

# **'The Spirit of Generation Y' - The Spirituality of Australian Youth and Young People aged 13-29**

Report on Phase 1 of the Project



by

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## 'The Spirit of Generation Y' - Report on Phase 1 of the Project

### Introduction: Phase 1 of the Study

The Spirit of Generation Y project is designed to take place in three year-long phases, over the period July 2003 – July 2006. Two of the phases involve in-depth interviews (about 70 each in years 1 and 3) plus a national survey in year 2 to establish population benchmarks regarding the findings from the first interview phase.

After completion of the Pilot study, Phase 1 of the main project commenced in July, 2003 and data collection and transcription has been completed. The task of this phase was to conduct in-depth interviews with 60-70 young people. This report presents details of the sample for the Phase 1 interviews, the analytical framework as it has evolved, and preliminary findings from the interviews in the form of case studies. Towards the end of the report, publications, presentations and other papers based on the project are listed.

### The Sample

The purpose of the first phase was to investigate in detail the variety of spiritualities to be found in our target age-group. As in all qualitative research, it was not our aim to profile the population, or to describe typical cases, but to explore in depth a selection of cases chosen to manifest the range and variations of spirituality.

*Target sample.* The sample was designed to include a diverse range of young people, including private and public school students, tertiary students, those in the workforce, the unemployed and those from both high and low socio-economic backgrounds. We sought to have equal numbers of male and female informants, and an appropriate mix of rural and urban. The sampling was strategic: we sought to interview a number of people from each cohort so as to enable us to get a sense of the types of spiritualities one might find amongst these different groups.

*Achieved sample.* In the core project, a total of 64 interviews were conducted with young people aged 13-29. Approximately half were female and half male.

Age Group	No.	%
13-14	12	19
15-19	43	67
20-24	4	6
25-29	5	8
Total	64	100

Informants were recruited from a range of organizations. Over half were recruited through schools (four schools participated in the project, two Catholic and two Protestant). One quarter of informants were involved in a week-long programme devoted to the development of civic consciousness and skills among youth. The rest of the sample was recruited through a community college, a 'work for the dole' scheme, a regional Catholic Education Office and a Bible College.

The informants came from all Australian states and territories except for the ACT. Thirty-eight per cent lived in Victoria, while one quarter lived in South Australia and one fifth in

New South Wales. Sixty-nine per cent of informants lived in an urban area, 31 per cent in rural areas.

Sixty-one per cent of informants were born in Australia to Australian-born parents. Twenty-eight per cent were second generation Australians: 14 per cent of these had parents from an English-speaking country (UK and New Zealand) and 14 per cent from a non-English speaking country (Poland, Holland, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Mauritius, Malaysia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Brazil). The remaining 11 per cent of informants were born overseas; eight per cent of these in non-English speaking countries.

The interviews took between 30 minutes and an hour to conduct. A better quantitative measure of content is the approximate number of words spoken by the person being interviewed, which varied from 620 to 10,500 words. As might be expected, younger informants were less articulate, with some notable exceptions. The transcripts of the more extensive interviews ran to fifteen pages of single-spaced type.

Interviewing commenced in November, 2003. Analysis of the interviews has been under way since we received the first transcripts in February, 2004, and will continue as we prepare the questionnaire for the national sample survey, which is the main task of Phase 2 in the project's second year.

## Analytical Framework

In this section, we outline the ways in which we have approached analysis of the data generated in the first phase of the project. The research objective of the project is to advance the understanding of 'the spirit of Generation Y'. It has three stated aims, seeking to explore:

1. ***Spirituality***: the varieties of religious and spiritual experience among young Australians aged 13 to 29 years; the versions of religion and spirituality which such experience shapes and reflects; the ways in which young people are defining themselves and interpreting their lives; the components of these religions and forms of spirituality: the master-narratives, the worldviews, the value-complexes, the rituals and other practices, the communal structures and activities;
2. ***Influences on spirituality***: the range of cultural resources used in constructing spirituality – including music, film and popular media; the extent to which the contemporary cultural milieu tends to shape the interpretation of the life-story more as a solitary journey than a communal one; patterns of cultural communication of spirituality; the social patterns of differential access to and distribution of forms of spirituality;
3. ***Consequences of spirituality***: the association between particular styles of spirituality and the holding of particular values and attitudes to the self, to others, and to society; the links between people's spirituality and their social ethic, cultural creativity, attitudes of civility and sociability, social and political awareness and participation, pro-social and anti-social behaviour, citizenship activities.

These objectives shaped our analytical strategy for the interviews: we focussed first on spirituality itself, then on what appear to be its sources, and the influences which play a part in shaping it, and thirdly on its social consequences – developing our more detailed analytical categories within this broad structure. We use the terms 'sources', 'influences' and 'consequences' in a broad sense; it is not possible from these data to demonstrate that certain influences actually *cause* the development of a particular type of spirituality, in the strict

sense, nor that a person's spirituality is the cause of their social attitudes and behaviour; at this stage we are simply looking for plausible links between social and cultural influences and spirituality, on the one hand, and between a person's spirituality and their social attitudes and actions, on the other.

The structure we developed in pursuit of each of our three objectives is now described in more detail.

### **(1) Spirituality**

Our subjects' spirituality is understood and described in terms of an analytical framework<sup>1</sup> derived partly from theory, but strongly shaped by successive attempts to frame meaningfully the rich content of the interviews themselves. We see it as having three components: worldview, ethos and practices.

#### *Worldview*

What is the shape of this person's life-story? (Has any story with a defined form even emerged yet?) How do they see and project themselves in relation to their world? What beliefs and ideas do they draw upon in interpreting their experience? Sometimes, there will be components which are both more subtle and more influential than clearly-formulated ideas; so we also ask: what significant experiences does this person relate? These may give rise to various forms of *experiential knowledge* – and come to expression as 'sensings', intuitions, feelings, moods, motivations, attractions, questions etc., rather than clearly formulated rational reflections:'

*-Articulation of the worldview:*

To what degree, we further ask, is our subject's spirituality named, explicit, expressed, articulated, known, owned, understood, recognised, and reflected on?

*-Coherence of the worldview:*

are the stories, beliefs and ideas which are present consistent with each other, or are there marked discontinuities? What structural pattern or patterns do we see linking items of content? What level of complexity can be accommodated? How is ambiguity handled? Are incompatible items forced into a Procrustean fit? Is there a tendency

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<sup>1</sup> In previous reports, and in the paper about to be published, we presented an earlier form of analytical framework for spirituality itself, very different in appearance from that used here. A brief explanation is in order. We consider the present structure a great advance over the former one. It has arisen from further hard thinking and reading about the analysis of spirituality, from long debates among ourselves and with other colleagues, some helpful suggestions from anonymous referees of our journal article, and most of all, by grappling with the actual data in our case studies – finding out what works, what is up to the task of getting deeper into the meaning and significance of the accounts provided by our interview subjects. Our former ten dimensions are all still present in the new structure, but now not as isolated headings of inquiry, but much more tightly integrated with each other under the headings of Worldview, Ethos and Practices. The previous dimension of 'relationship to religion' has been modified to form the basis of our set of 'types of spirituality'.

Probably the greatest change which will be noticed is in our definition of spirituality, now widened to include even secular worldviews which themselves may well repudiate all notions of 'spirit', 'spiritual' and 'spirituality'. This is less of an anomaly than having to justify our investigation of the important secular strand in the spirituality of Australian young people as an ancillary interest in 'deviant cases' –people who have no spirituality. Similarly, we include quite self-focussed or unreflective outlooks as 'spiritualities', since the notion of a totally self-enclosed or unreflective person seems more like a purely theoretical extreme or 'limiting case'. One can conceive it, but is unlikely to encounter it in reality. What of our former core definition of spirituality as 'a conscious way of life with a transcendent referent'? We have not deleted the reference to transcendence, since spirituality still seems to us, in and of itself, to carry a reference to some reality transcending the individual. But we have not yet found a completely satisfactory way of expressing this element of transcendence.

towards the unity of a 'system', (imported or created, whether explicitly recognised or not)? Where is there flexibility, and where rigidity? What seems more stable and settled, and what is in flux?²

*Ethos:*

Spirituality, as we see it, does not consist solely, or even primarily, of stories or beliefs or ideas. These may be quite dependent upon ethos, memorably defined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 127) as 'the tone, character and quality of life; its moral and aesthetic style and mood'; which also includes values (more universal or general principles of evaluation), attitudes (more particular affective orientations towards specific objects or ideas – especially towards the self, others, the surrounding society) and dispositions (habitual preparedness to act in a specific manner). Geertz's conception alerts us to such subtle but powerful components as the usual feeling-tone of a person's life; and elements of style and mood derived from aesthetic as well as moral values and criteria.

*Practices:*

How is spirituality expressed in action? How does it shape the way a person regularly acts? As we have emphasised from our earliest reports, we believe that much less weight should be assigned to a mere idea with which a person may toy idly, without much understanding of it, without any specific associated practice, without any impact on the person's lifestyle – e.g. someone says they believe in reincarnation, but knows only that it means being reborn on earth again after death, and this knowledge does not affect their actions or practices; in our definition, belief in reincarnation would not be a significant part of that person's spirituality. The same is true of mere opinions on religious or spiritual issues.

So our interviews enquired in detail about the person's practices: ritual and non-ritual, collective and private; reading, reflection, meditation, prayer, music, dance, drama.

We found it useful to construct a set of 'types'<sup>3</sup> of spirituality, which combine the dimensions of worldview, ethos and practices:

*Traditional:* grounded in the tradition of a world-religion (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism);

*New Age:* embracing a framework from one or more New Age religions or spiritual paths: (e.g. neo-paganism, goddess worship, Wicca, channelling, Reiki, crystals); or occult or paranormal beliefs and practices: (e.g. spiritualism, belief in ghosts, superstition,

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<sup>2</sup> This focus on coherence does not imply any preference for consistency on our part, or any negative judgment on 'inconsistencies'. Inconsistencies are of great interest; they may indicate a transition under way; or a fidelity to the 'truth of experience', in tension with premature or inadequate systematisation. Most of our informants are adolescents – they are developing in myriad ways; inconsistencies are to be expected, and may be a sign of personal growth; consistency may indicate either maturity or rigidity and difficulty in changing, or the influence of a very strong cultural pattern. Neither alternative prompts us to negative evaluation.

<sup>3</sup> There is a very large literature, some of it highly critical, on Weber's original notion of the 'ideal type'. We do not intend to survey or debate the issues here. Suffice it to say that an ideal type is a kind of 'pure form' – not intended as a detailed representation of any empirical reality, but a combination of characteristics serving as a kind of communicative shorthand. As revised by phenomenologists Husserl and Schutz, the 'type' is revealed as the basic currency of discourse, and the building block from which we construct the 'structures of relevance' through which we manage our existence in the everyday lifeworld. E.g. I post a letter, assuming that it will be collected from the pillar box by an anonymous worker of the type 'postal worker', processed by others of the same type, and eventually delivered by another anonymous person of the type 'postman'. Without this process of 'typification', our everyday life would be completely unmanageable (Schutz & Luckmann 1973).

astrology); or elements of Eastern or esoteric religious practice detached from the tradition to which they belong: (e.g. Yoga, Tai Chi, TM);

*Eclectic*: a collage of themes from disparate sources, sometimes including elements from traditional religions – for many authors, this is the paradigmatic ‘post-traditional’ spirituality;

*Secular*: ways of making sense of life which reject religious traditions; sometimes finding an alternative base in science, philosophy or economic theory; often predominantly pragmatic and atheoretical;

*Self-developmental*: focussed largely around issues of personal autonomy, self-development, self-realisation;

*Embryonic* (unformed, undeveloped, inchoate, tentative, emergent, amorphous, nascent): largely implicit and unreflective – because of the subject’s early adolescent stage, or lack of education, cultural, social or family ambience, or brutalisation, or other factors which have impeded development.

## **(2) Influences on spirituality**

This aim expresses our interest in how and why people come to have one type of spirituality rather than another; hence we need to look at the social and cultural influences on spirituality. Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus – a theory explaining individual social practice (what individuals do in their daily lives) – is one way to approach this investigation. A habitus is ‘a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways’ (Thompson, 1990). Or, as Bourdieu himself states: ‘a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, function at every moment as a matrix of *perceptions, appreciations, and actions*’ (1966, in Swartz, 1997). According to this theory, one’s spirituality (ethos, practices and worldview) would be informed by one’s *habitus*.

Where do these dispositions come from? The (shared) dispositions which constitute a habitus are formed through an individual’s *socialisation*: the participation in certain communities, culture, education (formal and informal) and upbringing a person encounters throughout their life (Schirato & Yell, 1996). It is also mediated by one’s social class.

Social groups are important for our understanding of habitus: without subscribing to social determinism, as sociologists we are particularly conscious of humans as profoundly social beings, even in their most private moments; more like nodes in a network than isolated ‘computers’; constantly interacting with really or imaginatively present others; multi-channel receivers constantly monitoring dozens or hundreds of cultural signals; responding more to complex changes in the pattern of what is received than to single ‘sounds’ intruding into a silence.<sup>4</sup> Hence we are aware of, and interested in, the variety of social groups of which each person is a member, and the ways in which these support or challenge their spirituality.

Importantly, from Bourdieu’s perspective, people are not pre-determined to act in a certain way because they have a particular habitus. Rather, this enculturation informs their behaviour and their responses to various cultural resources, but does not overly determine them. Thus, the cultural practices that individuals undertake are also the product of some free choice (although constrained by what their habitus deems acceptable).

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<sup>4</sup> See Geertz (1973, pp. 79-82).

To this end, we sought to investigate the informant's socialisation and enculturation according to a number of dimensions, along with his or her uptake of various cultural resources, to see what types of relationships there are between spirituality, socialisation and culture. We are also interested in other influences on spirituality, especially the informants' life stage and the locus of authority for their spirituality.

In particular, we sought to investigate 5 dimensions which might directly and indirectly influence spirituality.

#### *1. Family and Communal ties*

Family and communal ties; the nuclear family very important to most of our cases. What about the extended family? In what ways does the family influence an informant's spirituality? Furthermore, does the informant have strong or weak links to other communities – an ethnic community, gang, church or school? Is the informant's spirituality typical of any particular community with which they are involved?

#### *2. Peer Networks*

How strong are these? Is a person socially isolated or not? Does an informant engage in spiritual exploration/development with his or her peers?

#### *3. Culture*

This includes cultural background, religious background and education, all of which inform a person's spirituality. There are also cultural resources from which individuals pick and choose, constrained by what their habitus deems acceptable – what's out there that's relevant to young people? What is the culture offering to spirituality through various media of transmission such as film, books, magazines, music, the internet and video games? How much does an informant use these things in his or her spiritual quest?

#### *4. Social Class*

Upper? Upper-middle? Lower-middle? Working class?

#### *5. Life stage*

Where is the informant in the lifecourse? Are they still at school, dependent on parents? Have they moved out of home? Are spiritualities more fully formed according to age?

### **(3) Consequences of Spirituality**

Within this aim we focus on the consequences of young people's spirituality for social action, i.e. mutually oriented, intersubjectively meaningful behaviour (not necessarily on consequences of other kinds – e.g. for identity, psychological well-being or pathology, etc. Many of these are being studied by specialists in other fields. Our perspective is sociological, and we believe that our focus on *social* consequences is particularly relevant in view of the allegedly increased individualism of youth. Is this true, and is it rooted in their spirituality?)

Over the past ten years there has been an increase in attention, both in Australia and internationally, to young people's ideas about civil society and to their civic behaviour (Janoski, 1998; Weidenfeld, 2003; Hartley, 2001). 'Civic-mindedness' is a term that has been used to denote an orientation to the common good, which includes reciprocity, cooperation and trust (Putnam, 1995). It involves a sense of responsibility towards one's community (whether local, national or global) and a belief that despite individual differences, everyone has something to contribute to the common good (Smart, Sanson, da Silva & Toumbourou, 2000). For sociologists, civic-mindedness represents an important aspect of 'social capital' in that it contributes to the culture of trust and reciprocity that underpins social relationships

and networks and facilitates collective action and civic engagement (Winter, 2000). It has been found in a number of studies that religiosity is associated with a variety of healthy, desirable outcomes across a diversity of areas of personal and public concerns including political and civic involvement (Smith, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997).

After an examination of previous research on citizenship and civic behaviour we have mapped these characteristics into four broad dimensions:

1. *Knowledge and appreciation*: understanding of basic human rights, social/political structures, and mechanisms for social change, plus an appreciation for social justice, equity, cultural diversity, community engagement, new ideas or experiences and volunteering.
2. *Personal capacities and skills*: a range of skills and personal competencies: a capacity to make autonomous choices and decisions, to exercise personal control, to argue effectively for one's views without denigrating those of others and to work in a team. The social skills include: leadership, communication, cooperation, teamwork, negotiation, balance between trust and scepticism.
3. *Social attitudes (to others and the wider society)*: attitudes and actions showing an orientation towards the common good and a desire to work for the community. We therefore are looking for such things as: caring and respectful attitudes towards others, support for legitimate authority -- in constructive tension with a willingness to dissent (in the political and civil arenas), identification and engagement with the neighbourhood, the wider community, religious or civic groups and institutions (schools, parliament, legal system). We also looked for signs of a capacity and willingness to engage in shared discourse which is tolerant of others' opinions, and of dissent from one's own.
4. *Social action (individual or collective)*: can and does the person put into practice the attitudes described in the previous section? What are their actions in relationships with family or friends, peers, and in the community? To what extent is the person engaged in volunteering and community service, civic and political activities at local and regional levels? We also examine activities related to the national and international scene. To be considered to have a high level of social action, young people need to demonstrate continuous involvement in community activities including volunteering, over a long period. Those who do no more than occasionally collect for a charity as a one-off exercise, possibly as part of compulsory community service at school, are rated as having a low level of social action.

We assumed that someone might have high levels on some of these categories and low levels on others. A young person classified as truly civic-minded would have high levels on all four dimensions. To clarify the conclusions of our analysis we have developed a typology that classifies cases into broad groups. They are assessed on what would be a reasonable level on each of the dimensions for someone about their age. While no young person may fit perfectly into a *Type*, we found the typology a useful tool -- however, it is a 'work in progress'. The five types that have emerged to date are:

#### 1. *High civic orientation*

Those who rate highly on all four categories and may be considered to be ideal young citizens.

## 2. *Medium civic orientation*

Some exhibit high levels of social action accompanied by varying levels of the other three dimensions. If they show high levels on at least one of them, then they fit into this category.

## 3. *Low civic orientation: apathetic*

These people have low to medium levels of civic knowledge and of personal capacities/skills and evidence minimal civic social attitudes. They do only a small amount of volunteer activity or social action. They are not antagonistic to civic duty but do not see it as relevant to them. They are apathetic or lethargic towards civic engagement.

## 4. *Low civic orientation: self-interested*

These may have good knowledge of how the political and economic systems work and are highly skilled but they do not have strong civic social attitudes. They do almost no community service unless it has direct personal benefit. They do not see altruism or social action as relevant to them.

## 5. *Low civic orientation: anti-social*

Those who rate low on all categories. Their ethos endorses anti-social actions, in which they engage either for individual benefit, or as part of a sub-cultural group such as a gang.

In the next section, we present case studies of some of our interview subjects to put some flesh on these theoretical bare bones.

## Case Studies - Spirituality, Influences, Consequences

Condensing the richness of the interview content is no easy task; we decided that the best way, for the purposes of this report, is to present five case studies, retaining something of the individuality of the interviews by allowing our subjects to speak in their own words at key points. In the next few months, we will extend our analysis – although not in the case-study mode, to cover the entire sample.

We would like to introduce to the reader five young people who, while not necessarily typical of their age group, are a reasonably representative selection of the informants interviewed in the first phase of the study.<sup>5</sup>

In each case, after providing a few demographic details about the person interviewed, we will consider in turn his or her spirituality, the influences shaping it, and its consequences for attitudes and actions towards others, especially towards the wider society.

### **Case 1: 'Michael' (Length of subject's parts of interview: 7633 words; the interviewer was male).**

The first is a young man aged 23 – let's call him Michael. He was born in Australia. His father is a tradesman, Australian-born; his mother was born in an Anglo-Celtic country, and works in education. He attended private schools, has just completed a post-graduate degree in education, and is moving out of home to begin his career as a teacher.

#### ***Spirituality:***

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<sup>5</sup> All of the informants have been assigned a pseudonym, and other identifying details have been altered.

The issue of sexual identity is salient for him. Asked whether there is an issue he feels strongly about, he responded with deep feeling, referring to a political statement opposing homosexual marriage:

Yeah. I feel very strongly about homosexual rights. I don't identify as heterosexual myself ... I never felt more like minority than when I heard him speaking in the car on the radio. That speech just made me feel incredible anger, made me feel really marginalised. I just think it's incredible injustice, I think that it's a destructive influence for young people. It enrages me to think that we are still at the point that we can't acknowledge these life styles or sexuality are equally valid and reflect that in legislation and culture, practice and all sorts of things. I just think it's incredibly criminal and I don't think we need to give the church time, and politics time; I think we need to wake up and realise what an injustice it is. So that's an issue that I feel very strongly about.

What is the relationship between Michael's spirituality and traditional religious worldviews and values?

Although he says 'I didn't grow up in a religious family', he was christened in the Uniting Church: ('When I was a baby. . . . That was my parents' decision, obviously') and was sent to Sunday school. 'As an adult, I would never make that choice now'. For a while, at that time, he and his parents attended church.

His spirituality now is decidedly non-religious. 'I'm proud to say I have no religion, I don't believe in them, I don't affiliate with the church. I guess it's pushed me away. . . . I feel very strongly about homosexual rights, I don't identify as heterosexual myself.'

Asked whether he 'draws upon the ideas of a particular religion or philosophy', he responds:

I do - negatively - it informs how I think about things, but in the negative. I see Christianity really negatively because of its extreme stance on things like homosexual marriages, abortion, premarital sex. Things that I think are okay, churches that I have seen on TV seem to condemn. So in that sense I totally distance myself from them. . . . I guess what it is that turns me off most about it is Christian people who I talk to. You know, people who try and harass you about their faith, and also media portrayals of it.

Michael rejects especially the stance on moral issues that he associates with churches. But his rejection of traditional religion is not confined to moral issues; it goes to a more fundamental level: 'I don't really believe in God, I don't believe in some designer or anything like that.'

His ethos strongly affirms personal autonomy, especially in the area of sexuality, and its tone is angry and defiant when he rejects what he sees as the moralism of the churches.

However, his broader outlook is anything but negative. Although he is not drawn to elaborating an alternative to the religious view of the world in abstract scientific or philosophical terms, he has a clearly defined set of interests and commitments which shape his identity and the direction his life has taken.

As we will see, he is strongly idealistic, highly involved in the world around him, capable of deep commitment, altruistic, generous, non-materialistic and enormously energetic.

There's a real culture about the people I associate with anyway, and that aspiration of doing something good or doing something worthwhile. Not just going and working for a company and making lots of money and stuff. It's a bit left wing, I don't know if it's typical of people my age. But certainly it's the case with the sort of the people I associate with. . . [It's] really important just getting and having that life style where I am not making money necessarily but I'm working with young people, doing something worthwhile. It's a pleasure going home and being able to say I could have made a difference or that I've done something that is important to the community.

It seems significant that, in contrast to most of our other cases, Michael identifies his friends as the major source of influence, and his primary support group. Most of the others chose their families. This is probably associated with his age, (he is the oldest interviewee among those not yet in fulltime work), and perhaps also with his sexual identity.

When asked at the outset about things he enjoys doing, he replies: 'I do too quite a lot of the volunteering sort of the stuff I'm doing on this program. I really enjoy that. I work with people with disabilities, young people, single-parent families and all that sort of stuff.'

This is no empty boast; as we will see in the section below on 'Consequences', Michael is extensively and deeply involved in contributing to the social and political development of young people, and gives substantial time to several other causes, such as children with disabilities and Aboriginal families.

He has a strong sense of vocation towards the professional role of teaching on which he is just embarking:

It's a bit weird actually, I wanted to be a teacher since I was 15. And I think, I think that's unusual, I think teaching becomes more people's choice later. For me it was a bit of a calling. I saw people in my community, school community and I really want to do that. I thought it was really rewarding profession, so I went to Uni with that as my goal and I've come out the other end, believe it or not, with that still as my goal. I've always wanted to do it and I couldn't be happier having done the teaching rounds. And it's confirmed for me that I really want to stay with young people. I really like the idea of teaching, so we'll see how it goes next year. If I can really hack it then. . . . I hold it really, really highly, issues of education. Issues of education is probably the things that get me most worked up, when people talk about it, perhaps issues of environments would be second. I think educational policy is really interesting. I get really passionate about equity issues within schools because I can see a whole lot of different things within....., when you go from one school to another there this crazy mix of different things. Just being involved in a profession that engages those issues is always been really important for me. A juicy area to get into.

This is clearly a major component of Michael's view of himself and his world; he has a set of consistent ideas about teaching, and a strong and enduring attraction to it, which has motivated him through years of university study in preparation, teaching rounds, choosing a career in teaching. His emerging identity as a teacher finds support among like-minded colleagues.

He has a strong affinity with the natural world:

I'm a bit of a nature-head, I studied conservation at Uni. We went on this camp in my third year, we went wombat spotting with spotlights and they taught us how to track the animals so we could tag into conservation studies. Umm, because of that I've developed important love of all that, especially the Australian landscape I think it's pretty awesome. And I love reading

poems that use that as their inspiration. Just being out there, with my peers all learning about it. I guess it's close to nature but also directly so learning about plants and animals that are in their environment. I love being out there and using that as your lab and studying them. Handling these animals that were pretty rare, and studying them, as I said before like the hairy-nosed wombat and stuff like that, so I found that incredible -- an intensive experience actually. I quite like to go possum spotting and stuff myself just as recreation. Because I really enjoyed that stuff. . . . I love going bush walking and camping, and getting out in the National Parks and stuff like that.

Again we see consistent ideas, formed both by study and some crucial experiences of the natural world, enlivened by an ethos which is positive and strongly affective, featuring both an environmental ethic and a literary aesthetic dimension, and extending into a broader valuing of the Australian environment. It is expressed in regular practices (bushwalking and wombat-spotting). This is the stuff of which environmental activists are made.

Michael's creativity and aesthetic sensitivity has been developed especially through involvement in theatre:

I haven't done [this] over about a year now but there was a good six years there that I was directing youth shows and performing myself, in those community groups and stuff. . . . I got into it through school about year 10 doing school shows and that led to doing community amateur theatre from there. So I was involved in a lot of youth shows and met a lot of the friends I've got now from theatre and stuff like that. . . . [I felt it was] incredibly liberating, because even though I properly don't like to put labels on this but I think I am pretty creative person and to be able to think and to be up to do things in that environment. I really liked it because I think some people you can do the theatre and that's where they function and that's where they shine. I think I was one of these people the really got something out of it. It was a different environment for me to achieving. . . . I was never good at sport or anything growing up like that and I always felt intimidated and really turned off by the idea of competitive sports and competition . . . So to find a place like theatre that I could be creative and I could do all these wonderful things that I like to do. I found that really stimulating actually.

Given the prominence in the media of reports of 'New Age' religions and practices, and experimentation with the 'paranormal', as in the case of spiritualism, all interviewees were asked a set of questions on these topics: had they participated in a séance, practised yoga, meditation or chanting, had a tarot reading, seen an angel or a ghost, read their horoscope (and put faith in it, followed it)?

A strikingly uniform pattern emerged: with few exceptions (mostly the religiously devout), our subjects had experimented with one or more of these practices – especially in their early to mid teens. The degree of involvement varied. A few of the older ones had paid for tarot readings or horoscopes from practitioners. At the same time, with very few exceptions, they hastened to add that they did not believe in any of the systems or take them seriously, or allow them to influence their lives. We will certainly ask about these topics in the forthcoming survey to see if this pattern is generally shared across our target age groups.

Returning to Michael, it only remains to locate his spirituality in terms of our set of types. Strikingly individual as he is, he nonetheless has a good deal in common with many of the other interviewees, whose spirituality is of the same type.

*Spirituality type*  
Secular.

***Influences on Spirituality:***

Michael's secular-mindedness appears typical of the socially engaged, citizenship-active youth with whom he identifies (and those we interviewed). Many of these young adults come from an Anglo-Celtic background, are middle-class, have a private school education and some broader exposure to the church when they were younger. Their religious background has informed their values base, but the church itself has no ongoing attraction, nor does it provide a community with which people like Michael feel they can now identify. He notes:

I never had a huge involvement with it, a guess what is that turns me off most about it is Christian people who I talk to. You know, people who time and harass you about their faith, and also media, media portrayals of it. But I did when I was younger go to Sunday school. It seems like another world for me now. As an adult, or sort of an adult I would never make that choice now. It was my parents choice to give me that, umm, but I don't think at that young age it gave me much... or to pull my own bases on religion, so that has come through the media and chatting to people now. Now that I am a free thinking university students or something like that. So yeah, it was minimal, I didn't grow-up in a religious family, I was just sort of taken along to Sunday school as a bit of a thing but I've never really felt religion very strongly in a country like Australia.

Michael does not mention his family much in the interview, unlike many of the other informants, but he is very clear that his current ethic and worldview are nurtured and influenced by interactions with his peers:

But at the moment, and the most of the young people I associate with as peers all want to things that are going to change society for the better. Especially doing courses like education and doing the volunteer work.

Michael has made use of a range of spiritual resources in the past, but these are not part of his ongoing life story, nor do they have any lasting impact.

*I: Some specific things, have you ever participated in a séance?*

S: I am just trying to recall the memories, see I remember always being interested in it, growing up as a teenager year 9 and 10 I had a friend, we were always into that stuff, you know, I am sure we talked about it, but I am just trying to remember if I ever did. Probably didn't, but not really because we didn't believe in them growing-up because didn't have the opportunity. But I think is as a teenager I would have been ... and stuff like that. Now, I would never do that, because I sort of don't like the idea of making things you don't understand... Growing-up, umm, yeah I was sort of curious about those sort of things, I would have tried it had someone suggested, I don't remember I never had the opportunity I guess. Sit down with a ouija board and some friends.

Nonetheless, his involvement with theatre, poetry, and in effect, with the various 'philosophies' behind conservation, work with Aboriginals and needy youth, and his commitment to teaching, are all engagements with cultural resources of other kinds, and perhaps have had more than a little impact.

***Consequences of Spirituality:******1. Knowledge***

He demonstrates a high level of civic knowledge and understands the principles of social and political structures and social change.

I think to be young is to be obsessed with injustice. And I say that because everyone I talk to, who identify with as a peer has a whole set of things, and would answer that question quite easily. I've already spoke to about homosexual discrimination which I believe is rampant in Australia, I believe it is legal as well as cultural. And I think homophobia is a really unfortunate thing fully alive and well in Australia. So there is that, I also think Aboriginal people in this country are also unfairly discriminated against. I see it as injustice that there is this umm, this sort of racist philosophy and throwing money at them and hoping it will be okay. And white Australians talking about them bludging or trying to get benefits off the government I find it's incredible, incredibly interesting cultural dynamic but it's also incredibly scary that those sort of views exist. I see whitening out the Aboriginal voice, a really huge injustice. Hear enough about that. Also, I mean there is still the minority groups here, because I also feel pretty strongly about women too, like, even within the volunteer programs I do, it's not just Parliament House. I look at the volunteering program we do 70% camp leaders on our holiday programs are female but all the managerial or the programme co-ordinators or group leaders positions even though they are still volunteer positions there 90% male, and I just think that's, pretty disgusting. This program itself has a task force of 16 and 4 are women and the rest men. I just think it's a questionable role model for young people and I just think it's, I think it's an injustice because as much as people think women have advanced in the quest of equality. I'm not convinced they are any where near where they should be. And that gets me as well. Umm, I don't like racism either but I guess I would say, homosexuals, women and Aboriginals. Are my key injustice focus areas.

## 2. *Personal capacities and skills*

He demonstrated a high level of personal capacities and skills – he is open to new ideas, has a high level of internal locus of control and leadership skills.

It's pretty naive to say that it's easy to be able to do that [make a difference] and I think it's a about chipping away very, very slowly at what's around you so you start. You form a belief on those beliefs, you start umm, doing something like becoming active in your school, or raising money, questioning things and picking up on policy in your school or community and saying hang on can you explain this please, because I think this is wrong so, umm, yeah I don't think people make a difference and it's great like in a movie and it's all triumph and it's all that celebration attached to that I think it's a laborious chipping away one step at a time. It's going to take time if a young person is going to make a difference, because young people, I don't see them as particularly in powered in society. So it's a pretty hard sort of thing to make a difference I think. But I certainly believe it can happen. I don't want to be too pessimistic, I'd like to think I'm trying a little bit to do that in the volunteer work that I do.

What is also interesting about Michael is that many of the community activities that he undertook required an enormous amount of courage. He had to overcome his own fears and insecurities, but by persisting he saw that his skills and abilities grew with each new experience.

## 3. *Social attitudes*

Michael demonstrates a high level of connectedness with friends and the wider community. He also links his values and worldview with his actions and claims that he acts out of idealism.

And everyone tells me, you know, you'll forget all about that [idealism] in a few years. You won't want to change the world. But at the moment, and the most of the young people I associate with as peers all want to things that are going to change society for the better. Especially doing courses like education and doing the volunteer work.

## 4. *Social action*

He is actively involved in community activities individually and within a group. His level of volunteerism is high and his life appears to revolve around helping others and working with organizations for the good of others.

Umm, I've attended protest rallies just to show my support and gesture, but I guess I take them up in ways you can't measure success from. Oh right, I say okay, I'll be involved in this 'Youth Action Kids Camp' with young Aboriginal children which something I did, ..... and just offering a week of experience for them. So I don't think I can sit back and say yes I achieved something for Aboriginal rights today, but I think I can say, I'm creating something positive in relation to this.

Michael fits neatly into *High civic orientation* in that he demonstrates high levels on each of the four dimensions. In this way, it could be argued that he is an ideal young citizen. His life is well integrated in respect to the consequences of his spirituality: beliefs, knowledge, skills, social attitudes, and social action.

## Case 2: 'Monique' (5870 words; female interviewer)

Monique, aged 17, is a Year 12 student in a Catholic school, and lives in an upper-middle class suburb. She was born in Australia of an Australian mother and a Lebanese-born father. He is a finance industry professional, and her mother a secretary. She is one of 5 children. She wore a necklace and a bracelet featuring the Cross.<sup>6</sup>

### *Spirituality:*

Her spirituality is traditional, and highly so. She is a 'Maronite'<sup>7</sup> Catholic, devout, orthodox, committed.

One of the techniques we used, in an endeavour to touch upon the dimensions of spirituality which lie beyond words and concepts, was to show our subjects a small selection of evocative pictures,<sup>8</sup> and ask if any one or two of them expressed something about themselves or their lives. Monique chose a church stained glass window and a small child running towards its parents, commenting:

Well, that one, in the sense of the religious one, because I mean we are a Catholic family and we do all the Catholic things, plus more. Like, we go to church on Sundays. Now that it's Lent we're all off meat and fasting until 12 [midday] and we do all of that stuff and we have family gatherings and all of that, but I think that one more, the family picture, the one where the kid is running to the dad. It just reminds me of our family. My dad's very different to other dads. Like, a lot of dads go out there and work and just bring home the money and by the time they come home, they're tired, especially a lot of Lebanese dads. Because, like, back in Lebanon they

<sup>6</sup> In addition to transcripts, we have notes from our interviewers of observations made at the time of the interview, which contain such valuable sidelights as the one just cited.

<sup>7</sup> Most Catholics in Australia of Lebanese ancestry belong to the Maronite church, a Lebanon-based Eastern (Catholic) Church in union with the (Western) Catholic Church. The Maronite church has its own Patriarch in Lebanon, its own bishop for Australia (resident in Sydney), its own liturgy and law, and a network of local churches. Monique and her family attend one of these churches, quite some distance from where they live.

<sup>8</sup> There were eleven photographs, selected from the 'Photolanguage Australia' series (Burton and Cooney 1986). These are quite dissimilar, in content and purpose, from the well-known TAT (Thematic Apperception Test) illustrations. They are described as: 'black-and-white photographs which have been chosen for their aesthetic qualities, their capacity to stimulate the imagination, the memory and the emotions, and their ability to challenge the viewer to thoughtful reflection. Photos which can be described as symbolic become a key to enable a person's past experience and sub-conscious to find a conscious expression' (ibid., p. 2).

had to work really, really hard to get the money and by the time they came home they were tired, so all they wanted to do was eat and sleep. But my dad like even though he's had to work for it and he's had to study for his job and all of that, he's always made time for me and my brothers and my sisters and my mum. Like, he's always made time for us and that.

The word 'family' recurs constantly in her account, laden with warmth, pride and a sense of security. Asked what gives her life meaning and purpose, she replies:

Like I said before, it has to be family. Without family it's nothing. Well, for me, family and religion. We're big on the religion, obviously. And family. So I don't know, they keep you going. . . . like with me he [my Dad] is always offering to help with assignments and take me places and like nothing's an effort and with my brothers, every week he's taking them to football games, wherever they want to go he'll take them and my younger sister is like if they want to go to the movies, we'll take 'em. The same thing with my mum. They're both pretty good.

By reading those sort of books [on the Middle East] it makes me realise like how lucky I am because to be living in Australia for starters, and to be living with the family I am. Like, even though there's five kids and both my parents have to work and all that stuff, like, we're a really close family and we have family values and morals and all of that stuff. And it just makes you realise how lucky you are. You don't have to go through all of that stuff.

The 'best fun' she has is when a group of families, including hers, goes away together at Christmas.

She believes in God, prays regularly, reads the Bible every few nights. Fascinatingly, she jibs at *describing* God:

*I: So what do you think God is like?*

S: I've never imagined what God would be like or what he'd look like but he's just God.

[and later in the interview]

*I: So what do you believe about God?*

S: God, he did a lot for us. I mean, he's God. I get funny sort of talking about him. I don't know what to say.

It does not seem to be drawing too long a bow to see here, in this youthful member of an Eastern Church, some traces of the 'apophatic' (non-speaking) emphasis characteristic of Eastern Christian theology: what we do not know about God far exceeds what we know; it is better to be silent and 'let God be God' than to imagine that we have 'grasped' Him in a few of our inadequate ideas. This approach could be expected to generate in the believer an attitude more of awe than of intimate friendship; all we can say is that although Monique is clearly uneasy talking *about* God, her religious practices do not show signs of distance or fear in the relationship.

The interviewer inquired about some of Monique's other beliefs in more detail; what happens after death? Monique believes in the traditional Catholic doctrines of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. When did she feel particularly close to God? When her two sisters were born.

*Interviewer: So you were saying earlier you go to church every week?*

Subject: Yep.

*I: How do you find Mass?*

S: It's relaxing. It's sort of like therapeutic. It's like the only place for that one hour where you can think straight and nothing's going on in your mind except the connection between you and God. That's how I feel.

I: *Okay, so would you get a lot out of the homily and that sort of thing?*

S: Yeah.

I: *I know some people say they're hard to follow?*

S: No, they're good. I mean, I understand it and go through them.

Monique stood out among Year 12 students interviewed in showing no sign of being influenced by the secularity of Australian society and culture. National surveys of Catholics show that only a minority of Year 12 students in Catholic schools are church attenders; and few retain the full range of Catholic beliefs.

Through her family, she is tied strongly into a Lebanese-Catholic ethnic enclave; yet even there, although family values would find strong support, there would be diversity in religious adherence, and her suburb, and to some extent also her school, are religiously pluralistic environments.

She has never doubted God or the Church, nor dabbled in occult or New Age practices, which she firmly rejects on religious grounds.

Although her faith could be described as simple or child-like, in the best sense, there are ample signs of a critical intelligence at work. Asked about the influences on her life, she mentions the media, adding: 'The media not so much because I'm old enough to know that they exaggerate it and they only tell the public what they want to hear. I'm old enough to know all of that by now.'

She is critical of the portrayals of life in the TV show 'The Bold and the Beautiful', and even in her favourite show, 'Home and Away', which she says reflects but exaggerates teenage life, and is 'becoming corrupt'.

She is a great reader, with a strong interest in ancient history, and looks forward to travelling, and visiting Greece, Rome and Egypt.

Her worldview appears to be complete, coherent, comprehensive, highly explicit, articulated and reflective for a year 12 student; and wholeheartedly owned. It is expressed in numerous practices – public rituals, family Lenten fasting and private prayer. She makes a personal statement of her Christian identity by wearing jewellery featuring the Cross.<sup>9</sup>

Her ethos is dominated by family values, the family and ethnic community are her 'reference group' – the support base of her worldview; so that although her moral attitudes and dispositions are conservative and strict, the tone and mood of her life is suffused by warmth and a sense of rock-solid security.

*Spirituality type*  
Traditional.

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, pop singer Madonna also adorns herself with crosses, yet would seem to share few of Monique's values! Crosses are popular; their significance for the wearer can be known only from the fuller personal context. In Monique's case, this context makes it solidly plausible to interpret her wearing of the Cross as a badge of identity.

***Influences on Spirituality:***

Monique's spirituality is typical of her nuclear family, her extended Lebanese family and the Maronite Church of which she is a part, and all of which are interconnected. Strong family ties were reported by most of our informants who had NESB parents. It is no surprise that she maintains a strong identification with her family at this point in her lifecourse. In her case, her broader family is a nurturing and close one. When asked who she admires, she said:

*I: It can be a sports hero or even someone you know. Family or a friend.*

S: It would have to be one of my cousins. Do I have to say the name?

*I: No, you don't have to say it.*

S: It would have to be one of my cousins. I mean, she's just like – I don't know, she's like a big inspiration thing, pushes me through everything and talks to me all the time and makes a point of even though she's older than me, like makes a point of talking to me and like we go out a lot and muck around.

*I: So why is she an inspiration to you?*

S: Um, she's – she's from a big family as well so all through her schooling she's had to work as well, her and her sister have had to work to support the family as well as her parents working and that and she's also – like, she'd work after school and wake up at 3.30 and 4 o'clock in the morning to study and then she'd go to school and the same routine over and over again.

*I: So for you what gives life its meaning and purpose?*

S: Like I said before, it has to be family. Without family it's nothing. Well, for me, family and religion. We're big on the religion, obviously. And, family. So I don't know, they keep you going.

Her spiritual journey is one which is undertaken in community (including empathetic peers) rather than in isolation. In addition, the cultural resources she employs on her spiritual quest are also the ones her habitus disposes her to choose:

*I: Okay. So do you read the Bible?*

S: Yeah. I've got this new one, little tubby thing. No, I've got this Bible and it's just one of the really easy ones to read. Like, it's a normal Bible but the passage has got questions that explain it and that.

*I: How do you think it's helpful?*

S: Like, it just sort of strengthens the connection. Like I mean, it's not like I go out there and say I'm going to read this, this, this and that tonight. I'll just open it and whatever it opens up to I'll read.

She eschewed other media of spiritual exploration. Also of note is the fact that her encounters with religion at school are important to her:

*I: Now, I know that the school has masses as well. How do you find those?*

S: Oh they're really good but in a way brings the school together because it's the only time the whole school is together in a relaxed sort of way. We're not in trouble for you know not doing homework or wearing the wrong uniform or anything. We're like all together for a good reason.

***Consequences of Spirituality:******1. Knowledge***

Monique does recognize basic human rights and demonstrates an understanding of some social justice issues and the importance of volunteering in social and community activities. She has given some thought to the reasons for world and community conflicts.

Monique is sensitive to the unfairness of being treated differently, more protectively, by her father, because she is a girl, and of her brothers 'getting away with a lot more than me', and used to protest about this to her mother, who apparently mediated with some success.

While her views demonstrate a certain naivety in respect to the causes and solutions of social issues, this is not surprising given her age and she does attempt to link her religious faith to her worldview.

Yeah, I think all this fighting and world peace needs to come in and all this fighting needs to stop. It's destroying the world.

I mean, I think if everyone sticks to themselves, like if every religion say for example, minds their own business and lets each other religion go about their own way then they'll be fine. Obviously everyone thinks their religion is the right religion, but whose to judge that a faith isn't right for them, and Judaism isn't right for them or that. You can't judge that. If they think it's right for them, then it's right for them. As long as it works for them, leave us alone.

## *2. Personal capacities and skills*

She is highly articulate, thoughtful and enjoys reading. She is aware of the advantages that she has in living in Australia and that she is in many ways fortunate. She has an internal locus of control in that she believes that her actions can make a difference and that her future is not merely a matter of chance.

## *3. Social attitudes*

She has a strong attachment to her school, her church, and the wider community. She demonstrates caring attitudes towards others and an orientation towards the common good, a willingness to work for the community.

I'm very open with people. Sometimes too open but very open and like if I like someone and if I love them then they love it and I always make a point of letting people know that I'm there for them if they want me and even if it's not now, they can always come back to me.

She demonstrates support for legitimate authority and for the teachings of her church.

There's a lot of people that I know that think that, okay, I can go steal a car and rob a bank and then I'll go to church on Sunday and I'm forgiven for it. You know what I mean? It doesn't work like that. You can't go rob banks and steal cars.

## *4. Social action*

While she has an understanding of some of the issues confronting the world today she has not become involved in political action to try to address them. For example, in respect to the religious conflicts that are detailed earlier, while she is aware of them she does not become involved in doing anything to further harmony between religious groups.

*I: Yeah, so you see religion as being a source of a lot of this conflict?*

*S: Yeah.*

*I: Yeah, okay. So have you done anything about this issue? I don't know, signed a petition or protested against the war?*

*S: No.*

*I: Do you think there's anything that people like us can do?*

S: Oh, you can always do something. I mean, even if it's something that's small like signing a petition.

*I: Yeah, but in terms of I guess religious intolerance what can we do to stop that?*

S: I think it's just like up to the individual to grow up and realize that we're not the only religion in the world, we're not the only person in the world. There are other people and their feelings and their considerations and their religion as well.

Monique is heavily involved for someone her age in volunteer work within her community, including work with the homeless as well as visits to nursing homes. These are part of the community service organised through her school. She has recently become involved with the school St. Vincent de Paul group, and has gone on evening trips with the 'van' to feed homeless and hungry adults and children.

S: I've done a couple of Wednesday nights with the school with the St Vincent Set and we go to the Station ..... and we like just feed the homeless and give 'em drinks, hot drinks, cold drinks, food, sandwiches, donuts, whatever they want. That goes for a couple of hours. I think it starts about 5.30, 6 and finished about 12. ...:

*I: Does it come easily to you?*

S: No, it's heart-breaking. Especially with the kids. There's a lot of kids at Bradstow, especially, that like are crying for food and it's just heart-breaking.

Monique could also be classified as being in *High civic orientation*. However, she fits less well than Michael. If we rate Michael on a scale of one to ten on each of the four characteristics he would be on a 9-10 on each. By contrast Monique might be on a 6-7 on each.

### **Case 3 'Christine' (4478 words; female interviewer)**

Christine, aged 17, is in Year 12 at a private school, and lives in a middle-class suburb. Both of her parents were born in Australia; we have no record of their occupations. At least one of her parents is in a second marriage.

#### ***Spirituality:***

Christine identifies as Lutheran, practises her faith, and has strong and well-formed religious beliefs; one of the most interesting things about her is that she has had to work through the process of reconciling her faith with science: she is a keen maths student, and has been interested in biology since she was very young. She hopes to study it at university. She has her own microscope, and chose a time when she was using it over the holidays as her response to our question about 'the time she felt most alive'.

Among the pictures on display, Christine picked first the photo of the stained glass window:

To me, it looks like some church of some kind, and it looks like the church and God is a big influence in my life. I mean, the band here at church and Sunday school was definitely a part of my life, and yeah, without God, my life would be very different.

She attends a Lutheran church weekly with her family, and reads a chapter of the Bible each night and prays about it. Some of her friends also attend, but her best friend does not. She responded to an appeal for Sunday school teachers: 'I love little kids and I've got little twin cousins who are five now and a half brother who's five, so just helping kids to grow up in their faith.'

*I: And so what do you believe about God? What do you think God is like?*

S: Umm, I see him as my friend, but also like, yeah, a person I can depend on no matter what's happening and I know that he loves me, no matter what, and if I totally screw up, then he's still going to be there for me. Yeah, if everything goes wrong, then he's still going to be there for me.

*I: And what about Jesus?*

S: I believe that he is my saviour and that he died to save me and everyone else, so yeah.

*I: Was there a particular time when you made a decision to accept Jesus as your saviour?*

S: Um, yes. I mean, there was a point where all – one particular incident where I knew from then on, that night, my faith was totally more stronger and definitely like yeah.

[a highly emotional experience on a Christian youth camp]

*I: Okay, and so what do you believe happens after death?*

S: Um, yeah, I think that we go to heaven or we go to hell or whatever you need to do.

*I: Has there ever been a time when you've doubted whether God exists or you've doubted the church?*

S: Um, I don't think majorly. Like, I don't think I've ever really turned sort of my back on God. I mean, I think there's definitely been times, little times, where, maybe it all doesn't add up. I mean, really because I'm a very scientific type of person. There would be little times where it doesn't add up or something, but I don't think majorly. Like, I don't think about it all the time.

*I: So you don't feel greatly conflicted about science and religion?*

S: I don't think so.

*I: Okay. So, if you're interested in biology, would you hold a creationist view of the origins of the world?*

S: Yes. My views are a little bit different. I do believe in the Big Bang, but I think that it was God who created the Big Bang. I mean, all the scientific stuff, they still can't explain what had actually started. They know that it all was little and everything went off with a bang, but, yeah, they still don't know what had actually started it. There had to be something there for it and what it did. So yeah, I don't think so far that that conflicts with anything in the Bible. I mean, I still know that God created, by everything that's in Genesis, God still created the world, and all the people and trees and everything. . . . I wrestled with it for a long time, but that's what I believed in the end.

Asked what gives her life meaning and purpose, she replies: 'Just to make everyone else happy. Yep. Just to pray to God and making people happy.' When she prays, it is for her friends, especially some who are 'going through issues', for her family, for 'help for the world'.

Christine is emphatic in her rejection of non-Christian religious practices. She does yoga at school, but: 'I do it as a fitness sort of thing, so that yeah, my body sort of thing. I don't believe anything about – I just sort of tune out. I usually say The Lord's Prayer when I'm doing it or whatever.' She confesses, with notable honesty:

S: I did take part in a séance.

*I: Do you want to tell me about that?*

S: Um, yeah, I think it was year 7. I did that for a while and really regret doing that now, but yeah.

*I: So what happened?*

S: I just like – I don't think anything really happens, yeah.

*I: You use the word 'regret.'*

S: Yeah, well, I think that I associate that with witchcraft and things, and the Bible says that witchcraft is bad, and therefore the séance is bad, too, so yeah.

Similarly, she does not take horoscopes seriously. She does believe in angels, because the Bible mentions them.

Christine strikes us as a 'young 17-year-old', intellectually developed in some areas; perhaps still catching up socially and emotionally with her physical age. Her spirituality is strongly traditional. She has embraced Lutheran Christianity comprehensively, and struggled for a coherent understanding: to reconcile a strongly Biblical faith – particularly regarding creation – with the area of science she knows best and is very drawn to undertake as a career.

Although Christine herself displays absolutely no ambivalence about her denominational identification as Lutheran, it is likely that one of her parents (assuming that there are at least three people who could fit this description) is Catholic. Early in the interview is the following passage:

*I: So you're involved in the Lutheran Church?*

S: Yep.

*I: And how long have you been involved?*

S: Probably here only about four or five years. We used to go to a Catholic church before and then we started – like, I've always been coming like to school here . . . but we didn't actually attend the church.

The salient components of her ethos are intellectual honesty and determined faithfulness. Perhaps some of the moral dimensions of her faith remain to be more fully worked out if they are to provide workable practical guidance in the dilemmas which will soon enough confront her. There is positive affect in the relationship with God she describes.

Her faith carries through into practice: church attendance, private prayer and Bible reading, camp participation, Sunday school teaching, and the avoidance of what she understands as practices contrary to Biblical teaching.

*Spirituality type*

Traditional.

### ***Influences on Spirituality:***

Like Monique in the case above, Christine's spirituality is deeply informed by her attendance at a church. Unlike Monique, her background is Anglo-Celtic; it does not appear to give her the same powerful sense of tradition and belonging and fewer clearly identifiable cultural markers and symbols. The spiritual resources she engages with are typical for one with an upbringing such as hers:

*I: Okay. And, so outside of church would you sort of read the Bible and that?*

S: Yeah, yeah.

*I: How often?*

S: Um, I usually read sort of a chapter at the moment of the Bible before I go to bed and pray about it and yeah.

As noted above, her current spiritual exploration does not deviate from those church-approved resources.

Apart from her references to church, we do not learn very much about the social support structures for her faith; obviously the school is a very strong support; she is also 'good friends' with the pastors there. Some of her peers are churchgoers (but not her closest

friend). Her family have always attended church with her, but when asked whether family or friends have influenced her, she replies: 'I think my friends, definitely, and I think probably my family, yeah'. Christine's response here (and elsewhere in the interview) shows much less emphasis on family support than many other interviewees her age. Why might this be? We can offer only tentative suggestions.

Firstly, we have begun to notice the significance of intact families for young people's spirituality, but have not yet arrived at a confident interpretation. It is possible, but less likely, that the couple Christine lives with are both her biological parents, since her half-brother is only five.

Whatever the reasons for less emphasis on family support, Christine's reference group appears somewhat fragile. She leaves school soon; will part from some of her friends. If the pastors associated with the school hold Sunday services there, as appears to be the case, it may be possible for her to retain this link, which she clearly values. We would also expect her quickly to locate and join one of the strongly Christian groups on the campus of the university she later attends – and perhaps to find there the primary source of faith-support for the next stage of her life.

### *Consequences of Spirituality:*

#### *1. Knowledge*

She does not demonstrate that she has more than a very basic knowledge of human rights, social and political structures. She has a vague awareness of how to achieve change and the consequences of actions and decisions one undertakes. She does seem to understand the importance of volunteering in social and community activities, but does not relate this to the logical conclusion that this also applies to her. The only unjust happening that she could identify is the Iraq war, but she does not take any action.

#### *2. Personal capacities and skills*

She is quite articulate and academically competent – she is doing science at school. She does not denigrate the views of others, although she did not discuss diverse views in the interview. She is a house vice-captain at school, plays a musical instrument, and is in drama productions and student forums. She has skills that she uses at school and chapel, but does not appear to use them outside this quite small arena.

We had our house drama production last Thursday and Friday, so yes, produced that. It was so much fun, but also extremely stressful and I had no time to do anything else, but that was good.

#### *3. Social attitudes*

She clearly feels that she belonging to her school and church communities but not to the wider national or international community. She would like to be remembered as a good person but does not articulate what this means. She demonstrates support for legitimate authority but does not articulate an understanding of how she might change unfair practices or policies.

[What gives life its meaning and purpose?] Um, I think that to make other people happy I think. Yes, just to make everyone else happy. Yep. Just to pray to God and making people happy. .... Umm, I would like people to remember me sort of yeah, as being a happy person and someone that can help people but also hopefully something to do with astronomy, but yeah, that I've made an impact somehow.

#### 4. Social action

She has done very little in the way of political activism apart from signing a few petitions, writing emails about deforestation and encouraging her family to re-cycle products. She has door knocked for the Red Cross and does some baby sitting for friends of the family or members of the church. There is no evidence that she feels in the wrong about having done so little community service or civic activities. She is largely unaware of what is happening in the world and her community in terms of social justice issues. She engaged in a small amount of peer support at her school but does not appear to initiate social action.

S: I mean, I usually have strong views. I don't usually sort of sit on the fence or anything. I don't think of anything that makes me concerned at the moment. I mean, the war's a big thing at the moment.

I: Okay, so do you think that people like you and I can make a difference to our community or the world and make it a better place?

S: I definitely believe we can because we're sort of a generation from the other sort of things, so yeah, by just getting involved in everything and then when you're there you can sort of make - be an impact and an influence. I mean, just in writing to the government or whatever.

I: So is that something you've done before?

S: No. [Laughing]. I mean, I suppose I would if I feel something. I mean, I don't think - yeah, I don't think I would turn away that opportunity if I had that as an opportunity, but there sort of hasn't been any need to.

Christine is an example of someone who fits into *Low civic orientation: Apathetic*. She demonstrates that she has limited civic knowledge but some personal capacities/skills for good and civic social attitudes. However, she does only a small amount of volunteer activity or social action.

#### Case 4 'Rohan' (2538 words; male interviewer)

Rohan is a 15-year-old Year 10 student in a Catholic school. His family is working class; one parent was born in an Anglo-Celtic country. He works evenings and weekends at a fast-food outlet.

##### *Spirituality:*

The interviews with secondary school students in their early teens are richly instructive about the experience of being an adolescent in today's world: we have a few minutes of privileged insight into what it is like to be thirteen to fifteen, much less supported than were previous generations by traditionally defined ways of thinking and acting, thrown back upon their personal resources (which are still rudimentary) for making meaning, choosing values, learning how to relate to others and finding a place in the world; experimenting with various ways of being themselves, confronting life as an 'infinite possibility thing', while constantly exposed to a climate of cynicism which deconstructs all values, and to vivid and frightening scenes of violence and evil.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> We are told that when Australian native trees are grown from seed as far as the 'seedling' stage when they can be planted out, just before they reach this stage, red gums cast off all their leaves and grow new ones which look quite different. Obviously, their 'baby' leaves are inadequate for the new growth stage they now enter - it's rather like humans losing their first teeth. Something similar may happen to the beliefs adolescents have grown up with, as they 'put aside childish ways' (1Cor 13: 11). But nowadays they may be like solitary seedlings, out in the middle of a field; instead of growing in a forest, protected by a canopy of mature trees, they are exposed to the extremes of weather and browsing animals.

In Rohan we see a worldview in flux, in development, undergoing drastic redesign.

He chooses the photo of the railway tracks, commenting:

S: Because it's just gone in every direction. Like, just don't know which way it's going to go. It's all mixed up.

I: *Yeah, so you feel at the moment sort of you're not sure where life's going?*

S: I'm not sure what I want to do with my life.

Rohan attended a Catholic primary school, and later in the interview, notes that going to Catholic schools has influenced his outlook, now, he and his classmates are questioning all that. He comments favourably on the Religious Education at the school:

S: I like it because it's not just focused on Catholic, it's focused on religion in general so you get to see what other people believe, their culture believes. It's like a window to other religions to compare and everything.

I: *Yeah. Have there been any parts of the curriculum, things you've done that have stood out in your mind that have been really helpful?*

S: Oh, probably just when you talk about the Catholic religion, we go on about how there's no actual evidence anything could have happened. It's like that, just talk about it and come up with different theories

He's not sure what to believe. He thinks that 'there is some kind of God . . . but I don't know because there's always different religions, so which one is true . . . ?'

I: *Would you say that what you believe has sort of changed over the last few years?*

S: Yeah. Like, I used to believe in God, like a lot of Jesus and all that. Now I'm starting to doubt that. Starting to think oh yeah, he's probably just - as I grow older, like I learn more about science and evolution and all that so I'm starting to think that would probably be more accurate.

He has always thought of Jesus as 'like a regular person, because they always try to tell us, when he was a kid, he would have been just like you.'

As to what happens after death: 'I don't know. There's just too many possibilities. I just reckon you die and that's about it.'

'Too many possibilities' seems to sum up his experience in more than one respect.

Rohan reads a card on which there are several short descriptions of 'religious experiences'; and asked to select anything that reminds him of his own experience, indicates one of the accounts and comments: 'He goes on about how it's just useless and stuff and if there is a God, then how can bad things happen kind of things. That's what he's trying to say, and that's how I feel sometimes, you know.' The item on which he is commenting contains the phrase: 'feeling desperate about the uselessness of my life', and goes on to describe 'the feeling of a Presence, of Light, of Love, all around me.' There is nothing in the account about the problem of 'bad things happening'. That's something Rohan adds in, which he associates with the 'sense of how it's useless'.

Perhaps we can discern an edge of frustration, of anxiety here. He's like someone who realises that they have lost their way; lost confidence in the map they had been using up till

now; there is a sense of being overwhelmed by the number of possible choices; but he seems to be holding panic at bay. There is also a calmness and a sense of confidence that he will be able to work things out.

Another of the scenarios begins with the words: 'No one in our family went to church, ...' and goes on to describe a strong experience of feeling one with the universe. Rohan comments: 'And this one, when no one in the family goes to church -- and that's how my family is.' But then, amazingly, he adds: 'Sometimes you just feel, like, a religious presence when you think about it.'

He doesn't tell us any more about feeling this presence. We are inclined, on theoretical grounds, to expect these scarcely articulated experiences to be present on the edge of consciousness, exercising a subtle subterranean 'pull' on young people's explicit thinking and feeling.

What is his religious identification? (Meaning: how would he answer the Census question on religion - without implying full acceptance of any 'package' of beliefs and moral prescriptions, and certainly without any implication of regular attendance.) In the past, he would have identified as Catholic; it seems very likely that he was baptised and confirmed. What about now? Our sense is that although he is revising his beliefs considerably, he would probably still say 'Catholic' in response to this question - even if now in a kind of 'residual' sense: with less assurance than formerly. Perhaps not; but religious identification shows in surveys as tending to persist quite strongly, despite considerable changes in belief and practice.

Although the interview is one of the shorter ones, Rohan's worldview-under-revision is quite well articulated; his doubts and questions are explicit, and he is engaged in a process of reflecting on them - a process which he knows is far from complete.

And even amid the flux, there is a kind of coherence in the worldview: not a coherent story, or understanding of the world, or set of beliefs, but a coherent process of reinterpretation: everything needs to be looked at again and reassessed in the light of his developing understanding.

What of his ethos? His temperament is equable; although he expresses some anxiety about the uncertainty he feels in face of the endless range of possibilities, he faces his future with an impressive calm and courage, and a basic confidence that he will be able to work it out. Autonomy is a recurring theme; he admires his father for his tolerance and fairness; for not judging people, and shows the same values in his own outlook.

Rohan's primary spiritual practice could well be described as questioning - rethinking his former traditional worldview. But he retains some practices associated with that way of life. He prays occasionally 'when bad stuff happens', thinking particularly about people going through some kind of trouble. He attends school liturgies, hastening to add: 'Oh, we don't go every day. It's good because we only go on occasions. We don't go every day or anything.' Describing the Mass at school on Ash Wednesday, he comments tolerantly: 'It wasn't bad. . . . Mass isn't a bad thing . . . It can get boring if you go too often . . . because they tell the same stories over and over again. There's no new stories. You've heard it before.'

He and his family don't go to church on Sundays. He remarks, actually in connection with school liturgies: 'We just go at Christmas and that'. This can't actually apply to school Masses, since he would not be at school at that time; more likely he is referring to himself and his family here.

He dismisses out of hand questions about New Age practices: 'I don't believe in that kind of stuff, ghosts and psychics and stuff.'

*I: Do you take your star signs or your horoscope seriously?*

*S: No. Like if I read it I'll be intrigued, like, maybe that could happen. But I'd never rely on that to guide me in any way.*

Music is the activity Rohan most enjoys. He feels exhilarated when playing guitar in a little band he and friends have formed.

After reading his candid story, our hope for him is best expressed by what the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to a young man in his twenties troubled by the question of whether he had a 'vocation' to be a poet:

Be patient towards all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms, or books written in a completely foreign language. Do not now seek the answers, that cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer (Rilke, 1934 p. 33).<sup>11</sup>

#### *Spirituality type*

Primary: Secular; secondary: Traditional. Quite a large proportion of the cases have a similar classification; we may in time formulate it as a type itself; it occurs in people who have come from fairly traditional spiritual backgrounds, who are now finding either that Secular conceptions place their traditional beliefs under severe question, without yet forcing their suspension (in that case, we indicate Traditional as primary) or that the Secular worldview is more persuasive.

#### ***Influences on Spirituality:***

Despite Rohan's current ambivalence about religion, his Catholicism is an irreducible part of his habitus. Rohan's Catholic family background, his Catholic education and past church attendance provide a particular context and specific trajectory for his ongoing questions, doubts and exploration, whether he is aware of this or not. His questioning is also indicative of his stage in the lifecourse; on the cusp of adulthood, about to finish school, thinking about the myriad possibilities that lie beyond.

Rohan's parents are divorced; living through a divorce can also raise all sorts of uncertainties about the meaning of life for a young person and this experience will have profoundly shaped him. Nonetheless, family is still important to him; he mentions his father as someone he really admires:

*I: Can you tell me about someone you really admire, what it is you like about them?*

*S: I don't know. Probably my dad.*

*I: Mm, mm.*

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Robinson (1978), who takes from it the title of his wonderfully insightful interpretation of a selection of accounts of spiritual experience from the Hardy Centre's archive.

S: He's like a nice person and stuff, yeah.

I: *In any particular way?*

S: Oh, because he's really tolerant of people. He doesn't judge anyone. He's really fair and not mean.

Our interviews also sought to understand the ways in which a range of cultural resources – music, film and popular media – might be used in constructing spirituality. Such resources appear to have little overt spiritual salience for Rohan, despite his love of music and its importance in his life:

I: *So apart from sort of hanging out with friends, what would you say your favourite activity is outside of school and work?*

S: Probably music.

I: *Yes. When you're playing your music, how does it make you feel?*

S: Like excited. I get really you know, just like I don't know, just feel good and excited.

I: *Do you think there's things that your music sort of carries over into the rest of your life in any particular way? Does it have any impact on other aspects of life?*

S: I guess like in a way, but I don't really know. I haven't really seen it.

This is not to say that for Rohan music does not inspire any sense of wonder, awe or otherness. As his interview illustrates, it is not always easy for a young person to make such overt connections or even understand how certain activities and practices influence their spirituality.

### ***Consequences of Spirituality:***

Rohan fits best in *Low civic orientation: apathetic*. He demonstrates limited civic knowledge, few personal capacities/skills for good and little evidence of civic social attitudes. He has done almost no community service; the little he has done has been to deliver material to the place where his father is doing volunteer work. He is not antagonistic to civic duty but it does not seem to be relevant to him.

#### *1. Knowledge*

Rohan demonstrates that he has a very basic knowledge of human rights and social and political structures.

I don't really watch the news.

#### *2. Personal capacities and skills*

He appears to lack motivation particularly for civic behaviour. He claims his friends would think he was a fun person, but he does not demonstrate much initiative in respect to assisting or helping others.

I: *Is there anything in particular that sort of helps you get out of bed in the morning, in the holidays?*

S: Not really.

When asked about unfair happenings in the world he mentions the Iraq war and George Bush but does not think we can do much about it. His response suggests that he has an external locus of control.

No. I don't think we have much say in what goes on in the world.

## 2. Social attitudes

He could not recall any examples of injustice. In fact he thinks the question about injustice is directed towards himself rather than injustice in the wider society. This response demonstrates an egocentric rather than altruistic orientation.

*I: Right. Have there been any examples of injustice that have struck you at all recently?*

S: No, I don't think so. I don't really get treated badly.

## 5. Social action

He is very much influenced by what others think of him and he wants to be remembered for doing something memorable i.e. adventurous.

Yeah, I mean, I don't want them (family and friends) to be like ashamed of me or anything. I'd just like to try lots of things, just get as many things as I can do under my belt, and just say, oh, I've done that. Probably jumping out of an aeroplane or something, climbing a mountain. Do something good to tell my kids or my grandchildren.

When he went with his father to a Community Aid program he did not get involved.

## Case 5 'Katherine' (5048 words; female interviewer)

Katherine, aged 15, is in Year 10 at a private school. Both parents are Australian-born, both professionals.

### *Spirituality:*

She appears to be very intelligent. She says 'a lot' a lot, describing her extraordinary range of involvements, her friends, her reflections. This young lady can keep many balls in the air at the same time, cope with a fair deal of uncertainty, and still fling herself into each activity with intensity, exuberance, success and intense enjoyment.

*I: Have you thought of a time that you felt the most alive that you ever felt?*

S: Probably last year at the school presentation night. I was awarded with four or five awards for academic achievement and stuff. Yeah, much to the delight of other students and that night I know that I just felt on top of the world, oh, this is cool. I just was buzzing and I could hardly sleep and it was like wow.

*I: So aside from buzzing what was going through your head?*

S: Um, just sort of - I guess it was the feeling of sort of acceptance and being recognised, people saying that you might think you're smart but got awarded an all-rounder medal for like first for community and stuff and I think to be recognised and people to say what you're doing is great. It gave me like the biggest feeling.

As if all this were not enough, Katherine is a dancer (jazz); she attends a dancing school, where, over some years, she has worked her way up to the top class, and is proud to be one of the best.

An unusual and important feature of her life is that she engages regularly in a practice of structured reflection.

Like Rohan, she chooses the picture of the railway tracks; they describe her life – which is ‘all over the place’. She is involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities; but her interpretation of this situation is quite positive: ‘I enjoy it all’.

She does well academically and wants to become a vet, and has had many pet animals of different kinds. She has a considerate boyfriend and a supportive and understanding family. In different ways, they are the ones who have influenced the way she thinks and acts.

Her life-story is undergoing reinterpretation and reconstruction – ‘This site under redevelopment’. As a result, her worldview is like a construction site on which a building is being refurbished; many different components are lying about – some which were part of the older building – perhaps to be discarded, perhaps to be reshaped and reincorporated; new elements have been assembled, but are still in the raw material state, not yet integrated into the new structure.

Katherine’s story provides an excellent example of a transitional mix of 1) rational ideas and 2) experiential intuitions, (described in general terms above). It may be useful to attempt to lay these out systematically, indicating in each case a) the content of the idea or awareness and b) the practices which gave rise to, and reinforced them.

*1a) Content of ideas and beliefs relevant to spirituality:*

She has recollections of the religion of her childhood, much of which she now puts at something of a distance, and treats with moderate scepticism. It is unlikely that she would now identify with her former denomination [say, in the Census question], yet, for all her questions, also unlikely that she would describe herself as having ‘no religion’. We did not ask directly, but would guess that she would say ‘Christian’.

*I: Would you say you believed in God or something?*

S: Yeah. I believe in something. Not specifically God, like, I’m still not quite sure about what I believe in. I certainly believe in something higher than that, whether it’s the Christian God or something else, I’m still not quite convinced. I’m still on a journey to finding what my true beliefs are. . . . I haven’t done huge amounts of research into other religions and stuff. I would prefer not to conform to a specific religion but at the moment combine them all into what I feel works for me.

*I: So what do you think about Jesus? What sort of person was he?*

S: Whether he existed or not, sort of will be probably back and beliefs and stuff, trying to work out whether he was here, a collaboration of things that happened, I don’t really know. It’s a very big grey area.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Anyone who has taught RE will have encountered this absurd but widespread component of juvenile scepticism: doubt as to whether Jesus even existed as a historical person, which we see in this comment from a highly intelligent teenager. It is most interesting for the insight it provides into teenagers’ confusion on religious issues. When explored further, we often find it extends to other historical persons with no particular religious significance: Julius Caesar or Napoleon. Some of the factors at work here may be: 1) few students now take a history as a subject in the last three years of secondary school, and so have no idea of what we know of the human past, or of even the most elementary criteria which enable us to distinguish historical fact from legend. Also, they are aware that in religion, legends abound, and one also encounters ‘symbolic’ statements which cannot be read as straight factual accounts; 2) the ‘trickle-down’ effect, through often thin popularisations, of the work of the ‘masters of suspicion’ – Marx, Freud and Nietzsche – more recently carried to extreme scepticism by some deconstructionists; 3) a widespread ‘scientism’ – augmented by uncritical reports of the work of writers such as Richard Dawkins – that is, naïve faith in the overpowering authority of the natural sciences, which, although they do not deal with historical issues, are thought to have cast a shadow of universal doubt over all non-scientific knowledge, especially on anything to do with religion; 4) a peculiarly post-modern scepticism regarding ‘public knowledge’: exemplified by those who sought to argue, a few years ago, that the manned landings on the moon were a hoax perpetrated by the U.S. government – filmed in an aircraft hangar and

*I: Would you believe what's in the Bible actually happened, say the miracle stories, the resurrection of Jesus?*

S: I don't know. That whole bit I find a little bit far-fetched really. I certainly believe that this may have happened and I'm sure one day I will make a decision on what I believe but at the moment it would be a bit idealistic that Jesus just came along and all this wonderful stuff happens.

*I: And what do you personally think happens after we die?*

S: I certainly would believe that there's an after-life. There's something there because that really makes no sense to myself. I'd say that – I don't necessarily believe in the whole heaven and hell situation where there's a good place and a bad place where we all finish. I think that – I don't know.

### *1b) Practices giving rise to, expressing and supporting these beliefs*

Katherine relates that when she was little, when the family lived in the country, she and her parents used to attend church regularly with her Grandma, 'who goes to church a lot', and she also attended Sunday school. When they came to the city, 'there wasn't one here' (presumably no church of that denomination within easy reach). But she goes to church still when she visits her Grandma, to whom she is close, and they all 'do the whole family bit' and go to Grandma's church at Christmas. But she sees it differently now:

I find it interesting, not so much because I believe everything that's coming out but people have different views and the way that they believe I think helps to form my own opinions and what I believe. I think not so much that, put it this way, that they're converting me and I'm specifically believing what's being told. Some of the more practical stuff in the Bible, the stuff that – like about emotions and feelings and related to people and stuff, I certainly find that more interesting.

A practice we might expect in someone who has had a religious upbringing at some point is prayer. Katherine has modified both the traditional practice and her understanding of it:

*I: Do you ever pray?*

S: Um, not specifically pray. I think that I have a lot of sort of hopes and that I like think about things that I'd like to happen but I don't specifically in that time sit there and pray. The only time is when there are big issues, stuff like death and stuff like that happens and just praying for God to take care of people and look after people. When there's big issues in my life, I know that I like to just think about it and hope someone else is taking care of them, because I can't do anything, but other than that, no.

Even this level of practice is likely playing a part in sustaining her residual religious beliefs.

### *2a) More recent experiences, and kinds of awareness arising from these experiences*

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manipulated in now-familiar ways so as to appear real in television broadcasts. At the popular level, many seem to doubt everything which they have not personally experienced. In short, Generations X and Y, although growing up in the 'post-modern era', appear to exist in the epistemological climate of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – an era of radical doubt of the capacity of the mind to know truth. And if certainty is unattainable and all is opinion, my opinion is as good as anyone else's, as younger teenagers are fond of maintaining. Perhaps though, only a minority in every age think critically, the majority have always combined scepticism towards 'official' versions of the truth with credulity towards whatever appeals as emotionally convincing.

I: [Handing Card A<sup>13</sup> to subject]. Can you say if any of that applies to you.

S: I stayed in a caravan park and I would go for a walk on the beach in the morning or night and just sort of that being at the beach makes you feel like not smaller but certainly there is something else out there. I certainly believe that experience has helped me convince myself almost that there is something else, something higher. I haven't really decided to go searching as much as some others, simply because I don't think at this stage of my life it's most important that I make a decision of what I believe. Certainly that kind of experience has given me this feeling that there has to be something more around me, something bigger and if it something bigger it's better.

[Later, after a question on belief in ghosts] . . . Certainly there have been times when I've felt a presence or something bigger or higher than me. I'm not sure what.

I: Can you tell me about one of those.

S: Well, I know that I was lying in bed one night after my grandfather had died, six months or whatever after and just thinking about it and I felt like he was almost with me, but there was no one in the room, but that feeling of some kind of spirit being there. . . . Certainly at the time I was thinking that it was my grandfather or hoping that it was my grandfather and sort of making me feel better about it and making it okay.

Both the sense of 'something else' in Nature, and of the presence of someone who has recently died, are very common 'primordial' experiences.<sup>14</sup> And in Katherine's case, as is typical of such experiences, the subject has no clear framework of interpretation in which they are assigned the kind of meaning attached to a concept or idea; they may not fit in with previously learned beliefs from a religious tradition, or may even be disapproved of within that framework; they remain vaguer 'sensings' or intuitions arising from the experience; yet may nonetheless carry with them a strong sense of validity – the 'truth of experience', and powerful emotive weight and influence because of their directness and immediacy.

2b) Practices expressing and supporting this 'experiential knowledge' component of Katherine's worldview:

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<sup>13</sup> Card A contained four short vignettes of different kinds of religious or spiritual experiences. The last was of an experience of someone walking along a beach, and unusually, 'feeling a part of something bigger and absolutely beyond me'. It contains no mention of any sense of a 'Presence'.

<sup>14</sup> On 'primordial' spiritual experiences and their place in our theory and methodology, see our previous report: 'Spirituality in adolescence and young adulthood: A method for a qualitative study', now about to be published in the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*. There we wrote: 'Our definition of spirituality includes also the ways in which people's lives are shaped by pre-conceptual intuitions. Very often, these have not been brought to reflective awareness, so by definition, people are not aware of them in such a way as to be able to answer direct questions about them. Two of our techniques (the use of the 'photolanguage' pictures and the exploration of primordial experiences) seek to *evoke* such phenomena. Our hypothesis, supported by research, is that they lurk in the penumbra of consciousness of many people. . . . Instead of direct questions about experiences of transcendence, in successive revisions of the interview schedule, we came to rely more upon questions which sought to evoke what we call 'primordial' spiritual experiences – events of inchoate spiritual awareness which may have been pushed out into the 'penumbra' of consciousness, and never before reflected on, for lack of any framework of interpretation.'

A revised footnote in a later version of the paper states: 'Revising the interview schedule after the pilot project, we have moved a step further: replacing these questions with four short first-person accounts of experiences of this kind, drawn from Maxwell and Tschudin's (1990) analysis of accounts from the archive of the Alister Hardy Centre for the Study of Religious Experience. We included both 'numinous' and 'mystical' experiences (in the latter, the self and the transcendent are not sharply distinguished, but rather experienced as unified; so that the transcendent loses its attribute of distance, and is experienced instead as 'immanent'). We expect that actual vignettes will be more evocative than the questions formerly used.' These are on the cards shown to the interview subjects. It is the 'maze of railway lines' picture which evokes Katherine's sense of the rich confusion of her life, 'all over the place', and the nature-experience (described just above) on the card she is given which calls forth her recollection of the 'sense of presence' experienced on her beach walks.

I do a lot of meditation and stuff. Outside in nature, that's really productive for me . . . focusing on yourself and calming yourself . . . I try to do it at least once a week . . . it makes a big difference in the way I feel, the way that I relate to everyone else and the way that I cope with things.

The practice is regular, salient, and Katherine goes so far as to rank it first among the things to which she ascribes her happiness.

*I: What are the things that you do that are good for you -- things that make you happy?*

S: Certainly my meditation, that's the biggest thing.

But the biggest surprise for the reader is the source of this practice:

*I: So how did you get into the meditation?*

S: Oh, my grandma did meditation classes. Not specifically religious ones, but focusing on yourself and calming yourself and then gradually I just picked up other things and stuff. I like to sit outside and read and calm myself and --

*I: So how often do you do that?*

S: I try to do it at least once a week. It all depends on homework and stuff, whether I get time for it. But, certainly when I do it, it makes a big difference in the way I feel, the way that I relate to everyone else and the way that I cope with things.

*I: Is it guided meditation? Would you have a tape or something like that to help you?*

S: Oh, sometimes I have not specifically tapes but like music, classical music and stuff, we make the natural sounds and stuff. Sometimes do it but mostly I sit outside and listen to nature and let the environment be the guide, listen to the birds and stuff, sit down and let that guide me.

*I: So you think nature can guide you?*

S: Yeah, I think it's very calming, just to sit outside and focus on not what's going on in my life but what's going on around me.

There's a great deal more to this Grandma than a pious old churchgoing lady who is trying to keep her talented grand-daughter in touch with the Church. Perhaps for her own benefit, perhaps mainly with Katherine in mind, she has 'got into' meditation, and has had amazing success in passing on a spiritual technique which is obviously perfectly suited to the teenager's current stage of spiritual questioning. Brava, Grandma!

A capacity to enjoy stillness and silence – a definite taste for them, seems uncommon in a member of a generation who typically seem never to be at rest, and perpetually plugged in to various sources of electronic noise – either the mobile phone or the MP3 player.

Katherine's meditative practice helps to explain her 'centeredness' in the midst of a life that is 'all over the place', and the relatively high level of articulation of her views. She has reflected on her former religious beliefs and without completely discarding them, developed questions about them, and a sense of where she needs further information. Doubtless without ever having heard it, she is following Rilke's prescription, cited earlier: she is 'living her questions', rather than seeking the answers, 'which could not now be given her because she would not be able to live them'.

Her practice of meditation does not appear to arise from identifiably New Age, esoteric or Eastern sources, nor is it linked with other practices of that type: Yoga, Tai Chi, spiritualism, Tarot; questions on all these drew a blank, with the one exception we have already noted regarding ghosts, which drew forth the anecdote about her grandfather. She used to read her horoscope, but found it 'pretty irrelevant'.

*Articulation of the worldview*

As already noted, Katherine's developing understanding of her world is relatively high in its level of articulation / expression and reflection – aided by a lively intelligence and her practice of meditation. She has developed a critical consciousness which is mature for her age and educational level. She distinguishes clearly between questioning past beliefs and rejecting them outright; she knows what she knows and what she does not know; but is not over-anxious about filling-in the large gaps. Not all is flux; what she knows – especially what is true to her own experience,<sup>15</sup> she owns and lives.

*Coherence of the worldview*

Like her life, Katherine's worldview is 'all over the place'; it does not display the coherence of an ordered whole; inconsistent elements jostle one another. But this is what we would expect of a view of the world, and of her place in it, at her stage of development, and of this period of active reconsideration of former beliefs, of questioning, of integrating new experiences. In her, this process is well along; yet does not seem likely to terminate any time soon. We can anticipate that it will continue and intensify through her remaining years at school, and perhaps well into early adulthood. She already displays an unusually high level of tolerance of ambiguity<sup>16</sup> which may well be considered a sign of maturity in itself – necessary today even in older adults with highly integrated spiritualities. Yet individual components of Katherine's worldview are not simply gathered in an uncoordinated heap. Nor is the flux chaotic, but shows several patterns: there is a substratum of traditional beliefs, and a structure of questions arising from clear sources: new knowledge acquired at school and from reading, modern scientific and historical criteria of verification, of which she has quite an erroneous understanding; third, there are new patterns of awareness arising from her experience and her meditative practice. At the same time, there is a drive towards cognitive consistency, or away from 'cognitive dissonance',<sup>17</sup> which is probably built-in to the structure of mind itself, and it seems most likely that a woman of Katherine's ability will in time reconcile antinomies, and find answers for many of her questions, arriving at a position of flexible consistency and considerable complexity, yet leaving room for continuing development, and for subtle elements of experiential awareness to which one would have to do a kind of violence to force them into harmony with plainer rational generalisations.

*Ethos*

Katherine's ethos seems best characterised by her stable mood of joyful immersion in life – grasping a multitude of opportunities and leaping fearlessly into schoolwork and her amazing range of extra-curricular activities (of which we have recounted only a few) and personal endeavours, attractions and explorations. She is exceptionally open to experience. If she seems somewhat underdeveloped in the area of moral sensitivity, her aesthetic sensibility is highly developed and influential, especially through her involvement in dance and music (she plays two instruments and appreciates both popular and classical music). On the other hand – but we all have our feet of clay – she is a sentimentalist -- emotionally soft to the point of gullibility: here's how she describes her favourite movie:

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<sup>15</sup> In *The Heretical Imperative* (1980), Peter L. Berger treats insightfully the priority accorded to experience as a source of knowledge in post-traditional industrial societies.

<sup>16</sup> 'In important matters we understand, not as we simplify, but as we can tolerate the paradoxical' (E.R. Goodenough quoted in Robinson (1977 p. 144).

<sup>17</sup> The classic treatment of cognitive dissonance is Festinger (1957).

S: It's really sad and it's really good.

I: *So why would you find that to be good?*

S: Oh, I just think because it made me cry. I think if you cry it must be doing something right. It's just really sad but a love story and he proves his love for her and stuff.

Older readers may well fear that such a naïve faith in whatever evokes tears shows poor emotional judgment and leaves Katherine far too vulnerable. But in an age when even young hearts are so often hardened by cynicism, perhaps this is an easily forgivable fault; she is anything but an emotional junkie, and displays ample evidence that her head is at work as well as her heart. She even offers a reason for being so affected by the film: it is a story of true love. Her ethos, however, does not consist solely of a happy mood, excessive emotionality and aesthetic sensitivity. She has some well-formed values: a serious concern with the large spiritual questions; a commitment to animal welfare which grounds her career ambitions, and as we shall see, a dawning social conscience.

We hope we are able to re-interview her in two years time; she will surely delight and surprise us all over again.

#### *Spirituality type*

Katherine's animated responses show us a gifted, happy teenager in the midst of a great surge of growth. She is difficult to classify in terms of our set of types. She no longer fits comfortably into the Traditional type, but retains sufficient traditional elements to fall well short of Secular; she is clearly not New Age, and her spirituality is much too well developed to be classified as merely Embryonic. We classify her spirituality as primarily Traditional, secondarily Secular: the only spiritual path she knows is Traditional; her radical questions come from the realm of the Secular, strongly expressed in the enviroing Australian culture.

#### ***Influences on Spirituality:***

Katherine has strong friendship networks and comes from a tight-knit nuclear family. Her cultural background is Anglo-Celtic. As noted above, her past and ongoing church involvement has some relevance to her.

Katherine is particularly close to her parents. Like many others her age, she rates them as influential in her life:

I: *Okay. Now can you tell me about someone you really admire and what it is you like about them?*

S: Probably my mum. She's gorgeous. Like, she'd be my best friend I suppose. She's forty but she behaves like she's twenty-five. Not tacky but you know, she doesn't look forty, put it that way.

I: *What about the rest of your family? Would they be an influence on you?*

S: I reckon the way my mum and then my dad behave, they influence the way I behave. Like, my dad is very particular about certain things. Not obsessive compulsive, but leaning towards it and I suppose that's influenced me in that I'm very precise about what I do, I like to have things right.

While she values her friendship network, she does not overtly engage in spiritual exploration with friends:

I: *Okay, so are you the kind of person that would have a lot of friends that you're not all that close with or just a few close friends?*

S: A bit of a mixture. I have a lot of people that I sort of go out with on a regular basis, a lot of friends, but then there's two or three that I'm really close with.

That said, like most teenagers, the experiences one has with friends are amongst the most important things in their life:

*Yeah. Now what about the time when you had the most fun ever?*

S: Nothing really would stand out. Certainly some of the parties I've been to recently and with friends and stuff and just that whole feeling of the excitement, the energy and not necessarily anything specifically with – like non alcoholic parties, but just that feeling of being around friends. Everyone was just so excited and hyped up and just glad to be with each other and stuff.

In terms of cultural of the cultural resources which influence her spirituality, we have noted above her enthusiasm for meditation. What about music, film and TV? They certainly have some salience for her, but like Rohan, their precise role in her spirituality cannot be easily articulated:

*I: Okay. And, what are your favourite music groups, if you have any? It's not a big thing for everyone?*

S: I like Destiny's Child, some of the older stuff. Some of the Christian stuff they do is really good. Um, pretty much all. I listen to a lot of different kinds of music, different styles and stuff, but not specifically that I really like, but yeah.

*I: You mentioned Destiny's Child do some Christian stuff.*

S: Yeah.

*I: So that's a good thing for you?*

S: Yeah, because when they do some Christian stuff it's up beat and up tempo but it's not specifically a Christian band. It's more interesting to me because in addition to all the other stuff, they do the regular pop stuff. They also have the Christian aspect of it.

*I: Okay and what would be your favourite film of all time?*

S: Oh, I like A Walk to Remember.

*I: What's that about?*

S: Oh, it's about this girl who has cancer, and she's in love with this boy but she can't love him because she's going to die.

*I: Oh.*

S: It's really sad and it's really good.

*I: So why would you find that to be good?*

S: Oh, I just think because it made me cry. I think if you cry it must be doing something right. It's just really sad but a love story and he proves his love for her and stuff.

### ***Consequences of Spirituality:***

#### ***1. Knowledge***

While Katherine's knowledge of political and current affairs was not extensive, she did read the newspaper each day, which is more than might be expected from many young people her age. Despite being concerned about a human-interest story she read in the papers, she showed little interest in increasing her awareness of social justice issues. The only activism in which she had been involved in was to boycott buying some goods that used animal parts.

*I: Moving on, now just thinking about today's world or your local community is there an issue that you feel really strongly about?*

S: Recently when that woman was killed down near the station, that got in all the papers, I sort of didn't realise there was a violence issue or a drug issue in our community but it sort of really brought that to light. It's terrible that people are out there not knowing what to do, doing drugs,

robbing and killing people. It sort of made me feel really uneasy. I never really realised that kind of thing goes on in this area.

S: My perception of current affairs is not good. I read the newspaper most days and whenever there are some issues – I can't really remember the things that happened a year ago or two years ago, because so much has gone on since then. .... I try and stay away from politics. I'm not big on the whole area. Some of the politicians I have strong feelings against in that they're silly. Certainly environmental stuff like dogs being dumped and mistreatment of animals and all that.

### 2. *Personal capacities and skills*

Katherine evidences a range of communication and interpersonal skills and has extensive family and community support for her life. She has consistently used these skills in a variety of activities, for example in organizing the knitting ventures.

Our local park has a program where we do environmental conservation, plant trees and stuff and I've helped out with that in the past and that's certainly rewarding, just getting out there and making our park gorgeous.

### 3. *Social attitudes*

Katherine appears to be well integrated and to have a strong sense of her responsibility towards others who are less fortunate. She also linked her community service activities to her Christian beliefs.

I guess I just want people to remember me as a person who loves other people, who is happy to contribute who is very open and making a big difference to people's lives.

### 4. *Social action (individual or collective)*

She was awarded an 'all-rounder medal' for community service at her school. She was involved in a range of volunteer activities and civic behaviour.

I initiated a knitting group to knit for the less fortunate, down at the community service, the kindergarten and yeah, just being recognised and all the extra curricular stuff, helping out within the school community and being very friendly to everyone. It just felt really nice, people who were disabled and what you are doing to make a difference, it's great.

Katherine is classified as *Medium civic orientation*. She does a lot of community service for her age, has some sound civic attitudes but has no interest in political or social structures and is not aware of current issues or events. She differs from the other cases noted in this report in that while she engaged in a range of volunteer work her main interest is with animal welfare.

## Publications, Presentations and Other Papers

Team members have published the following papers based on material from the pilot and/or the first phase of the project:

Singleton, A, Mason, M & Webber, R 2004, 'Spirituality in Adolescence and Young Adulthood: A Method for a Qualitative Study', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 9 (3).

Bond, S 2004, 'Me, Me, Me ...Me Too', *Pointers* Vol. 14, no.1, (March), pp.1-6.

Hughes, P 2004, 'The spirit of Generation Y: some initial impressions', *Pointers* Vol.14, no.2, (June), pp.1-5.

Presentations based on project material:

Webber, R & Singleton, A 2004, 'Spirit of Generation Y', Spirituality in the Pub Seminar Series, August.

Mason, M 2004, 'Methods for exploring 'primordial' elements of youth spirituality', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, San Francisco, August.

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