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Exploring Catholic Teacher Identity: The Intersection of Personal, Professional,  
and Religious Dimensions Across Generations

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (SocSci)

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## **Abstract**

This research investigates the nature and relationship of the personal and professional identity of Catholic teachers in Scotland, exploring how this identity is lived and expressed in practice. It critically evaluates the compatibility of a Catholic understanding of identity—grounded in the conviction that every person finds their origin and end in God—with contemporary perspectives that emphasise the compartmentalisation of self and the increasing performativity of the teacher. The study seeks to identify whether Catholic teachers in Scotland share perceptible, common qualities or distinct characteristics, and to examine how these have developed among those qualifying between 1965 and the present day. Set within ongoing debates about identity and the wider discourse on Catholic identity, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of who Catholic teachers are, whom they serve, and why.

The findings highlight both continuities and shifts in how Catholic teachers perceive and live their identity, revealing tensions between faith commitments and professional expectations. The research concludes that Catholic teacher identity remains distinctive but requires ongoing support to be sustained in contemporary contexts. These insights carry practical implications for policymakers, diocesan leaders, and schools, particularly with regards to formation and professional development strategies that affirm the integration of personal faith and professional vocation.

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I would like to end with two quotes that have accompanied me on this journey:

*“Bad times, hard times, this is what people keep saying; but let us live well, and times shall be good. We are the times: such as we are, such are the times.”*  
– St Augustine of Hippo

*“Things are only impossible, until they’re not!”* – Captain Jean-Luc Picard

## **Certificate of Originality**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Natalie Finnigan

Signature: N Finnigan

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale**

This study investigates Catholic teacher identity in contemporary Scotland as a dynamic interplay of personal faith, professional responsibility and ecclesial belonging within a state-governed denominational system. It seeks to determine whether Catholic teachers share identifiable characteristics and how these have been shaped by post-Vatican II developments in the Church and wider late-modern reconceptualisations of identity. By attending closely to teachers' lived experiences, the thesis examines how Catholic identity is understood, embodied and negotiated across generations, and what this reveals about the sustainability of a distinctively Catholic educational mission in Scotland today.

As this study explores questions of identity, it seems appropriate to begin by speaking briefly of my own. I am a Theology graduate and Catholic educator whose professional life has unfolded alongside, and in dialogue with, my commitments as a wife and mother. These overlapping vocations have shaped my sensitivity to questions of integration, vocation and relational identity within Catholic education. First, this led me to teach Religious Education (RE) in Catholic Secondary schools in the West of Scotland and now it finds me in my current role as a Secondary RE Adviser in two separate dioceses: the Diocese of Motherwell and the Archdiocese of Glasgow. This role has provided both access to, and insight into, the lived realities of Catholic teachers, while also requiring ongoing critical self-awareness throughout the research process.

Over the course of any given academic session, I encounter hundreds of teachers who teach in Catholic schools (and a number of Catholic teachers who teach in non-denominational settings and either wish to return to the denominational sector, or who have sought out professional/spiritual development specific to

their own faith background). I address ITE students, visit schools, hold Principal Teacher and Head Teacher meetings, host and lead professional development events and spiritual nourishment opportunities – amongst a variety of other interactions. It is in these encounters, in the establishing, maintaining, repairing and fighting for these relationships that the issues of identity underpinning this study have crystallised in my mind.

### **1.1 Aims**

The present thesis will seek to understand more about the nature and relationship of personal and professional identity in these contexts and how they are lived and expressed by Catholic teachers in Scotland. It will critically assess the compatibility of i) a Catholic understanding of identity in which every person finds their origin and end in God, with ii) relevant theories and related trends in personal and professional identity, specifically the compartmentalisation of different aspects of an individual's identity. This is made manifest, for example, in the increased emphasis on performativity and often stated bureaucratic demands within the teaching profession. Undoubtedly, the issues of identity raised by this study are integral to the prerequisite question on which to build any meaningful response to who Catholic teachers are, whom they serve and why.

The key purpose of this study, therefore, is to consider the nature of Catholic teacher identity in Scotland today against a backdrop of intricate and divergent opinions surrounding identity and within the broader context of Catholic identity more generally conceived. With reference to the specific national geographical and political contexts, my intention is that this research also provide operational

proposals for those involved in, and responsible for, ongoing teacher formation in Scotland.

Hall and du Gay, P. state that: “There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of ‘identity’” (Hall & du Gay, 2011, 274).

This description attempts to describe the sheer volume of work that has been undertaken in the field of identity research. This increased academic interest is contingently related to the growth of individual and collective consciousness of identity. However, in the last half a century, and perhaps the change most relevant to this research, the notion of identity has taken on a decidedly self-determined stance:

The point I am making is that we all live in a world in which it is increasingly easy to imagine that reality is something we can manipulate according to our own wills and desires, and not something we necessarily need to conform ourselves to or passively accept (Trueman 39, 2020).

Trueman alludes here to the move away from an approach that accepts objective truth or reality to one that is self-fashioning, or autopoietic.

Continuing and developing this line of thought, each statement of identity made by a person, therefore, can be *decided* upon and need not necessarily be rooted in statements that would have historically been labelled as factual or empirical.

Identity is, by many, considered now to be fluid and subjective, and a fundamental exercise in human freedom, not something imposed by circumstance of birth (sex, for example), assumed by association or even confession of faith (religious affiliation, for example), or even imposed by external structures (Hall, 1990; Taylor, 1989). Though there exists informative and insightful research into the identity of the Catholic Teacher, from which this study will certainly benefit (e.g. Coll, 2008; Sheridan, 2012), there remains

limited literature on the specific issue of Catholic Teacher Identity. This research, therefore, seeks to understand the identity of the Catholic secondary school teacher against the backdrop of unprecedented, seismic shifts in thought on identity and strives to examine the impact on, and challenges of, these findings on the Scottish Catholic educational community. For the formation and continued development of Catholic teachers to be fit for purpose – for pupils, parents and the Church alike – the challenges and opportunities that accompany this changing landscape must be grasped and responded to.

## **1.2 Context**

In Scotland, Catholic schools have been part of the state's school system since the *Education (Scotland) Act, 1918*. Within this particular context, where Catholic schools operate within the same administrative and structural frameworks as their non-denominational school counterparts, the identity of the Catholic teacher takes on another dimension for consideration. Though complex, this consideration centres on the intersection of professional and personal in the life of the Catholic teacher.

One of the principal aims of this research is to understand and examine the identity of Catholic Secondary School teachers in Scotland in order to discover whether there are perceptible qualities or distinct characteristics within this group vis-à-vis identity, and how well these can co-exist or even flourish within the distinct partnership between Church and State in Scottish Catholic education. This research will therefore also look at whether and how these qualities and characteristics might have changed over time, possible reasons for this, and analysis of the impact of these changes on the body of Catholic teachers in Scotland.

The shifting political landscape of Scotland is fundamental to this discussion because Catholic schools, whilst retaining specific links with the Church, are fully assumed into the state's educational provision, in accordance with the *1918 Education (Scotland) Act* and its successor legislation. Also relevant to this discussion is the limited variety of denominational schools in Scotland (the vast majority of denominational schools being (Roman) Catholic in religious character) and the complex history of the Catholic community in Scotland that accompanies this, including: "...the enmity directed towards the Catholic community at different stages of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (McKinney & McCluskey, 2019, 6). Devine (2000) corroborates this description of the way that the Catholic community in Scotland was treated and perceived.

It will be important to consider the impact of this setting on the collective or individual concept of Catholic teacher identity: "This is possibly the most complex theme as it is influenced by internal and external pressures, perspectives, manoeuvring and even manipulation" (McKinney & McCluskey, 2019, 6). Any research questions asked, therefore, will be looked at through the lens of this partnership.

My professional experience will undoubtedly inform my approach to this research: being responsible for the planning and delivery of relevant professional and spiritual development for school staff necessitates an actionable concept and understanding of the markers or identifiers that belong in any articulation of the identity of the Catholic teacher.

In Church terms, thought and writing on the topic of lay teachers is relatively new. This development was largely due to the evolving staffing landscape,

necessitated both by a reduction of numbers of religious in teaching roles and an increase in Catholic educational settings. In this 20<sup>th</sup> Century period, through a variety of documents (Among them: *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965; *The Catholic School*, 1977 and *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 1982) and extended guidance, the Church became more conscious of the particular role and distinct vocation of the teacher (Vocation will be defined more fully in Chapter 2). These writings will hence be an important reference point for this research.

However, the identity of the Catholic teacher cannot be viewed in a religious vacuum but should instead be looked at and interpreted not only alongside relevant literature and research but also within the broader context of events within the Catholic Church that impact or shape notions of Catholic identity. To drill down deeply to the fundamental questions about Catholic teacher identity, the disciplines of theology, education, history, sociology and philosophy will all be employed in order to grasp the fullest nature and reality of the experience of identity under investigation.

Within the vast field of identity theories and philosophies it is necessary to be selective about the timeframe of this research. The chosen time frame for this research is 1965 to the present day. This period is characterised by widespread social and cultural change, which we see paralleled in both society and the Catholic Church. Greenwood and Guner (2010) state that: “There may be no better illustration of social change than the sexual revolution that occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” (Greenwood and Guner, 2010, 893). Though the beginnings of the sexual revolution can be traced back to the 1940’s (Bailey, 1988), the 1960’s are widely accepted as its pinnacle (Weeks, 2017). Meanwhile,

Brown (2009) speaks of: "...the cultural rift between Catholicism and the liberal-pluralist societies of Europe culminating in the rift of Vatican II in the 1960's and the complex changes in religious practice that resulted" (Brown, 2009, 226). This quote highlights not only the changing nature of religious authority in Europe, but it also observes the internal tension that was taking place in the Church itself.

*Gravissimum Educationis* (Second Vatican Council, 1965) was the only document produced by the Council devoted specifically to Education. This document affirmed the universal right to education, the primacy of parents as first educators, and articulated the holistic and formative education that should underpin all conceptions of Christian education. Choosing to situate the research between 1965 and the present day therefore is a deliberate decision to mirror the Church's articulation of education as a vehicle for human flourishing against a backdrop of wider social change. This is not, however, limited to one point in time, but rather the decades since 1965 also allow the opportunity to view the Church's developing teaching on education synoptically with rapidly changing social conditions. All of which makes this time period an especially rich one to explore.

It should be acknowledged that this narrowing of focus is not to be seen as an attempt to dismiss the wide range of identity literature available, but more to ensure that efforts to study Catholic teacher identity specifically are not engulfed by the plethora of material and glut of identity studies of less direct relevance to the enquiry.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The study will be framed around three research questions:

- a. Are there identifiable characteristics of Catholic Teachers in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?
- b. How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity in Scotland?
- c. To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed Catholic education system?

This study is hence a standard qualitative enquiry into an area where there is a lack of research. The research here will employ semi-structured interviews with (active and retired) Catholic teachers in Scotland working in denominational and non-denominational settings.

Catholic schools in Scotland hold a unique position: they are both within the state system of educational provision but, at the same time, distinct within it because of their relationship with the institutional Church<sup>1</sup> (HL Deb 05 November, 1918). However, since the Catholic school is subject to the same evaluations and processes as its non-denominational equivalents, how does this claim to uniqueness continue to be evidenced? Perhaps the most obvious markers of it are to be found in the relationship between Church and school (mainly through local parishes/clergy) and the marking of key events from the liturgical calendar within schools; the presence of a school chaplain; sacramental preparation; selected curriculum content reserved to the authority of the

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<sup>1</sup> In the debate record we see the emergence of the principles contained within the system of Approval (where any teacher in a Catholic school is asked to submit an application which details their religious belief and character): “The Bill says that religion shall be taught in those schools exactly as has been the custom in the past. They are also to have the advantage of being able to apply whatever test they think necessary to the teachers as to their religious views and characters before they are allowed to teach in the schools. I do not think that anybody will complain of those advantages being granted to the Episcopalians and Roman Catholic Churches.”

Bishops (most keenly illustrated through the example of relationships education); and the requirement for the approval of the religious belief/character of each member of staff (whether they are Catholic or not) from the relevant Diocese.

Through these examples and a great many more, we may be able to glean the very nature of the Catholic educational mission in Scotland. The integrated vision of holistic formation, where Catholic schools seek to educate a way of living, and not only the communication of marketable skills and information, means that even in the many areas of similarity to be found with non-denominational schools, the Catholic school community is engaging in these activities with a unique motive which – although striving towards success and achievement for each one of its pupils – necessarily goes further than pursuing these ends only for their benefit in the temporal world. Archbishop Miller succinctly explains this:

The specific purpose of a Catholic education is the formation of boys and girls who will be good citizens of this world, loving God and neighbour and enriching society with the leaven of the gospel, and who will also be citizens of the world to come, thus fulfilling their destiny to become saints (Miller, 2006, 1).

The vision explored by Miller situates the aims of Catholic education within two realms -the temporal and the spiritual world. This immediately sets the Church's educational aims apart from other systems. This endeavour seeks not only to form young people to become good and loving citizens on a local and global level, but it also aims to form beyond the context of the school and into eternity. Understanding this dynamic is key to understanding the unique nature and purpose of Catholic education.

## 1.4 Theological Context of the Study

Catholic teacher identity exists as a subset of Catholic identity and therefore a theological context is necessary for the study. Catholic teachers are described by the Church as witnesses to the faith and participators in the Church's evangelising mission (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). This positionality presupposes something more than a professional designation and instead points towards a distinct anthropology that understands the identity of every person as made in the image and likeness of God.

Where does the person of Jesus Christ fit into an understanding of the identity of the Catholic teacher? Pope John Paul II tells us: "Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others" (Pope John Paul II, 1979, §6), thus making it clear that reflecting Christ and being witnesses to Him are fundamental elements of Catholic teacher identity. But to what extent does this actually feature in the consciousness of Catholic teachers in Scotland?

Undoubtedly, the absorption of Catholic schools into a state-sponsored denominational provision has meant that the cost of ensuring the religious character of a school is not a financial burden that rests solely with parents, as is the case in countries such as America (save for those students who are awarded scholarships). In addition to this, it has allowed Catholic schools to become comparable, in terms of fabric, staffing and teacher-pupil ratios with other establishments in the school estate. The advantages of this arrangement are easily identifiable, with Catholic schools eventually benefitting from extensive rebuilding programmes (Watters, 2020), as well as the transferral of

Catholic school teachers to the same pay-scale as their non-denominational teaching counterparts (McKinney, 2020).

Nonetheless, given the reality of cross pollination that occurs between secular and religious cultures and influences, it would perhaps be naive not to be cognisant of the complications that may arise for Catholic schools and individual Catholic teachers where the state fully funds denominational education. Bruce (2014), for instance, observes increased pressure felt by religious institutions in receipt of public funding to demonstrate their worth to society more broadly. Although Catholic schools, residing as they do within the state's educational provision, may not strictly fit within Bruce's definition of religious institutions, they are nevertheless associated *with* religion and therefore impacted by this pressure at some level at least.

Whilst the purpose of this research is not to question the separation of Church and State in either education, or indeed any other realm of civil society, it would be remiss not to highlight the possibility for conflict when governing bodies within education express views that are incompatible with Catholic lifestyles and values. Of course, tension is present in every partnership and the relationship between Catholic school and the Scottish Government is no exception. In Scotland, friction in the partnership is perhaps most observable in the application and granting (or not) of Approval to teach in a Catholic school, the placing of teaching staff by Local Authorities in schools, and the implications of this process for the suitable staffing of timetabled Religious Education. In addition, challenges are posed by shared or joint campuses which often reignite debate on the nature of education in Scotland and the impact of denominational education (BBC, 2004; National Secular Society, 2018). Most notably,

disagreement often arises in approaches to what is conventionally termed in Scotland ‘Relationships Education’ since Catholic schools seek to balance what the Church requires them to teach about relationships with the demands of recent Equalities legislation and the approach of the (current) Scottish Government to the broad subject area of sex and sexuality:

One very particular refraction of secularisation, as it manifests itself in Church- State relations in Scotland, can be vividly seen with respect to the evolution of sex education in schools wherein the legislature...has fairly consistently promulgated a secularist doctrine with respect to the normalising of a public discourse around the tropes of human sexuality (Conroy & McGrath, 2007, 391).

The deliberate use of the word “promulgate” by Conroy and McGrath again highlights the tension present within this partnership, especially in an area such as relationships education, where a lifestyle/lifestyles inconsistent with the teachings of the Church are often part of state-funded RSHP programmes<sup>2</sup>. Though Davidson and Davis (2005) chart a nuanced journey of sex education policy development from the post-war period onwards, including the tensions that existed between various stakeholders, they also point to the increased politicisation of sex education in schools.

It is also present in the opposition of Catholic schools to mandatory Equalities and Inclusion content within the school curriculum for all Scottish schools<sup>3</sup>.

Although there can be little doubt that there have been positive material outcomes as a result of the inclusion of Catholic schools within the state system with regards both salary and accommodation (McKinney, 2020; Paterson, 2015),

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<sup>2</sup> An example of this would be the content of both the Masturbation and Sexual Intercourse sections of RSHP.scot website

<sup>3</sup> Coll (29, 2020) “The Church representatives responded by entering into ‘genuine dialogue’ but throughout the conversations stated that to reach agreement, what was being proposed had to work for the Catholic sector, therefore consideration had to be given to the Catholic Church’s position on such matters since Church schools were also a part of the state system.”

it is also important to regularly question whether state schools can continue to exist as distinctly identifiable *Catholic* schools in Scotland. That is to say, can schools governed by a secular authority remain robustly religious in both character and aims?

Of course, a Catholic educational vision without people who are dedicated to its success, remains only words, or as Pope John Paul II describes it: "...no Catholic school can be effective without dedicated Catholic teachers, convinced of the great ideal of Catholic education" (Pope John Paul II, 1979, §5). This quote from Pope John Paul II rests the effectivity of a Catholic school firmly on the shoulders of teachers committed to Catholic education. However, he goes further than a performative sense of commitment and links the success of the school directly with the assent of Catholic teachers to the distinct philosophical position that underpins Catholic education.

To be able to speak authoritatively of a Catholic school community, the role of any given individual within the school needs to be looked at in great detail. The educational mission of the school depends entirely upon each member of the school community and their shared understanding and commitment to this vision. Without this perspective, the achievement of the vision is left to hopeful optimism in the effective formation and continued dedication of each member of staff— a variable that is extremely difficult to quantify. Approval statements aside, can it be *known* with continued certainty that those teaching in Catholic schools (Catholic or otherwise) assent to and will work to advance the educational vision and faith underpinning the school?

In this vein, further questions arose that were then organised under the research questions:

**RQ1:** Are there identifiable characteristics of Catholic Teachers in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?

*How do Catholic teachers understand and execute their own vocation and responsibilities in this context?*

*To what extent are they aware of their part in the educational mission of the Church?*

These questions go beyond qualifications and instead focus on what makes a Catholic teacher identifiable. They seek to ascertain levels of consciousness of, or personal commitment to, the Church's educational mission.

**RQ2:** How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity in Scotland?

*How do Catholic teachers interpret or respond to local and global events in the Church?*

*What of those Catholic teachers who do not teach in Catholic schools? How do they understand and live out their vocational role within a non-denominational setting?*

These questions explore how far events in the Church, either at a local parish or diocesan level, or at global level, impact or shape self-understanding of the Catholic teacher. The second question asks how Catholic teachers negotiate their role within non-denominational contexts.

**RQ3:** To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed Catholic education system?

*How do teachers negotiate the responsibilities of a Catholic teacher with the expectations of the state system?*

*To what extent are they aware of their part in the educational mission of the Church, and how can this be maintained within the structures in which they operate?*

*Has their formation and knowledge of the faith sufficiently equipped them to teach and witness to the faith?*

After considering what makes a Catholic teacher identifiable, as well as how they are shaped by the Church and other influences, this third group of questions seeks to understand how teachers integrate their own formation with the demands placed upon them within the state educational system.

The success of the Catholic educational project for pupils, parents, educational and faith communities, both local and global, will rely upon these questions, among others, being answered satisfactorily. Implicit within all of them is the identity of the Catholic teacher and the relationship of this identity to the nature and purpose of the school. Failure to respond appropriately and constructively to these challenges could result in a lack of identifiably distinct and fundamental characteristics observable within Catholic schools in Scotland. Finding through them practical suggestions which may in turn serve actionable initiatives, these questions remain a key motivating factor for engaging in this research in the first place – with the exploration of these questions highlighting

areas for attention and development for all those involved in the broad project of Catholic teacher formation.

The educational mission of the Church is achieved through its members and co-operators. This is not to reduce the endeavour to purely human efforts to the exclusion of grace that flows from participation in the mission of Christ (Second Vatican Council, 1965), but rather to correctly position the co-operation of Catholic teachers in this mission. Within this context then, I would suggest that exploring these questions necessitates a closer study of concepts of identity, both professional and religious. This is a simple statement to make but a complex endeavour to undertake: identity as a field of study and in popular culture is wide-ranging, nuanced, oftentimes conflicting and subject to constant change: "...the taking up of an identity is a constant social negotiation...identity voices investments, commitments, or what one feels" (Beynon et al, 2001, 29). Beynon et al's point here highlights the perpetual motion and dynamic interplay of identity. This same sentiment is echoed in Jenkins' (2014) work. He suggests that identity is not to be understood as a fixed possession (Jenkins, 2014), but rather a culmination of interactions across all spheres of human relational experience.

All of this, at a superficial level, can seem to stand in opposition to more traditional definitions of identity, perhaps especially within religious contexts, where the identity of an individual is so intertwined with the identity of the community, that the two are virtually inseparable: "For as with the human body which is a unity although it has many parts - all the parts of the body, though many, still making up one single body - so it is with Christ" (1 Corinthians 12).

We read in this scriptural text the implied reliance of one person on another, as one system relies upon another in the human body.

This analogy is useful to this study because the relationship of the individual to the whole, or the community, will be further explored throughout. In addition, the subtext of service of the other found within the text will be considered as an integral part of the identity of the Catholic teacher. This piece of scripture, therefore, serves to highlight the integral unity between Catholic teacher identity and the specific (Catholic school) and general (wider Church), and the necessity of considering identity and communal identity simultaneously.

However, people who belong to a confessional faith do not exist in a void occupied only by themselves but rather live within an environment characterised by a plurality of human interactions. Within this complexity, Catholics are called by the Church to both live in and transform the world around them (Second Vatican Council, 1965). The Church requires believers to be outward looking and positively engaging with the world, facilitating the permeation of the “...spirit of the Gospel...” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §43) into every sphere of human existence.

These observations raise important questions about how Catholics could or should navigate what the world and the Church teach about identity. They call us to ask how equipped Catholics are to select what of the world can, and cannot, be reconciled with the Catholic faith. In addition, they acknowledge the added complexity of this process when it includes *professional* identity when this professional identity incorporates the expectations of the government (as

distilled by local authorities), the GTCS and those which Catholic teachers themselves hold, or indeed are expected to hold.

Forde (2006, 5) argues that: "...compliance and conformity tends to constrain teachers in the formation of their professional identity...". Compliance and conformity, in this context, are seen as a hinderance to the development of an authentic professional identity. How, then, does this sit with the idea of identity, both individual and communal, within the context of a confessional faith which oftentimes demands both compliance and conformity?

### **1.5 Locating Teacher Identity within a Post-Modern and Post-Conciliar Framework**

As indicated in the rationale for the present thesis, the point of entry in the timeline of Catholic education will be the period often referred to as post-modern or late modern; specifically for our purposes here, this means 1965 to the current day. This period is characterised by widespread social and cultural change, which we see paralleled in both society and the Catholic Church: and whilst there is some overlap in terms of 'representative' or 'emblematic' issues (contraception for example), other matters are unique to the Church (eg liturgical changes; greater role of the laity within the church).

The specific time frame in which this study is situated is also marked by shifting attitudes towards authority, alongside a heightened awareness of the role of ideology, the growth of scepticism and the move towards a greater application of subjectivity (Taylor, 1991; Lyotard. 1984). During this same time period within the Church, we can observe how these shifting societal norms infiltrated and shaped Catholicism at a macro level – including Catholics as individuals, and as a further subset of this, Catholic teachers within Scotland. Although the

purpose of this study is in no way to assign the sole responsibility for this reshaping of Catholic identity to the Second Vatican Council, it would be remiss not to include an analysis of the Council as typifying the most transformative period in modern Church history (Wilde, 2007; O'Malley, 2008). Whether the Second Vatican Council is causally linked to or the causation of changes in the way that Catholics were catechised (in schools and beyond) and falling practice rates of Catholics all over the world, has been discussed at length with no glaring consensus reached (Bullivant, 2020; Wilde, 2007).

The documents that emerged from the Council both affirmed and re-articulated the participation of the laity in new ways (in liturgy and mission (Second Vatican Council, 1965)) and called for a more educated laity. Despite the desire of the Council to deepen not only the participation, but also the knowledge base of the laity, scholars question whether this was or has been achieved (Martin, 2012; Hitchcock, 1979). Pope John Paul II, some 14 years after the Council, also strongly cautioned against any approach to catechesis that obscured the "...totality of Christ's teaching" (Pope John Paul II, 1979, §30). In the literature consulted here, this is chiefly explored within the context of RE curricula and how the move away from structured, doctrinally rich formation to experience-based approaches manifested within Catholic schools (Rocha, 2006; Dooley, 2000). That both scholarly and magisterial voices are plentiful on the topic of catechesis post-1965 is indicative of both the change in approach that emerged after the council, as well as the effort invested in interpreting and translating this into practice.

That change in the Church corresponded with changes in wider society seems logical since it is not the case that any Catholic community exists as an enclave

but as a broad community that is altered and affected by the world it inhabits. Within a Catholic context however, any change must retain its *authentic character* (Newman, 1845/1974). Similarly to Pope John Paul II's words above, Newman insists that any new developments remain rooted in the source and in simply unfolding more of God's truth, rather than creating it. Although speaking specifically about doctrine, Newman's guide to discerning between corruption and development can legitimately be applied more broadly to include any change that occurs within the Church.

The opposite then, must also be true: the Catholic community, to a greater or lesser extent, must also impact the world around it. Regardless of the specific nuance, late modernity is a period of great change and one where, I would argue, we can see broader shifts in identity trends most keenly (both individual and community): from general patterns, such as shifts in psychopathology identified by Taylor, we move towards "...ego loss, or a sense of emptiness, flatness, futility, lack of purposes, or loss of self-esteem" (Taylor, 1989, 19). This stark description then leads on to a more fragmented understanding of community, including reduced rates of religious practice among Western Christians.

Amongst the tainted fruits of these manifold changes are apathy and acedia. Acedia, of course, is not unique to post-modernity but has been part of the Christian tradition since the Desert Fathers (Evagrius of Pontus, 4<sup>th</sup> c.1970). However, it remains pertinent to any work on identity, and as such can be discerned anew within new cultural and ecclesial contexts. The modern equivalent of the spiritual listlessness described by the Desert Fathers, and expressed anew reflecting a post-modern reality by Taylor, finds its expression

most keenly in reduced spiritual well-being (Büssing, 2020) and reduced religious engagement (Welbaum, 2020). I would argue that these are among the root causes of the pervasive lack of sense of identity within Catholicism and Christianity in general and which has been noted by several commentators (Bullivant, 2019; Trueman, 2020). Moreover, since the beginning of the so-called post-modern era, we have witnessed both a deficit understanding of the markers of Catholicism and a loss of Catholic cultural identity (Musiewicz, 2023; Tentler, ed., 2003). This contention will of course need a great deal of unpacking across this study in order to isolate the key aspects of the experience as they impinge on the identity of Catholic teachers.

Within this broad and rich thematic, I would hope to look at the following areas through the lens of Church and state dynamics, with the goal of clarifying what both interests teach, or imply about individual, community, and professional identity and the ramifications of this for Catholic teachers.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review and Set Theory

The literature review will allow a detailed examination of relevant literature and scholarly work. An analogy with Set Theory will be employed throughout to ensure that focus can be retained in what is a complex and far-reaching area. Although a modern mathematical framework by design (Jech, 2002), the standard functions of relationship, intersection and subset associated with it provide a fruitful conceptual framework with which to approach the study (Ragin, 2000). This will facilitate focused study in each of the 'sets' that are identified, whilst allowing for the analysis of shared characteristics, or common ground within set groups.

The General Set within this format will be Teacher Identity. In a profession dominated by self-evaluation and continued professional development, the identity of the person of the teacher is necessarily always evolving and adapting. A significant portion of this section will be dedicated to reviewing the literature around teacher identity defined or implied by the Scottish Government through key documentation including *The Education (Scotland) Act, 1918* and the GTCS' *Professional Standards* (GTCS, 2021).

The first subset, Catholic Teacher Identity, includes all of the material from the General Set but adds to it the Catholic dimension of this identity. This will include the teaching and guidance of the Catholic Church on the nature and role of the Catholic teacher. It will critically examine notions of vocation and service to the Common Good and appraise how both concepts relate to the identity of the Catholic Teacher. As well as Church guidance, it will be important within this section to also review within existing literature and research how the wider Church, through key stakeholders (other teachers, students, parents, clergy)

define or identify a Catholic teacher. This will allow analysis of any common ground or disparity that exists between ideals, perceptions and realities.

The final subset: Scottish Catholic Teacher Identity, is the distinctive area where most of this study is situated. Here, particular focus will be given to examining the revised GTCS Professional Standards and exploring how achievable such shared standards (as expressed in this and other relevant Government publications) are in an era of self-identification – and separately, but relatedly, how relevant or appropriate they are within a Catholic denominational context. Examination of relevant literature in this area should involve an investigation of the relationship between the role and identity of teachers and the implications of this for Catholic teachers in Scotland. This will allow an exploration of whether the identity of a Catholic teacher is viewed as public or private (and to what extent) and how confident Catholic teachers feel in communicating or expressing aspects of their faith within a school setting. Given Scotland’s unique arrangements for the provision of Roman Catholic Denominational education, and the limited amount of research study in this area, this subset of Teacher Identity presents a variety of opportunities to contribute original knowledge to this ongoing area of interest.

In the introduction to this work, I have shared my own professional context and the motivation to engage in this research and have briefly outlined the complex and sometimes challenging landscape of Catholic teacher identity in contemporary Scotland. Though there is much to draw on in both Church teaching and civic documentation regarding Catholic schools and Catholic teachers, there remains a gap in knowledge specifically relating to how Catholic teachers understand and manifest their identity within the Scottish educational

and cultural context. This research is situated within broader debates around secularisation and the re-conceptualisation of identity theory characteristic of post-modernity. It is also located within, arguably, one of the most pronounced periods of change in the history of the Catholic Church. The sea change of this period and the ecclesial and cultural developments that permeate it, justify this research both academically and pastorally.

The aim of the study is to ascertain whether there are common, identifiable characteristics present within Catholic teachers in Scotland and to examine how these have been shaped or changed by cultural, ecclesial or state influences over a given period of time by asking:

- (a) Are there identifiable characteristics of Catholic Teachers in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?
- (b) How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity in Scotland?
- (c) To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed Catholic education system?

This research will provide an original empirical account of Catholic teacher identity in contemporary Scotland, an area underrepresented in current literature. In addition, it situates Catholic teacher identity within broader theological and sociological discourse concerning secularisation, identity fragmentation, and Catholic identity. This is undertaken using a methodological framework that marries the theological background of the researcher as well as the context in which the study is situated, with the proven and reliable approach inherent to social science research.

## **2.1 Identity and research questions**

The purpose of this literature review is to understand the fundamental identity of the Catholic teacher in Scotland, spanning the period of 1965 to the present day, by drawing out the key themes contained within the relevant literature and considering them through the lens of the research questions. The justification for concentrating on this specific period is further elaborated in the Introduction of this study and has been chosen because of distinct intersections of change that can be identified simultaneously through shifting trends within both society and the Catholic Church.

The first of the research questions seeks to explore whether there are identifiable characteristics present among Catholic teachers in Scottish Catholic Secondary schools. The second question investigates how far changes or developments in the Church have impacted upon the notion and understanding of Catholic identity, both within the education community itself and more broadly within Church teaching and guidance. The third question which frames this literature review concerns the relationship between the personal and professional identity of the Catholic teacher within the unique arrangements for denominational schools in Scotland.

The first section of this review will hence survey indicative literature that explores the broad field of 'identity'. Since the first research question seeks to ascertain the existence and understanding of identifiable commonalities amongst Scottish Catholic Teachers, a thorough examination of seminal and current literature of this area of study is necessary. This activity will lay the necessary groundwork to allow a full and extensive interrogation of the data to be considered. The second and third research questions will be the lens through

which changes in this field of identity are viewed. Within the given timeframe, literature that relates specifically to changes in conceptualisation of personal and professional identity, as well as individual and communal identity, will be examined. Catholic teachers in Scotland are involved in a complex arrangement of personal and professional relationships and resulting responsibilities, imposed either by the Church or the state. The second part of this review, therefore, will focus on unpacking these interactions: specifically, the social, political, professional and religious environment in which denominational schools exist within Scotland and how this affects perceptions or experiences of identity for Catholic teachers. The third section of the review will concentrate on literature that extracts the religious concepts underpinning the research questions of this study - namely the theological concepts that are challenged or confirmed by theories and claims postulated within identity or teacher identity literature consulted here.

Using the same Set Theory approach outlined in the introduction and methodology, this review will be structured using the broad topic areas of Identity (with a particular focus on identity within the context of religion - namely Catholicism), Teacher Identity, and then Scottish Catholic teacher identity. Given that Set Theory builds upon the shared characteristics of each 'set', a certain amount of convergence of thought, or parallel thinking necessarily exists. It also follows that these 'sets', or topic areas, will not be mutually exclusive but instead will bleed into and inform each other. The texts referenced in these sets or areas are not exhaustive but rather indicative, providing a relevant insight into the areas above.

My objective here, however, and the objective of any literature review, is not to assess every piece of writing but rather to present a critical appraisal of selected key themes and related texts pertinent to this study. More specifically, I will evaluate significant *changes* to the conceptualisation of identity from 1965 to the present – an approach that will be replicated in the subsequent parts of this literature review. My use of Set Theory to structure this study and therefore this review of literature means that decisions made about which texts to include or omit, have been influenced by the nature of and relevance to each given set, as individual, but interrelated sections, as well as the period of this research; namely post-modernity (or, more specifically, 1965 to the present day). I have endeavoured to focus on significant developments in thought most salient to my overarching research questions and the ensuing ‘reconstruction’ of identity that has followed, specifically related to the context of Catholic teacher identity underpinning this work.

### **2.1.1 Part 1: Identity**

#### **(i) A Conceptual Understanding of Identity**

It seems appropriate to begin with an observation that succinctly situates the unique perspective of this research:

The question of ‘identity’ is being vigorously debated in social theory. In essence, the argument is that the old identities, which stabilised the world for so long, are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the individual as a unified subject (Hall, 1992, 274).

Viewed through the lens of the research questions of this study, what Hall draws our attention to here is a struggle, between social theorists certainly, but also within individuals. We have on the one hand stability of identity found through the external - structures such as the state or Church, for example, where

identity is shaped or even assumed based on a particular anthropology, where individual opinions or desires whilst expressed through personality have no bearing on the objective view of the human person. Of course, these two examples of structures (from which I would propose the 'old identities' referred to by Hall (ibid) emanate) do not necessarily share the same anthropology.

Indeed, the Catholic Church's understanding of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27) is hugely different from a Marxist interpretation, which focuses on the agency of the individual in relation to massive social forces, viewing any reference to an external creator capable of revealing an identity to human beings as extraneous (Iwand, 1961).

Nevertheless, despite their oppositional anthropology, within these structures a stability of identity is possible (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu would argue that even when individuals find themselves in situations of identity tension - as a Christian might within a Marxist dominated society - that the construction of a stable identity remains possible.

This stability does not, however, develop in a vacuum apart from the oppositional society of which the individual is a part. Rather, this identity emerges from and is shaped by the environment in which the person exists, even if at times this is oppositional to the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1990).

Contrary to Bourdieu's theory, Giddens sets out an alternative approach to identity. Whilst his work suggests agreement with Hall's assertion that identity is fragmented, he adds further depth and a different perspective to the analysis:

"In the post-traditional order, self-identity becomes a reflexive project"

(Giddens, 1991, 5). Here Giddens suggests that self-identity is a continuous and life-long process undertaken by the individual against the backdrop of rapidly

changing cultural and social structures characteristic of late modernity, sometimes referred to as self-fashioning or autopoiesis. Consequently, his view stands in opposition to the identity stability argued by Bourdieu.

The second half of Hall's quote above comments on the fragmentation and therefore loss of unified identity that results when stabilising structures are removed, and individuals reimagine their identity without the perceived constraints of an externally defined framework or reference to a specific anthropology. He states that: "Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions" (Hall, 1996, 4). Here, Hall is exploring the consequences on the concept of identity in a context of multiple and sometimes contradictory positions, namely that in late modern times it now transcends the boundaries of singularity of identity.

Of particular interest here is how a particular group of people (in this case, Catholic teachers in Scottish Secondary schools) can retain or even possess a core and unified identity in the midst not only of the vigorous debate referred to above, but of the tangible examples of this in day-to-day life.

## **(ii) Developments in Identity Theory**

The 'when' of this unravelling of structures and consequences for identity is difficult to pinpoint in exact terms. Rather, what can be observed is a landscape of sweeping changes and transitions in the post-World War II context that provides fertile ground for the reimagining of identity. This includes the internationalism that underpinned the creation of the United Nations. The

United Nations, established as a forum for diplomacy, created a sense of collective security and peace after the widespread destruction of the Second World War (United Nations General Assembly, 1948; Franck, 2006). The formulation of the Declaration of Human Rights that followed sought to articulate a set of principles that captured and protected the essential freedoms of every human person regardless of race, gender, religion etc. In other words, they sought to identify a common humanity amongst peoples. These events evidence a shift towards internationalism on a scale not seen before this period.

This period following the war also witnessed widespread decolonisation, with countries in Asia, Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean rejecting the colonial governing powers and choosing instead to exert their own cultural and political independence. This allowed for a rearticulation of national identities, expressed through culture and language that were independent of state-imposed identifiers (Putri, et al., 2017).

In addition, after occupying traditionally male roles in the workplace during the war effort, women emerged in the post-war period with experience of life and a variety of employment outwith the purely domestic role (Elementary teaching being one the exceptions to this general trend: “By 1871, women formed almost half of the workforce” (Abrams et al., 2006, 123). Although they entered the workplace because of a time of crisis, they did not leave it once this crisis had abated but rather remained and then reshaped the labour force (Striking Women, 2025). Post-war reconstruction efforts, as well as the creation of the NHS, resulted in an urgent need for an increased labour force of which women, although considered “secondary workers” were a key part (McCarthy, 2016).

The combined effects of these changes proposed what Pope Paul VI described in 1968 as a: "...new understanding of the dignity of woman and her place in society" (Paul VI, 1968, §2). This statement refers not only to a new sociological framework forged by the changing socio-economic conditions of the mid-twentieth century, but also to the Church's development of a new theological understanding of women built upon the fundamental principle contained within Catholic Social Teaching that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. The increased participation of women in areas of society where they had previously been underrepresented, facilitated by post-war conditions and changing societal norms, gave rise to Pope Paul VI's exploration and affirmation of the legitimacy and benefit of the participation of women in all areas of society. This approach would pave the way for future magisterial documents such as *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Pope John Paul II, 1988). Although changing societal and cultural attitudes towards women were happening more broadly within this timeline, and these are acknowledged and examined in Church documents such as *Humanae Vitae*, it should be noted that the Church's vision was, at all times, built upon its understanding of the complementarity of the sexes (Paul VI, 1968) set within its unique theological anthropology.

Also fundamental to this timeline is what Trueman (2020) and others (Hekma and Giami, 2014) explicitly refer to as the *sexual revolution*, and the effects of this on relationships and family life, and therefore individual and communal identity. In the Magisterial document authored by Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, referred to above, the consequences or results of these changes in attitudes and practices are further teased out always in relation to both the individual *and* society (Paul VI, 1968, cf. §10, 20 and 23), further illustrating the Catholic

Church's understanding of the intimate connection between self and community identity.

The interaction and overlap of the events described above and their subsequent influence are drawn together in the following insight from the Council Fathers:

“Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §4). This statement expresses the Church's awareness of the unprecedented transformations that characterised the mid-twentieth century.

The statement, and approach of the document as a whole situates these changes within the aftermath of two world wars and notes changes that they determine are of such import as to be described as: “...a new stage of history” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §4). In this pastoral constitution, one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, we see the Church taking stock of the changes in the modern world and the place of the Church within it, most especially in discerning the challenges and opportunities inherent to these changes as they relate to the individual Catholic as part of a global Church.

The profound and rapid change described occurred on both global and individual levels and provides the context in which the research questions of this study are necessarily situated. As Hall observes, these are “...historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively ‘settled’ character of many populations and cultures...” (1996, 4). It is within this unsettled terrain that the present study is located. In contemporary discourse, identity itself has become the focus of heightened debate and, at times, frenzy: questioned, contested, and legitimated in political, cultural, and educational arenas alike (Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 2004; Castells, 2010; Appiah, 2005; Taylor,

1994). The space of tension generated by these disturbances frames the enquiry undertaken here. Specifically, the study investigates the existence or survival of a core and unified identity of the Catholic teacher in Scotland—conceived simultaneously as an individual professional, as a participant (to varying degrees) in a faith community, and as both of these within the complex setting of a state-sponsored education system.

### **(iii) Individual and Communal Identity of Catholics**

The shifts and developments within the field of identity, and how this impacted upon conceptualisations of identity, unfolds concurrently with a similar period of change for Catholics around the world. The Second Vatican Council is often seen as the pinnacle, or at least most identifiable example, of this change (Blanchard, 2019; FCJ Sisters, 2025). Indeed, Wilde (2007) goes so far as to state that: “Culturally, the Council changed the very identity of the Church” (Wilde 2007, 15). This is a bold statement to make. From a sociological point of view, Wilde is suggesting that more than administrative, outward changes, or even the ecclesial renewal most readily associated with the Council, that the very identity of the Church is changed as a result of the Council. But what does it mean for Catholic identity, communally and individually, to make this claim? Reforms in the Church undoubtedly changed the lived experience of Catholics post-Vatican II, and the general, though qualified in comparison to other institutions, perception of the Church as: “...moving from world-estrangement to world-engagement...” (FCJ Sisters, 2025 §2) was widely accepted. The Council’s emphasis on *aggiornamento* (bringing up-to-date) and *ressourcement* (return to the sources), however, seems to be at odds with the wholesale change

of identity suggested by Wilde (Wilde, 2007) and instead implies a reorientation or new ways of expressing the unchanged beliefs of the Church.

Certainly, it is legitimate to describe the Council, as O'Malley does, as: "... the most important religious event of the twentieth century" (O'Malley 2008, 1) and his in-depth examination of the impact of it on Catholic self-understanding before and after the Council supports this statement. The Council certainly *changed things* -the liturgy, ecumenism, religious life to name but a few examples, but a change in identity would also necessitate a change in belief, one which The *Catholic Register* refutes: "Things changed with the Second Vatican Council. No one disputes that the Catholic faith remained what it has always been. The Church still teaches what the Church always taught" (*Catholic Register*, 2012, §1). Being made clear in this statement is the necessity of continuity of belief in the tradition of the Church, despite the change in external expression, not as a preference or option for the Church, but as fundamental.

Though undoubtedly complex, Blanchard (2019) succinctly summarises the polarised positions taken within the literature that explores the impact of Vatican II on individuals and the Church as a whole. He states that: "The debate over the interpretation of the council is often perceived to turn on "continuity" with past Catholic tradition and teaching or "rupture" from the past and "discontinuity" with it" (Blanchard, 2019, 3). Blanchard regards this dichotomy as a common feature in assessments of the Council, noting that there are multiple ways in which the Council may be interpreted (Komonchak, 2009, Blanchard, 2019). In other words, the evaluation of the impact of those changes that can be traced back directly to the Council documents, and those changes that have happened in the *spirit of Vatican II*, will depend, to a large extent,

upon whether the Council itself is seen as a natural progression in the life of the Church by the person or group doing the interpreting, or as a complete change of direction.

This evaluative process will not have been done at the time of Council, or even today, by each and every Catholic and might only occur amongst what Kelly (2012) describes as *Dynamic Catholics*. A key feature of this group is their orientation towards continuous learning. As well as devoting time to their spiritual lives, and active parish engagement, they pay specific attention to changes and developments in the life of the Church. This group, however, constitutes only 7% of Catholics according to Kelly (2012) which, if this statistic is to be believed, leaves huge swathes of Catholics who may not be aware of or engaged in the impact of this epochal moment (O'Malley, 2008).

The view common to the literature consulted throughout this chapter is that modern identity is in near constant flux, even in those institutions which have what could be described as a stable—though adaptable—view of the human person and their constituent identity. The changes surveyed in postmodern and post-structuralist theories of identity now appear dominant within the immense scope of identity theory literature (Hall, 1996; Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 2004; Castells, 2010; Appiah, 2005; Taylor, 1994). These scholars variously highlight the fragmentation, fluidity, and contested nature of identity in late modernity, contrasting sharply with earlier, more “settled” understandings of the self. The narrative outlined above seeks to address the maxim: “Understanding the times is a pre-condition of responding appropriately to the times” (Trueman, 2020, 30). In other words, to engage with society in a meaningful way, institutions of

all kinds must be able to analyse and understand the socio-cultural phenomena that characterise the times in which they operate.

Commenting on the evolution of the notion of the self in identity theory, Trueman (2020) states that: "...the true self in traditional cultures is therefore something that is given and learned, not something that the individual creates for himself" (Trueman, 2020, 30). This understanding of self is mimetic in nature – it assumes that the world has order and meaning not determined or imposed by human beings but rather discovered by human beings. Within this framework, it is proposed that we learn who we are from the world and through relationships with others rather than creating this for ourselves without reference to any external order or meaning. Giddens notes in contrast that in post-traditional societies where the individual no longer has the structures that shape or guide choices and actions, the individual must self-invent (Giddens, 1991).

In contrast to pre-modern times, where institutions that people belonged to, or the relationships that they engaged in, were fundamental to forming and understanding self-identity, "Modernity fosters a general shift away from traditional authority and institutional control to individual agency and control" (Stets, 2021, 298). These words not only state the reality of identity in the post-modern era, but also sub-textually highlight the implications of this new way of being for community identity. The emergence of individual agency highlighted by Stets is problematic within a Catholic moral framework because for Catholics there exist concrete and objective truths (for example, the sacred nature of human life from conception until natural death) which cannot be subject to individual choice. Catholic identity is a mixture of core credal beliefs and the

freedom to explore and develop a personal response (within this framework) to faith and practice.

Charisms within the Church are an example of this in action whereby religious orders within the Church will identify with a particular charism but will retain a core Catholic identity. Rowland explores this theme in depth through the lens of communion and extends this to all members of the Church. Building upon the work of Pope John Paul II and Balthasar, Rowland explains that charisms and gifts unique to the individual are an example of grace building upon nature. As such, when properly ordered toward community, these always emphasise unity, rather than existing as fragmented or parallel to the life of the Church (Rowland, 2024).

The same difference is also manifest within the various rites and new movements within the Catholic Church – whilst the faith may be expressed differently, they all profess the same set of core beliefs as expressed by the deposit of faith. Thus, diversity of lived expression does not exist as contraindicatory to unity, but rather confirms it, as well as recognising the vast diversity of human experience, and therefore, ways into relationship with God. This is captured well in the Church's principle *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of prayer is the law of belief), and is echoed in the Catechism: "The law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays" (CCC, 1994, §1124). In this quote we see that the Church sees prayer and belief as mutually affirming of one another and therefore one is not able to contradict the other. When read alongside Newman's essay on the development of Christian doctrine (Newman, 1845), this view reveals a pattern of understanding within the Church that emphasises continuity. This continuity is not characterised by the development

of new beliefs, but by the approach of the Council - namely the returning to the sources and the bringing up to date of the unchanged truths of the faith.

These perspectives provide a synthesis of the Church's approach to identity, an institution founded long before terms such as post-modern were coined but nevertheless has hitherto proclaimed an unchanged understanding of the identity of the human person. *Gaudium et Spes* states that: "Motivated by this faith, it [the Church] labours to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People have a part along with other men of our age" (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §11). This is interesting on two levels. Firstly, it supports the same mimetic understanding of the world, and thus of human beings; but secondly, it also asserts at the end the communal and relational nature of identity, even in relation to others outside of the immediate Church community. Crucially, it explains that meaning and purpose, and therefore identity, are deciphered as community.

Of course, the Church is not a homogenous group, but the point being made here is that the journey to understanding is not and cannot be a solely individual enterprise and should take place within the communion of the group to authentically discern meaning, purpose and identity. The social process taking place through this action can be likened to Bourdieu's explanation of *Habitus* where, he states that: "...the Habitus of the individual can be seen as 'a structural variant of all the other group or Class Habitus'" Bourdieu, 2003, 86). Parallels can be drawn between the way Bourdieu sees the individual habitus as a variation of the group's habitus, and the way that Rowland sees individual charisms as variations of the Church's shared identity - or communion. The framework of expression may differ, but both views share an emphasis on the

individual only being fully understood within the context of the common life of the group.

Responding to the tendency to minimise the concept of the human person to a crude performativity, rather than exploring the nature of the person, Taylor (1989) states that: “Selfhood and the good, or in another way, selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes” (Taylor, 1989, 3).

Taylor links any given person’s morality then, with a framework for good, a set of principles that govern or regulate behaviour(s) based on what an individual holds as important or of value to them - in other words where they find their identity. When looking at identity, and specifically Catholic identity, the relationship between the individual’s understanding of their identity and morality (as a mutually understood roadmap to Christian living) must also be explored as one of the challenges, or perhaps tensions within this study. An example of this would be the prevalent attitude towards contraception. Pre-Vatican II, the Church’s teaching on contraception would have been widely known (even beyond Catholic communities). However, Bullivant (2019) argues that for many Catholics in the present time, not living this teaching:

“...occasioned no great crisis of faith...” (Bullivant, 2019, 75). The group to which Bullivant (2019) refers then, see no contradiction between expressing a Catholic identity, whilst acting in a way that is contrary to Church teaching in a specific area. Using contraception as the example of Church teaching here, something explicitly prohibited within the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993 §2399), and *Humanae Vitae* (Pope Paul VI, 1968, § 14), the literature shows a clear example of an objective moral teaching - one that is arguably

foundational to Catholic identity -where a subjective approach is taken even by those who retain and proclaim a Catholic identity.

Confessional faiths, those that require the assent of their members to a core set of doctrines or beliefs, such as Catholicism (where revealed truths are made known to the Church by God), are reliant not only on individual acceptance of core beliefs but also on living and experiencing these beliefs as a community:

...we are the People of God, invited to live the faith, not individually or in isolation, but in community, as a people loved and wanted by God. We belong to Him, and this implies not only having been incorporated into Him through baptism but living in coherence with that gift received (Pope Francis, 2020 §4).

Here Pope Francis is making clear the group dynamics of Catholic identity. This identity is firmly situated in the individual's belonging to God and to the community of believers. Being part of this community then is not contained within a singular event, such as Baptism, but is instead a dynamic and life-long living out of an identity. This interdependence of individual and community or group identity stands in direct opposition to the post-structuralist approach to identity definition where, as Britzman (1992) explains: "...meaning is never fixed or stable. Instead, meaning becomes the site of departure, a place where reality is constructed, truth is produced, and power is effected" (Britzman, 1992, 26).

#### **(iv) Objective Truth and Identity**

Where there is order and meaning it is also reasonable to assume that there exists the opposite to this: disorder and meaninglessness. This is one of Trueman's (2020) key claims when tackling the complexities of the modern self. The negative connotations of the oppositional words above would also, I believe,

be in line with his thought. In the foreword to this book, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Templeton Address* is cited in identifying the reason for the present identity crisis: "Men have forgotten God, they have also forgotten man; that's why all this has happened" (Solzhenitsyn, cited in Trueman, 2020, 12). Repurposed for Trueman's book (2020), this quote nevertheless articulates a Christian perspective on post-structuralism that can be applied to any approach or philosophy which undermines the fundamental claim that without objective truth, there can be no Christian identity. Of course, this characterisation of post-structuralism risks an over-simplification which dismisses the variety of approaches found within this framework. For example, Derrida (1976), did not dismiss the existence of truth, but questioned the established frameworks through which it was interpreted. Again, Foucault (1980) allowed for the existence of truth as accepted discourse, but situated it as a discursively constructed reality, rather than an objective reality.

The theme of objective truth is developed further by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter *Centisimus Annus*:

If there is no transcendent truth, in obedience to which man achieves his full identity, then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations between people. Their self-interest as a class, group or nation would inevitably set them in opposition to one another. If one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others (Pope John Paul II, 1991, § 44).

Pope John Paul II is here making the same connection observed within *Gaudium et Spes*, namely that the identity of the Christian is inextricably linked to the individual's recognition of objective truth in the person of Jesus Christ, and their relationship to the group or the community that necessarily follows as a result of

accepting this truth. Within this point he is setting individualism and self-interest as not just another option, but as oppositional and with negative and potentially catastrophic consequences for the individual and the whole of humanity.

Hall, without specifically referring to religious organisations, certainly corroborates the causal connection between the disunity of the individual and the loss of stabilising social structures:

This so-called ‘crisis of identity’ is seen as part of a wider process of change, which is dislocating the central structures and processes of modern societies and undermining the frameworks, which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world (Hall, 1992, 274).

This echoes what Eagleton describes as a *crisis of nationhood* (Eagleton, 1992).

Hall’s use of the words “stable anchorage” underpins the notion that this situation is detrimental to individuals as they seek to understand their own identity and how it fits or interacts with the world around them. In the same article, he speaks of various factors that have eroded a perceptible sense of national identity, and therefore any sense of shared identity. The undermining of frameworks of which Hall speaks in the quote above, leads to what Eagleton (1992) suggests is a synthetic creation of a shared identity, hostage to current desires or trends, with a deliberately selective approach to cultural history.

#### **(v) Post-modern Identity Theory**

What then is the current post-modern understanding of identity? With such breadth of information available, consensus would be difficult, but Akkerman and Meijer (2011) explore what they state as “The three characterisations [that] stress that identity is not a fixed and stable identity but rather shifts with time and context” (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, 308). These three terms will serve as

narrative, or summary of post-modern identity. Together, they chart the shift in the tendency of accepted norms of identity as being something imposed, to something which can be completely self-determined.

*The multiplicity of identity* (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, 308) refers to the decentralised understanding of identity. Gergen (1991) is cited by Akkerman and Meijer as stating that: "...in this view, self is no longer seen as having a centre or one core, but as varied and dynamic (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, 309). The variation and dynamism here referred to encompasses the abundance and diversity of different groups, contexts or communities to which any given individual may belong. This description certainly recognises the wide array of social opportunities available but also opens up a space of tension. In this space, multiplicity runs the risk of resulting in a similar critical level of fragmentation at the cost of an intelligible unity, or identifiable characteristics of the individual.

The key defining feature of *the discontinuity of identity* (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, 308) is described as "...fluid and shifting from moment to moment and context to context". Of the three characterisations, I found this one to be the most commonly recognisable. The literature reviewed suggests that people are comfortable occupying different social spaces and adopting different identifying characteristics to do so. I would also propose that the pervasive nature of social media has allowed the growth of these characteristics (Gündüz, 2017; Pan, Z. et al., 2017). Of the many contexts noted in the first characteristic defined above, it is still possible that a set of core principles, features, or identifiers may yet exist. Within this characterisation, however, identity is not static but constantly evolving. The reasons stated for this conclusion include the dynamic process of

experiences, changing level of maturity, social interactions and the variety of different relationships that a person enters into over the course of their life. Therefore, it seems possible only to recognise a series of fluid, possibly contradictory, core principles in the identity of the individual. This may perhaps be the most threatening to the existence of structures, specifically those which are confessional in nature, which seek to articulate and protect a set of objective truths.

The final of these three characterisations is *The social nature of identity* (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). In this characterisation we see identity being influenced, and perhaps formed by, social interactions. In terms of conceptualising identity, this characterisation is more abstract. Akkerman and Meijer ask (2011) ask: “Is the social to be considered a contextual variable that has an impact on how a person acts? If so, how does it come to affect identity formation?” (Akkerman and Meijer, 2001, 311). This explores the extent to which the individual understands themselves and how this correlates to others’ understanding of them. This characterisation also allows for exploration of the relationship between the individual and community, including:

...the strength of how communities are responsible for the parameters that our identities take and how much weight communities have on our self-images; such that forming identities is impossible without communities directing and determining the types of identities formed (Barnes, 2015, 2).

Barnes argues that communities play a fundamental role in shaping the identity of the individual, with the result that identity formation is never solely an individual endeavour. The communities to which each person belongs create the frameworks of reference within which identity is formed and interpreted. While this position resonates with the analyses of the relationship between individual

and community explored by both Bourdieu and Rowland, it also invites reflection on the more antagonistic dynamics of identity evident in contemporary politics. The culture wars of today often involve competing groups who construct identity in opposition to one another, demonstrating that the communal dimension of identity can serve not only as a source of belonging and meaning but also as a catalyst for division and conflict.

#### **(vi) The Fragmentation of Catholic Identity**

Without the anchors which dominated the modern era, it seems logical to expect fragmentation of commitment, belief and, therefore, identity. This interpretation is not, however, accepted by all parties in the literature consulted. It is not the case for instance that, specifically in relation to Catholic identity, a universal Catholic identity could be isolated in pre-modern times, not least because of the dynamic relationship between religious and national identity which was present--perhaps most obviously in places where the Catholic population was in the minority. McDonagh (2019), for example, problematises the existence to some extent, and certainly the elevation, of *any* period where there existed a singular understanding of Catholic identity. Commenting on what he sees as the deficiencies of research into Catholic identity, he states that: "In short, the prevailing discourse tends to speak of Catholic identity in reductive, singular terms that assume its meaning and overlook its complexity" (McDonagh, 2019, 169). Grace (2020) concurs with this position. Both McDonagh and Grace both express concern regarding the association of Catholic identity with singularities and see this approach as stifling to the faith development of Catholics.

Instead of working to reinstate that which is unobtainable, McDonagh (2019) instead suggests a recognition and nourishment of the multiplicity of Catholic identities (plural) that exist and can be identified. The reasoning behind this approach is valid, and essentially positive and inclusive. Rather than exclude people from being able to identify as Catholic based on their non-conformity to certain norms or behaviours, he embraces the fragmentation that occurs as a result of individual interpretations of Catholic identity. This appears to be in contradiction with Barnes' (2015) assertions that it is the community that shapes the individual, rather than McDonagh's (2019) claim that it is the individual who shapes the community.

The obvious question to ask here however is, how far can this fragmentation progress before there are few to no unifying factors which could be stated as constituting a recognisable and articulable Catholic identity? Or is McDonagh simply being pragmatic in his recognition of: "...the multiple social worlds that people engage in" (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, 309) and the subsequent impact on their formation of an identity? Whilst there is no doubt, given the sheer numbers of Catholics and geographical spread of the extended Church, that there will be a wide variety of lived experiences of Catholicism and therefore of identifying factors, this highlights the difficulties of belonging, identifying and communally relating to one another as members of the same faith, without a core set of identifiers. As Taylor (1989) states: "Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not" (Taylor, 1989, 30). Within this statement there is the acknowledgment that there must be some things that are part of any given identity and some which are not. I would observe that this

challenges the suggestion of an endless multiplicity of identities and more specifically a multiplicity of Catholic identities.

## **2.1.2 Part II: Teacher Identity**

### **(i) Teacher Identity in Post-modernity**

The first part, or ‘set’ of this literature review broadly explored the landscape of identity within the period 1965 to the present. This second ‘set’ will build upon these observations and focus on teacher identity (in the UK) within the same period and attempt to illustrate a number of changes and developments in the broad field of education that have impacted upon the conceptualisation of teacher identity.

Developments are not, of course, strictly limited to this period since significant changes also have a gestation period. It is worth noting the change in teacher training courses as an example. In the years immediately preceding 1965, such courses were extended from two years to three years, a nod to the increasing professionalisation of the teaching workforce and the value placed upon ITE courses offered by Higher Education establishments. In the year our chosen time focus begins, 1965, the General Teaching Council for Scotland is created as: “...one of the first teaching councils in the world” (The General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2022 §1). The key aim of the General Teaching Council at the time of its establishment was to address the qualification deficit of those teaching in Scottish schools, and therefore by implication addressing standards, in the post-war era:

It shall be the duty of the Council to keep under review the standards of education, training and fitness to teach appropriate to persons entering the teaching profession and to make to the Secretary of State from time

to time such recommendations with respect to those standards as they think fit (Teaching Council (Scotland) Act 1965, Section 2).

Though the objectives of the Council have been amended since 1965, it remains a legal requirement for teachers in Scotland to be registered with this professional body. As part of the simplification of public bodies undertaken by the Scottish Government (Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010), the GTCS became: "...the world's first independent professional and regulatory body for teaching" (GTCS, 2022, About Us, §2), thereby allowing it to separate, or at least insulate, itself from externally imposed duties and responsibilities. At the same time, it is important to remember that the GTCS holds a dual role: not only does it regulate the profession, but it also advocates on behalf of teachers by promoting professional standards and defending the status of teaching as a profession. More recently, in 2014, the GTCS implemented the requirement for all registered teachers in Scotland to complete a five-yearly Professional Update, a process which aims to improve quality and to maintain, develop, and record the professional lives of teachers in Scotland (GTCS, 2018, Professional Update). The effectiveness of this initiative is debated within the literature, with some warning of additional bureaucracy (Humes, 2014, 56) and others observing that the Professional Update is positioned to systematically address teacher competency (Adams and Mann, 2020, 595).

The 1960s also witnessed the beginning of the protracted back-and-forth debate (and subsequent reforms) around the removal of the 11 plus (a form of standardised testing, the results of which determined the type of secondary school that any given primary aged child might attend) to make way for the comprehensivisation of secondary education. Of significance within the Scottish

educational landscape, is the Scottish Education Department's *Primary Education in Scotland* (SED, 1965). This document, commonly referred to as *The Primary Memorandum* brought the needs and experiences of learners into sharp focus, giving birth to "child-centred education" (Darling, 1990, 8) and shaping ensuing pedagogy.

By the early 1970s, comprehensivisation was largely complete in Scottish secondary schools, with conversations about standardisation and the introduction of a basic curriculum beginning to emerge in the mid-1970s (Callaghan, 1976). Though Callaghan's speech was directed at schools in England and Wales, it is indirectly relevant to the Scottish educational context of the time since it captures some of the key issues dominating socio-political debates. Chief among these was a growing UK-wide concern over educational standards, which in Scotland was sharpened by recognition that a large proportion of pupils were leaving school with few or no qualifications. This concern was addressed the following year in the Munn and Dunning Reports (Munn, 1977; Dunning, 1977). Both reports emphasised the need for a shared and standardised curriculum that could serve all pupils, alongside continuity and progression across the years of secondary schooling. Together, these proposals provided the curricular and assessment framework that would lead directly to the development of the 5-14 curriculum.

The introduction of Standard Grade examinations found its roots in the Munn and Dunning reports of 1977. Munn (1976) recommended a broad curriculum that avoided early specialisation which allowed equality of access to both academic and practical subjects for students and ensured a common core within the curriculum. Parallel to this, Dunning recommended a single Standard Grade

framework within which pupils would be assessed utilising both internal and external assessment mechanisms. From 1984 onwards, Munn's curriculum model and Dunning's assessment framework were implemented across Scottish schools.

The arrival of the 5-14 curriculum in 1991 heralded the introduction of National Tests to aid assessment of achievement and in addition there was the ongoing expansion of vocational education - a development not universally accepted. Priestly and Minty (2013), for example, highlight the tension that exists when educational reforms clash with the established practices and cultures within the teaching profession. In addition, the rollout of vocational qualifications in Scotland in the early 90's, viewed by some as a dual assessment system, caused controversy in some quarters (Howieson, 1993).

By 1999 education is devolved exclusively to the Scottish Parliament, giving the Scottish Government a greater level of ownership and executive authority over educational policy and reform. The implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* in 2010 continued the focus on learners that had begun in *The Primary Memorandum* and added to this the development of four capacities in every young person, taking the values inscribed on the Scottish Parliament's Mace as their focus. The assumption of shared values within this context, also being significant to this study.

This brief summation illustrates the dynamic nature of education and change that necessarily flows from this. What is evident from the events and documentation consulted above is that the focus of developments is squarely on the professionalisation of the teaching profession and the subsequent consequences for young people, rather than on the person, or identity, of the

teacher. While the GTCS Standards (for Registration and for Career-Long Professional Learning) do include reference to “values” such as social justice, trust, and respect, these are framed as professional commitments and expectations of practice rather than as identity-imposing requirements on the individual teacher. In this way, the Standards shape a professional ethos without prescribing who the teacher is or must be beyond their professional role. What can also be observed emerging from the subtext of this broad summary is a greater awareness of parental voice within education and the importance of communicating with parents, an evolution that can be argued exists as a precursor to the process of individualisation discussed in the first section of this literature review.

What will be key to unpack within the context of this research, are the key features and subsequent implications (or intimations) within the changes noted above, and in other relevant literature, for teacher identity. These include the evolution of the professionalisation of the teaching workforce and, relatedly, issues of performativity, the commodification of knowledge and, for the specific purposes of this research, how the identity of the teacher is affected and shaped by these major changes.

## **(ii) Educational Reform and the Person of the Teacher**

Education, and therefore educational reform is not value free (Sutrop, 2015, 192), but necessarily exposes a particular view or philosophy of education. The somewhat bumpy journey towards comprehensive education in the 1960’s, with its various enactments and repeals (depending on which political party was enjoying power at the time), is a stark example of this. Whatever the reform in question, there is a consequential impact upon the teacher, most certainly in

terms of role but perhaps also in terms of professional identity. However, the understanding or interpretation of the relationship between role and identity in teachers is not an area of consensus and exists amidst a plethora of debate around teacher agency, consent and autonomy, all of which are nested in context-dependent theories of identities where: "...meaning is never fixed or stable" (Britzman, 1992, 25). Of course, every profession has roles and duties associated with it, and teaching is no different. The key question here, however, is whether and to what extent educational reform and the subsequent changes this brings to the role of the teacher, eclipse any sense of a *stable* professional identity and instead replaces this only with role and functionality.

Dealing specifically with ownership and agency in maintaining and sustaining professional identity, Forde *et al* (2006), state that: "This dislocation of identity can result in a distancing between those who generate policy and those who implement it" (Forde et al, 2006, 4). This statement recognises and challenges the reality that educational reform is politically motivated by stating the consequences of this for teacher identity. At the same time, it is reasonable to link the absence of a robust professional identity causally with the limited involvement that the teaching profession has in education reform. Without a sense of ownership, or at least the opportunity to contribute meaningfully and systematically to the discussion of policies, it is no stretch to imagine the disaffiliated teacher whose understanding of their professional identity is little more than the performance of an expected set of behaviours. This same point is consistent with the findings of comparable research on the impact of public service reform in the Netherlands. Here, Hendrikx (2019) states that: "...this study points to managerialism as creating a gap between self-image and role"

(Hendriks, 2019, 608). Self-image in this context is understood alongside role as two co-existing elements that make up the professional identity of the teacher. Though the context spoken of by Hendriks (2019) is not exactly replicated within Scotland, there are nevertheless useful parallels to be observed within the framework of managerialism, namely that the majority of decisions about education and educational reform, are taken outwith the purview of the professional life and identity of the teacher. Though the New Public Governance paradigm in Scotland sought to address the lack of subsidiarity within the approach of New Public Management (Policy Scotland, 2019, §3) the literature suggests that both styles have assimilated aspects of the other (Klijn, 2014, 211).

Britzman brings this line of thought to a head when she states that: "...in actuality, role and function are not synonymous with identity" (Britzman, 1992, 24). In other words, the *doing* of the job of a teacher is not the same thing as the *being* a teacher. Similarly, Forde et al (2006) distinguish the functions of a teacher as actions largely determined by government policies or local authority frameworks. In contrast, however, they describe: "...professional identity [as being] constructed by the individual who carries out the role, and is based on that person's values, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and understanding" (Forde et al, 2006, 6). These quotes not only highlight the complexity of understanding professional identity, but they also draw our attention to the teacher's reality - performing externally imposed roles whilst trying to maintain a professional identity that retains meaning for the individual and for the profession as a whole.

### **(iii) Educational Reform and Performativity**

Writing about performativity within the context of educational reform, Ball (2003) describes the situation as an: “epidemic of reform” (Ball, 2003, 215). The image conjured by the very deliberate use of the word epidemic is not of necessary change and evolution to the educational system as befits the dynamic enterprise described above. Rather, this word provokes thoughts of a disease that spreads, indiscriminate of victim and context. The result is a system of education where, “Change appears to be the only thing that remains constant in the fluid context of contemporary education” (Lefkios, 2013, 140). Why does Ball use such evocative language? And is his choice of language justified? The full sentence reads: “The novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are” (Ball, 2003, 215). Read in its proper context then, Ball’s use of language is justified by what he describes as the consequences (unintended or otherwise) of reform. Not only, he argues, does it change what teachers do, but it also changes their very identity as a result.

Authors such as Ball (2013) and Themelis et al (2021) would claim that performativity exists as a symptom of a much broader transformation of education systems as they continue to be shaped or determined by either the social and economic ideals of capitalism, or the political and economic principles of neoliberalism. The result of this combined and non-exclusive influence on education is that the role of teachers, their way of being, as the GTCS would describe it, has been significantly altered. This alteration has not occurred because of developments in pedagogy or as a result of the continued

professionalisation of educationalists, but rather because of the demand of the market and the politicisation of education:

Educational systems, and the societies in which these systems are nested, are in a constant struggle to meet predefined indicators of quality. This restless endeavour allows no time for reflection on the political issues underlying the quest for modernization (Lefkios, 2013, 141).

Lefkios is highlighting here not only a feeling of perpetual motion of the structures that dictate educational reform, but he is also implying that this busyness results in a lack of time and therefore space to scrutinise the drivers behind these constant changes. In the busy lives of teachers, the metanarrative directing educational reform is easily overtaken by the constant performance of roles demanded of teachers, the victim of this being any sense of stable professional identity.

Of course, teachers should desire achievement and success for their students, and in certain instances, these achievements and successes may also translate into situations of economic gain and prosperity for individual students. However, one of the consequences of this for teachers is that their role, and therefore professional identity, can become reduced to little more than a service provider, with their roles and duties determined by the market, rather than by a commitment to any of several philosophies of education. One of the main challenges, however, is that “The apparatuses of neoliberalism are seductive, enthralling and overbearingly necessary. It is a ‘new’ moral system that subverts and re-orientes us to its truths and ends” (Ball and Olmeda, 2013, 88). The question here is not whether it is good or right or necessary that school students become materially successful, but that we ought to be more concerned with the

insidious and corruptive effect that this approach to education has on the person of the teacher and their ability to develop and sustain a professional identity.

In an earlier work, Ball (2003) argues that:

In more general terms, the new technologies of reform play an important part in aligning public sector organizations with the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector. The distinctiveness of the public sector is diminished. Indeed, such alignments create the pre-conditions for various forms of 'privatization' and 'commodification' of core public services (Ball, 2003, 216).

Ball (2003) observes here not only the reforms in education, but also something fundamental to understanding why this has come about: namely that a neoliberal ideology has led to the distinction between public and private sectors becoming less perceptible as the private sector rapidly consumes the public sector. Within this movement, we see a relationship based less on mutual assistance where parties learn cooperatively and evolve to include each other's best attributes, and instead a process whereby the private sector eliminates the public sector and refashions it in its own image.

When the function of education is understood as primarily serving economic needs, and focuses solely on measurable outputs (Ball, 2003; Robertson & Verger, 2012), the nature of education can become a technocratic endeavour. From this perspective, school inspections, examination results and league tables – as results based and competitive activities – *can* mirror the way that markets operate whereby success is only recognised or possible through measurable output (Lingard et al., 2013). These public markers of success not only impact individual teachers, but whole school communities. They create an environment characterised by competitiveness which results in the service provided by the

school being predominantly shaped by the means necessary to achieve external success.

This approach stands in stark contrast to a humane conception of education since it obscures, either intentionally or causally, focus on the broader aims associated with the formation of the whole person (Second Vatican Council, 1965). Pope Francis is clear in his warning against the narrow focus that accompanies the technocratic paradigm (Pope Francis, 2015) and warns that a technocratic approach in any realm of human experience carries risks. These risks, he tells us, lie primarily in the realm of anthropology since they have the power to undermine the dignity and worth of the human person by treating them as *something* rather than *someone* (Francis, 2015). Educational reform and the structures that shape this, communicate an understanding of the human person. Though harder to quantify, a humane approach to education seeks to create an environment in which human beings can flourish in all aspects, not solely economically.

Education reform therefore is not unbiased. The effect of this realisation on teachers is that education no longer occupies the middle ground between epistemology and ontology but is at risk of being reduced to a merely transactional activity where knowledge is commodified, and learning is limited to skills for the labour market.

#### **(iv) The Personal and Professional Identity of the Teacher**

If, as argued by Forde et al (2006), *professional* identity includes values and beliefs, how far is the professional identity of a teacher shaped by the *personal* identity of the teacher? And, relatedly, how far should it be?

Thomas and Beachamp (2011), whilst investigating new teachers' identities, offer the following observation:

For a teacher, the self encompasses not only notions of “who am I?”, but also of “who am I as a teacher?” This tight connection, perhaps even an inseparable one, confirms that there are intricate and complex dimensions to identity development, making it difficult to articulate and explore (Thomas and Beauchamp, 2011, 763).

Articulated here is an inextricability of self-identity from the professional identity of the teacher. In other words, the kind of person that I am, who I am at my core, is also who I am as a teacher. This interpretation also has implications for the role of the teacher, since the link between personal and professional identity implies, at the very least, a set of values, or guiding principles. The “tight connection” referred to in the passage above echoes the earlier comments of Forde et al (2006) and makes clear a necessary connection between the personal and professional. It also raises significant questions regarding instances when the personal values and beliefs of any given teacher may be at odds with the body responsible for education. If this holistic understanding of identity is to be accepted, then Taylor's following definition would be true for both personal and professional identity: “...an identity is something one ought to be true to, can fail to uphold, can surrender when one ought to” (Taylor, 1989, 30). Taylor's description speaks to the human condition. He describes an identity that exists as a striving between what we know to be right, our propensity to act against this, and our ability to navigate a path through. Consequently, it would be difficult to reduce Taylor's description merely to the systematic performance of a role. To do this would be strip the very dynamic back and forth of a person's identity from them and replace it with something far less creative.

Similarly to Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) above, something much deeper is implied about the whole person of the teacher. Considering professional identity as one aspect of a unified concept raises the importance of maintaining and supporting such an identity. However, as was discovered in the first section of this literature review, singularity in understanding a shared professional identity, without losing sight of the individualistic aspect of this, is difficult to achieve, making Hendrikx's definition of professional identity: "...as the relatively stable ways in which professionals see themselves in terms of who they think they should be - i.e. self-image - and what they do - i.e. role" (Hendrikx, 2020, 609) seem somewhat elusive.

To counter this, some authors aim to define teacher identity in its negation in order to highlight specific issues or, at the very least, narrow down the fundamental characteristics of professional identity. This is demonstrated by Ball and Olmedo (2013) in reference to power struggles experienced by teaching professionals:

That is, when the teacher begins to look for answers to questions about the how(s) of power inside and around him or her, the how(s) of his or her beliefs and practices. In these moments, the power relations in which the teacher is imbricated come to the fore. It is then that he or she can begin to take an active role in their own self-definition as a 'teaching subject', to think in terms of what they do not want to be, and do not want to become, or, in another words, begin to care for themselves (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, 86).

The co-existence, and sometimes tension, of the personal and professional identities is explained in this quote in terms of relationships of power. Rather than an internal negotiation, Ball and Olmeda (2013) instead draw our attention to the tensions that exist between the external (government or local authority) and the internal (professional identity) of the teacher, calling on the individual

to take back control of the power to self-define. This action is not merely an elucidation of a role, but a reflective, and possibly resistant action that seeks to understand and live out a deep reality of what it means to be a teacher.

In the Scottish context, the GTCS's recently reviewed Professional Standards also include within them reference to the values of the teacher as able to affect the experience of education: "The educational experiences of all learners are shaped by the values and dispositions of those who work to educate them" (GTCS, 2021) and, within the same section, teacher professionalism is spoken of as a: "...way of being..." (GTCS, 2021). This webpage goes on to explain that these values have been placed at the core of the Professional Standards. In other words, these values are the way markers by which a teacher will not only shape their professional engagement but by which they will also be assessed (by way of Professional Update) in their professional life. Certainly, a professional body such as the GTCS should be able to communicate a set of standards for the profession in ways that determine behaviours and practices that would either sustain or bring the profession into disrepute. Moreover, it could be argued that this is, to some extent, inevitable: the very existence of compulsory education within a liberal democracy presupposes a broad assent to "riverbed" values such as human dignity, equality, and fairness. Yet, values can be interpreted in a variety of ways and differ from person to person, especially in the current age of individualism. At a basic level, "Values refer to abstract beliefs which serve as guidelines in peoples' life and affect the way people and events are evaluated" (Kesberg and Keller, 2018, 1). The language used here to describe values also alludes to an underpinning morality that guides the actions of the individual - with no distinction made between professional or personal values: "...values

transcend specific actions.” (ibid., 1). Thus, while the articulation of shared values is both admirable and arguably necessary, it remains important to recognise that consensus around how such values are interpreted or enacted may be fragile, and rests more securely when anchored in legislative frameworks such as the Equality Act (2010).

A common theme throughout the literature, and in particular the work of Hobbs (2012) and Beijaard & Meijer (2017), is the lack of attention given to the development of a coherent understanding of teacher identity, and subsequently of opportunities via ITE institutions to communicate this as an integral part of learning in the journey to becoming a teacher. Perhaps this is a result of different experiences, at least geographically, of the professional lives of teachers. Or perhaps, as in the first section of this literature review, this is because singularity of (teacher) identity is not possible or even desirable. It could also be a result of economic and political influences in the sphere of education, or a combination of all of the above. As such, and as is common in research into identity, consensus remains elusive.

### **2.1.3 Part 3: Catholic Teacher Identity**

What is apparent from the literature consulted in the first two parts of this review is that Identity as a concept, and teacher identity as a related sub-set, are both highly complex areas of study open to a multitude of approaches and perspectives. As with the first two sets, it is appropriate here to illustrate, in a similar way, the landscape of our chosen time period (1965 onwards), specifically related to identity, and so too Catholic teacher identity within this tradition. Of course, the landscape of the first two sets remains applicable to the specific group addressed within this section, since Catholics live in the world

and are subject to the changes happening more broadly, to a greater or lesser extent. Also helpful to this study, however, is how and whether these broader changes have affected the Church in such a way that Catholic identity is perceptibly changed in some way. Articulating the situation of human persons who live and are affected by the changes in the modern world, The Second Vatican Council states: “Hence we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well” (Second Vatican Council, 1965. §4). Within this statement the Council fathers are recognising that secular changes do not only impact the secular realm but rather shape and effect the identity of these same people who live, and are educated and work in society, exist and relate in the religious realm also. For this reason, conversation between the Church and the world is not only desirable, but also necessary.

Throughout history, there are many examples of the Church articulating its message in a way that, although not deviating from the central truths of Catholicism (as expressed in the Catechism, or credal statements, for example), does take account of the culture, politics, traditions and even geography of a particular situation in order to make the Catholic faith more coherent. In other words, the Church constantly engages in dialogue with the world. Cardinal Pell (in Franchi, 2007) describes the Church as: “...a responsive Church willing to engage with the challenges of particular eras” (preface, 7). In this statement, Cardinal Pell is describing a Church that should listen to the needs of the time, without surrendering its key mission and anthropology in the response. The emphasis, therefore, is on rearticulation, rather than reinterpretation. He goes on to name a number of challenges to the Church's anthropology in the form of

Communism, Fascism and Nazism and how the Church has retained its distinct identity whilst responding to previously unencountered challenges.

Pope Pius XI's earlier teaching *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929) is echoed in Cardinal Pell's call to vigilance above. In this document, Pope Pius XI tells us that: "...education consists essentially in preparing man for what he must be and for what he must do here below, in order to attain the sublime end for which he was created" (*Divini Illius Magistri*, 1929, §6). This holistic view of education fits firmly within the humane conception of education. It also adds further depth to the concept by emphasising not only the worldly end of education, but also the implications this has on eternity. What emerges from both Cardinal Pell's words regarding engagement and faithfulness, and Pope Pius XI's ordering of education is a clear orientation of the Church, and its educational mission, to be at the service of human flourishing. In this way it provides a strong counter-narrative critique of the technocratic conception of education outlined above.

Responses in the Church to such challenges in the past, and continued responses to challenges in the present, were and are specific to the political or social changes occurring in different parts of the world - Liberation Theology in Latin America, or Political Theology in post-war Germany, being just two examples. Although change in the Church is a constant reality and not something limited to the preparation for, or in the wake of, an Ecumenical Council, Vatican II remains the most significant Church event of the chosen era of this research, and therefore a necessary starting point. In light of this, the third section will specifically attempt to steer a route through Catholic thought and wisdom on Identity, and by implication, Catholic Teacher Identity, by selecting and analysing comparable themes from the first two sets.

### (i) Identity in Catholicism

Identity within Catholicism cannot be explained without reference to Catholic anthropology. The belief that human persons are made in the image and likeness of God and that they are a unity of body and spirit (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §364), pervades Church teaching about the condition of humanity, and by extension, the very identity of every person. The consequence of this understanding is that the identity of any one individual, or all of humankind, cannot be comprehended without reference to God. This concept is rooted in the belief that human beings are made in God's image, otherwise referred to throughout Catholic thought as *Imago Dei*. St Thomas Aquinas explains that human persons are most like God in their intellectual capacity to know, love and understand God (Aquinas, ST I. Q93. A4). It is, according to St Thomas Aquinas, in the extent to which we are able to reflect or embody the essential nature, or framed within the language of this research, the *identity of God*, that we are most like him. Human persons do not become God, but only share, imperfectly, in His nature. Consequently, the core identity of Human persons is intrinsically reliant upon God's identity, since in this understanding, humanity merely reflects the perfection of God.

The view outlined above is incompatible with the widely held individualistic approach explored earlier in this review. The fragmentation of the individual described by Hall (Hall, 1992, 274), resulting from the disentanglement of the self from external structures (of which the Church would certainly be one example), stands in stark contrast to the relational anthropology of Catholicism. Catholic thought has consistently emphasised the person as constituted through relationships, whether with God, with others, or within community (Wojtyła,

1979; Pope John Paul II, 1991; Ratzinger, 2004; Pope Benedict XVI, 2009). More recent Catholic scholars have further developed these themes in dialogue with postmodern and pluralist contexts. Boeve (2003; 2016), for example, highlights how Catholic identity can be rearticulated in late modern culture while retaining its relational core, while Rowland (2003) critiques the pressures of individualism and calls for a renewed Thomist grounding of personhood. Murray (2008) and Faggioli (2012) likewise argue that Catholic self-understanding in modernity requires both continuity with tradition and openness to contemporary cultural dynamics. Within late modernity, and the rapid social change that characterises this period, the individual is pulled in many directions without necessarily having any structural anchorage by which to navigate or interpret how these changes impact upon their identity. The inherent consequence of this fragmented self is that the Church—previously established as a stabilising force—can, within this framework, be reduced to one option among many rather than the source and sustenance of a unified identity (Taylor, 2007; O’Collins and Farrugia, 2013).

Maritain’s *True Humanism* (1939), builds upon Pope Pius XI’s earlier teaching set out in *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929) and offers an antidote to the notion of a fragmented individual. Within his explanation of integral humanism (1939), Maritain posits that the human person is only fully and completely understood in light of the incarnation and their eternal destiny:

...it is only through the mystery of the redeeming Incarnation that a Christian sees the proper dignity of human personality, and what it costs. The idea which he has of it stretches out indefinitely, and only attains the absolute fullness of its significance in Christ (Maritain, 1939, pg 200).

Maritain’s claim is absolute and therefore opposed to the one option among many theory. Christianity is not, in his view, a lens which one chooses, but

rather the only logical framework that fully explains the dignity of the human person. Accepting this interpretation, he goes on to say, comes with a cost, a cost which is expressed in the treatment of the human person in all contexts of existence.

### *Imago Dei*

Since Vatican II, *Imago Dei* has been the paradigm of choice (International Theological Commission, 2004, §3) through which the "...mysteries of the Christian faith" (Ibid, §4) are understood and communicated to the world. Not only then is *Imago Dei* how each person is called to understand themselves, and therefore their identity, it also has a further, interconnected dimension. This proposal states that, by recognising and living the relational reality of existence, human persons can express the very essence of the Christian faith to the rest of the created order. The presentation of humanity throughout the scriptures, or the *biblical anthropology of relationality* (Pope John Paul II, 1999, §2), further underpins the proposal that the core identity of a human being can be found only in the reality of our relationality to God, to other human persons and, by extension, to the environment as the created order. Through these relational experiences, Pope John Paul II goes on to say: "...we find a vestige of God's own mystery revealed in Christ" (Ibid, §2). Just as the Trinity is the archetype of relationality then, between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so too, it is suggested, that human persons share in this intrinsically interconnected nature.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further expresses this belief as follows:

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. and he is called by grace to a

covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §357).

There is an immediate statement made within this extract that sets human beings apart from the rest of the created order, by explaining further what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. Unlike the rest of creation, the Church teaches that human beings possess freedom to enter into relationship with God, and with others, responding to, re-enacting, and thus reflecting that same freedom expressed through Christ's sacrifice for the whole of humanity. This, the Catechism states, is the meaning of *Imago Dei* and the core of the Catholic Christian's identity. Conversely, of course, this same freedom can also be exercised when deciding not to accept this distinct anthropology.

This view is widely challenged in both society and education. *Philosophical naturalism*, in its attempt to align philosophy more closely with science, would reject any claim of ontological difference between human beings and other species (Singer, 1993). Challenges can also be found within *transhumanism* (Huxley, 1957), and the evolved branch of this line of thought captured within *technological transhumanism*. By challenging any implicit meaning of the human person, this framework freely pursues changes and enhancements of human beings to better exploit their technological capability (Bostrom, 2005).

Relevant to this study is whether and to what extent a Catholic teacher refers to or implies an understanding of *Imago Dei*, aspects of Catholic anthropology, or the rationality of existence when asked to describe their own identity. Catholic theological sources, such as *Gaudium et Spes* (§12, §24) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§355-384), place relationality and the *Imago Dei* at the heart of human identity. Contemporary scholars have explored how these

themes might be articulated in today's cultural and educational settings (Rowland, 2003; Grace, 2002; Boeve, 2016). Such literature suggests that Catholic teachers, explicitly or implicitly, may ground their sense of professional and personal identity in this theological anthropology. Though it is to be expected that the experience of living a Catholic identity will vary from person to person, and individual Catholics will articulate an understanding of this identity in different ways, it will nevertheless be fundamental to this research to explore how this concept is lived and understood by Catholic teachers in Scotland.

Challenges to the Church's image of the human person, or indeed, any fixed or objective view of the human person do not emanate from a singular origin but instead from a variety of schools of thought. The literature consulted suggests that one of the greatest challenges to the Church's understanding of identity, in the terms referred to above, comes today from gender theory. Pope Francis states that within this landscape of oppositional ideologies that: "...human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time" (Pope Francis, 2016, §56). In this same document, he goes on to reason that the origin of gender theories separates the body from the human will (§20), therefore fundamentally challenging the necessarily relational nature of Catholic anthropology.

#### **(ii) Universal and Specific Mission**

Central to the Church's articulation of the lay teacher's role is the language of vocation. However, this term requires clarification. For the purposes of this study, vocation is understood not merely as an occupation or professional role, but as a sustained sense of calling that integrates personal faith and professional

practice. Within the Catholic tradition, vocation is rooted in the conviction that the human person is created with purpose and oriented toward participation in the life and mission of God (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964). It therefore implies more than individual preference or subjective fulfilment; it denotes a response to a perceived summons that is relational – emerging through encounter with God, others, and the created world – ecclesial by the communal nature of its expression, and directed toward service of the common good.

In the specific context of Catholic education, to describe teaching as a vocation suggests conscious participation in the Church’s formative and evangelising mission (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). This understanding enables vocation to function analytically within this study as a marker of integration between personal belief and professional responsibility, rather than as a purely emotive attachment to work.

To investigate adequately the identity of the teacher in Catholic thought, it is necessary to understand how the Church understands education in relation to its broader mission. The mission of the Church, although lived out in many different ways, is singular. Mandated by Jesus Christ, we read in *Ad Gentes* that the Church obediently: “...strives ever to proclaim the Gospel to all men” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §1). Understood in more common terminology, the literature states that it is Church’s, and therefore each Catholic’s mission, to make Jesus Christ known to all people. The essential identity of a Catholic Christian then, as evidenced in this literature, is missionary in nature. Whilst missionaries in the Catholic Church often invoke images of those proclaiming and living the Gospel in faraway places, separated from family and friends and from

material comforts, Pope Francis states instead that: “I am a mission, always; you are a mission, always; every baptized man and woman is a mission” (Pope Francis 2019, §4). Pope Francis also speaks of mission and evangelisation in relationship: “Evangelization takes place in obedience to the missionary mandate of Jesus...” (Pope Francis, 2013, §19). Evangelisation then, is the action that results from being a missionary. This relationship is not spoken of as singular or fragmented but instead as universal to all Catholics.

This understanding necessarily has implications for Catholic teachers since Hall et al (2019) state that, “The identity of the Catholic school at its deepest philosophical level is that of the identity of the Church.” (Hall, Sultmann and Townend, 2019, 34). The quote highlights that Catholic schools are not stand-alone institutions but form part of the Church’s wider mission, so their identity and purpose are inseparable from that of the Church itself. This mission extends to every aspect of the Church - including the Catholic school and the Catholic teacher. The Church describes evangelising as “...her deepest identity” (Pope Paul VI, 1975 §14). However, the Church is not an abstract concept but rather a people, and so it is reasonable to extend this deepest of identities to each one of her members in a way that is particular to their position in life, as well as the extent to which they understand or respond to the invitation of faith.

How then does this identity manifest itself in the life of teachers? In the same document, Pope Paul VI states the following: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Pope Paul VI, 1975, §41). Whilst this apostolic exhortation is not an education document as such, the statement raises an interesting point which can be applied to the personal and professional identity of the Catholic

teacher. The roles and obligations of Christians are not compartmentalised in this document, just as the evangelical identity of the Church is not compartmentalised. Rather, throughout Church documents, the Christian is always spoken of as a unity of mind, body and soul, with the implication that any activity that is engaged in, professionally or privately, is done so through the lens of this unity. Contemporary Catholic thinkers emphasise this same point: Pope Francis (2013) in *Evangelii Gaudium* stresses that faith is communicated above all through witness, while the Congregation for Catholic Education (2014) insists that educators embody a unity of life and vocation. Grace (2002) and Franchi (2013) argue that Catholic teacher identity must integrate professionalism with witness to the faith, rather than viewing these as separate domains. Similarly, Rowland (2017) and Kelly (2014) underline that Catholic theology frames Christian identity as holistic, where teaching and witnessing are inseparable. Reading Pope Paul VI's extract in this light highlights that the ability to be an effective teacher is synonymous with the ability to witness to the Catholic faith, since neither aspect of the individual's identity is viewed in isolation.

### **(iii) The Catholic Teacher and Post-Modernity**

It is perhaps necessary to speak of the evolution of the role of the Catholic teacher in the second half of the twentieth century, specifically within Scotland. Franchi states that: "For most of the 20th century, religious education in Catholic schools—often called religious instruction—was taught with the explicit aim of formation in faith: it was hence co-terminous with catechesis" (Franchi, 2013, 467). The parish and the parish school were intimately connected, and the demographic reality of Catholic schools meant that most children attending were

there to receive catechesis because they were both of the Catholic faith, and part of a community of faith. The details of this are explored in depth in other works but of greater relevance here is the transition of Catholic schools into the state provision of education in Scotland and the implications of being managed by local government, rather than the local Bishop, for the Catholic teacher.

One-hundred years on from the key legislation, and the demographic of Catholic schools is very different from the parish schools of the paragraph above:

“Scotland in the 21st century is an increasingly multi-cultural and diverse nation” (Curriculum for Excellence: Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools. Principles and Practice 2010, 1; Scottish Government, 2021).

Educational researchers have commented on some of the challenges that this change has presented for schools. For example, Arshad (2015) suggests that despite inclusion policies, that the lived experience of some pupils remains a superficial acknowledgement of their cultural background, rather than the diversity of the school being reflected in a meaningful way. McKinney & Tyrell (2012) explore the potential benefits to young people when the diversity of school communities is meaningfully engaged with.

This change in make-up and management of the Catholic school has practically affected whether and how religious instruction or religious education is taking place in the Catholic school. By implication then, it has also necessitated the Catholic teacher’s ability to understand the difference: “There is a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction between religious instruction and catechesis, or the handing on of the Gospel message” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, §68). Religious Instruction, or Religious Education as it is more commonly known within the UK, can be

interpreted in different ways and can be seen both as synonymous, and completely separate from, faith formation. This difference lies in the disposition of the student, and their belonging to a Church community. Ideally, this document continues, “religious instruction within a school should be augmented by the individual's family, parish and any other related faith activities” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, §70). What are the implications for the Catholic teacher when the reality of this tripartite ideal is not realised, however? And where encounter with the Catholic faith is solely contained within the confines of the school environment, does the universal call to mission take on an enhanced role? And what of the implications for Catholic teachers and questions around identity in this situation?

#### **(iv) External Challenges to Catholic Teacher Identity**

Although the ways in which Catholic teachers embody their identity inevitably vary across contexts, there are several contemporary factors that place particular pressure on, and present distinct challenges to, the expression of Catholic teacher identity. Though the purpose of Catholic education is set out clearly by the Church, how each individual absorbs, accepts and decides in freedom to live this reality out as a Catholic teacher will naturally be different. As has been observed earlier in this review, the identity of any individual relies on a complex set of circumstances/factors and experiences - which is not fixed or stagnant. What is starkly different from the many views of identity dominated by individualism is that the individual Catholic always exists within a faith community. Bullivant quotes Popes Benedict and Francis to explain this:

Fundamentally the same idea also finds expression in Pope Francis' first—and/or Pope Benedict's last encyclical *Lumen Fidei*: ‘It is impossible to believe on our own. [ ... ] We can respond in the singular—“I believe”—

only because we are part of a greater fellowship, only because we also say “We believe” (Bullivant, 2020, 39).

This quote explains that the “I” of the identity for the Catholic, and therefore Catholic teacher, is inextricably linked with the “we” of the community of faith. In other words, faith is never simply the act of an individual that can be understood apart from the community of believers. Belief then cannot be a private possession, but is rather an expression of a communal faith, and of participation in the life of the Church. The faith of the individual is enabled by the community which nourishes and sustains that faith as expressed within the collective and ecclesial “I believe” of the Creed.

The revelations that have come to light in the many abuse scandals that have rocked the Catholic Church have impacted, at the very least, the confidence levels of Catholic teachers to teach the faith and, perhaps most keenly, but not exclusively, Catholic relationships education (sometimes more readily recognised as Sex Education). The behaviour exhibited by the perpetrators of these crimes has impacted the perception (since the individual does not in reality change the nature of the message) of moral legitimacy, not only of the perpetrators, but by implication, every Catholic and every Catholic teacher. Whilst empirical evidence on the specific impact on Catholic teachers is sparse, there are other studies that can illuminate the issues highlighted above. For instance, Abts (2022) research on levels of confidence in a post-abuse Catholic Church in Belgium charts the steady decline of trust in the Church, as well as noting that those more likely to express their thoughts about the Church’s failings as ‘*guardians of trust*’ (Abts, 2022) were religiously involved people. In addition, Xavier University conducted a pilot study to ascertain levels of moral injury resulting from clergy sexual abuse. The survey group included abuse survivors, as

well as diocesan and parish employees and university students. The findings of the survey indicated:

...that while moral injury was generally higher among those who are directly connected to clergy sexual abuse via their personal experiences of abuse, the impact of this crisis extends further, causing moral injury among those with varying degrees of affiliation with the Catholic Church (Mescher et al., 2022, 2)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the pilot study found that survivors of abuse scored highly in the moral injury parameters. However, importantly for this work is the crisis bleed, and subsequent moral injury caused to other members of the Church, even though they were not directly involved in any abuse. This speaks to Catholic community identity as explored in this chapter, as well as to the potential impact of this moral injury on Catholic teachers.

If the premise of Henrich's (2009) "Credibility Enhancing Displays" is to be accepted, where moral legitimacy is actualised and commitment is encouraged by such displays, then the opposite is also plausible - that negative displays affect legitimacy and deter commitment.

#### **(v) Catholic Teacher Identity and Performativity**

*Gravissimum Educationis*, the Declaration on Christian Education, produced by the Second Vatican Council, explores the fundamental principles of Christian education. Within this document, education is understood in its broadest sense. In it is described the promotion and rapid expansion of access to education happening in many parts of the world (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §2). It goes on to reaffirm that education is not just limited to the realm of formal schooling but is instead an endeavour that begins with parents and includes formal

schooling and, by implication, the whole Christian community. Of teachers, specifically, the document says this:

But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §8).

The preparation of Catholic teachers is given fundamental importance in this reference, as is their role in assisting (and being relied upon) to ensure that the Church and the school community are fruitful. The citation of secular, as well as religious knowledge, and of current pedagogy, is an interesting inclusion too and, and implies an integrated vision of the teacher. Catholic teachers are not, by this description, only asked to teach the faith but are, rather, asked to teach all knowledge, and cultivate pupil understanding and capacity, in the most effective way possible, through the lens of faith. The assumption here being that the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, understood as “A 2,000- year-long conversation” (Boston College, 2012, 6) between the Church and the world, and the related identity of the Catholic teacher, will permeate all areas of the curriculum and the wider life of the school. The conversation above encompasses all areas of knowledge and learning. The image this creates is not one of an insular community of faith and learning, but rather an outward looking community where all learning takes place within the wider horizon of faith.

Ultimately, in the literature consulted here, Catholic education is not synonymous with passing exams, or with league tables or preparing pupils to take up their place in the economic sphere. The modern obsession, fuelled by Human Capital Theory, and international comparisons via the OECD’s PISA

scheme means that: "...on the whole, performativity is associated with the measurement of students' progress through formal testing..." (Munday, 2018, 867). Catholic education, at its heart, is not chiefly about these kinds of measurements, and if it allows itself to become limited by these secular ways of measuring performativity, then it loses some, if not all, of the essence that is apparent through Church teaching and wisdom on the subject of education. The literature also points out that Catholic schools should be places of academic excellence, although there is also debate about what this term means within Catholic schools (Weitzel-O'Neill & Scheopner Torres, 2011). What is successful by worldly standards is not the principal standard by which a Catholic school measures "success": "I am not called to be successful, I am called to be faithful" (The Word for Today, 2017, §2). This oft-quoted response to a question posed to Mother Theresa about the enormity of the work that she was engaged in, has something fundamental to say to Catholic educators about the criteria that they need to employ when evaluating how successful their school is from the Catholic perspective. Of course, it is appropriate that every educator works for and wishes for the success of the student in their care, but what this response highlights is the broader meaning of the word success and how it fits into the wider mission of every Christian.

#### **(vi) Personal and Professional Identity within Catholic Schools**

When we consider the standard by which Catholic schools should be measured, we must look at the personal, faith and professional identity of *all* those who work within Catholic schools, with particular attention being given to teaching staff and senior leadership:

One specific characteristic of the educational profession assumes its most profound significance in the Catholic educator: the communication of truth. For the Catholic educator, whatever is true is a participation in Him who is the Truth; the communication of truth, therefore, as a professional activity, is thus fundamentally transformed into a unique participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, carried on through one's teaching (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 §16).

What is being spoken about here is both a vocation to holiness as well as a vocation to teach. Regardless of the teacher's subject discipline, they are participating in communicating truth because what they teach comes from "Him who is the Truth" (*ibid* §16). In addition, the Catholic teacher is part of something much bigger than only themselves as individual Christians. Owing to the fact that the lay Catholic who works in Catholic schools is "a member of the People of God" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, §6), they participate "in the saving mission of the Church" (*ibid*). This is fundamentally about the identity of the Catholic teacher: an identity that is intimately bound up with the teacher's own baptism and their membership of the People of God. More recent Catholic thinkers emphasise the same inseparability of personal vocation and professional mission. Hallman (2014) stresses that Catholic teachers embody a distinctive identity precisely because their teaching is itself a form of witness, and Franchi (2013) similarly highlights that Catholic educators communicate faith not only through subject content but through the integrity of their lives. Grace (2002) argues that the Catholic teacher's professional practice cannot be divorced from their ecclesial belonging, while Rowland (2017) situates the Catholic teacher's vocation within the wider Thomist tradition of personhood and community. Together, these perspectives reinforce the point that the Catholic teacher has a specific role to play in the life of the Church, and they are "commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself" (Congregation for

Catholic Education, 1982, §6). Therefore, when it comes to the professional life of the Catholic teacher, the personal and professional are inextricably linked.

Given the inference of the close link between personal and professional values set out by the GTCS and explored in the second stage of this review, Catholic schools need to be cognisant of the secularising influences that threaten both Catholic teacher identity, as well as the identity of Catholic schools themselves. Such influences seek to consign religion to the private sphere, which carries with it significant implications for Catholic teachers who, rather than compartmentalising private and public parts of their identity, embody an integration of these two spheres of reality. This dismissal of faith from the public sphere can result in a hesitation or even fear on the part of the professional to express their identity fully within the workplace (Taylor, 2007). Marketisation of education (explored elsewhere in this chapter) and individualism could also be cited as secularising influences since they both contribute to an erosion of both a humanistic conception of education, as well as the reduction in importance of community with its focus on service, to make way for the desire of the individual (Groome, 1996). Pope Francis expresses his understanding of these influences as follows:

The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism (Pope Francis, 2013 §64).

Pope Francis' observation in this quote is stark, and in line with the paragraph above, he also explores the consequences of excluding religion from the public sphere. This reductive view stands in opposition to Habermas' (2006) inclusion and respect for religious contribution to secular debate. Not only is this,

according to Pope Francis, detrimental to the moral and ethical fabric that underpins society, but it speaks to a more fundamental rejection of the transcendent, and therefore the ability of anything outside the human sphere to contribute to understanding the human condition.

This narrow framework, therefore, results in truth and moral judgements being subjugated to changing social consensus. This is problematic when viewed alongside an understanding of the human person as understood within the Catholic tradition. This rests on the acceptance of God as the origin of all life, as well as the reality of a fallen human nature in need of reconciliation and redemption (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993). When looked at in the context of education, a lack of grounding in the transcendent can result in the educational endeavour being reduced to skills training, or the supply of marketable competencies.

Defining and asserting the identity of the Catholic teacher is arguably all the more necessary in today's world when this process of secularisation is advancing with great speed (Inglehart, 2021). The very concept of truth is also one that is now, in the West at least, being called into question more and more. Everything is presented as relative, and indeed in some circumstances relativism is presented as a form of truth with the result that in many moral and ethical spheres what was once considered to be settled and universally accepted as true, is now subject to doubt and confusion.

Whilst both Augustine and Maritain's work stand in firm opposition to this line of thought, others would defend the existence of relativistic truth with similar conviction. Foucault's (1980) assertion that truth is inextricably bound up with

expression of power, rather than objective realities, as well as Rorty's (1989) contention that truth merely represents consensus of agreement being two such examples. These views come from a position seeking to recognise the plurality of ways that human beings seek to articulate and construct truth. The Church teaches that Catholics live between two worlds - the temporal of which they are a part and the eternal as their ultimate end. The consequent effects of relativism on the claims made in Catholic epistemology can erode the primacy of objective truth for both the individual Catholic and also, therefore, the community of faith of which they are a part.

This relativistic tendency also impacts the identity of the Catholic teacher in terms of the legitimacy of authority. Who says that a Catholic teacher should speak and act in a certain way? Who are they to say that their job is more than just an occupation? The Catholic teacher cannot simply elucidate the truths of the Church and expect them to be internalised by students. In a context where relativistic assumptions shape cultural discourse, questions of authority and truth are already unsettled before the pupil enters the classroom:

Identity crisis, loss of trust in social structures, the resulting insecurity and loss of any personal convictions, the contagion of a progressive secularization of society, loss of the proper concept of authority and lack of a proper use of freedom - these are only a few of the multitude of difficulties which, in varying degrees, according to the diverse cultures and the different countries, the adolescents and young people of today bring to the Catholic educator (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 §6).

This long and complex list, even though it is noted here as incomplete, elicits a sense of the overwhelming. This feeling finds its origins, not only in the complexity of the challenges facing young people listed here, but also in the responsibility placed on the shoulders of Catholic educators to stem or redress

these. Essential to a response to the challenges is the Catholic teacher's cognisance of them as well as what is required of them in response. Therefore, they must know who they are and what they are called to be or do if they are to navigate the choppy currents of secularisation and relativism and present a coherent and holistic understanding of the Catholic faith in their role as Catholic teachers. This endeavour presumes that teachers are grounded in the truth of Jesus Christ, and of His Church, in order to accomplish their mission of participating "in the saving mission of the Church" (ibid, §6). How this is achieved, and whether or not it is even possible, is an area of great interest to this study.

The influence of such cultural and intellectual shifts upon students is not primarily a matter of explicit ideological instruction, but of atmosphere and coherence. Where teachers themselves possess clarity and confidence regarding the status of truth, this informs the language through which moral questions are framed and the consistency with which Catholic anthropology is presented. Conversely, where truth is treated as negotiable, students encounter fragmentation rather than integration.

#### **(vii) A Catholic Understanding of Truth and Knowledge**

As a consequence of trying to understand more deeply what we mean by Catholic teacher identity, we also need to ask and answer the following question: what do Catholics understand by Truth? In *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, truth is mentioned most in the section exploring the Eighth Commandment: *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour*. Here we see not only the prohibition of lying placed upon the Christian, but also of the reason for this: "In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made

manifest. "Full of grace and truth," he came as the "light of the world," he is the Truth" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, §2466). In other words, this fundamental instruction is about much more than the difference between right and wrong action in the life of the Christian. The Catholic Church is claiming that Christ *himself* is Truth, and therefore to lie, or by extension, reject the concept of truth, is to deny Christ.

What connection then, does this relationship have with the identity of the Catholic teacher? In countries such as Scotland, where Catholic schools are fully assumed into State provision for education, there are a number of areas that may present challenges. For example, Catholic schools in Scotland do not (unless in the case of over-subscription) require pupils to be Catholic to enrol. The inclusivity of Catholic schools in relation to those from other faith backgrounds and none is a hallmark of Catholicism's deep respect for other Christian denominations, as well as those who come from other religions. The Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland sums this instinct up aptly when it states that Catholic schools in Scotland will uphold "a commitment to ecumenical action and the unity of Christians" and that each school will promote "respect for different beliefs and cultures and for inter-faith dialogue" (A Charter for Catholic Schools, 2004). McKinney (2008; 2013) argues that this inclusivity is both a strength and a challenge: it enables Catholic schools to serve the common good and embody the Church's commitment to dialogue, but it also requires teachers to negotiate how Catholic identity is maintained and communicated in a pluralist environment. Pope Paul VI was adamant that this openness to others would be a fruit of the Second Vatican Council:

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men (Second Vatican Council, 1965 §2).

In this quote, Christians are called to remain rooted in the truth of their faith, whilst reaching out in love to find common ground and values with people of other faith - in other words to reach outwards and beyond. Though the ecumenical movement and the work of inter-faith organisations are now an established part of the religious landscape in many contexts, (and there are examples that pre-date the Council - mission movements in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance), these words were novel. They epitomise Pope John XXIII's often quoted image of the Church opening its windows not only to look out, but also to allow others to look in (Hebblethwaite, 1984).

The call of the Council is to reach out whilst remaining rooted in the truth. This rootedness in truth, though applying to all members of the Church, has implications in a particular way within the context of the Catholic school and in the life of the Catholic teacher. The same document continues:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (*ibid* §2).

Given the religious diversity of many Catholic schools in Scotland, the message of these words to welcome and respect different beliefs continues to resonate.

The Truth that is referred to in this quote is, we are told, Christ himself. As a result of this fact all “the Church’s activities stem from her awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself” (Pope Benedict

XVI, 2008 §7). This is significant since it directs the Church's authority always back to the person of Jesus Christ - rather than the truth being something of the Church's creation or possession. This is something echoed in St Augustine's words when he says to God: "...for your truth does not belong to me nor to anyone else, but to us all whom you call to share it as a public possession" (Augustine, 265, trans 1991). That God is the origin of truth is of incredible significance to any work on identity since it presents a paradigm at odds with many modern identity frameworks. Augustine's words reject the notion of created, or subjective truth, as well as calling for the truth to be shared. The subtext of this quote invokes again the imagery that Pope John XXIII used to describe the purpose of the Council - namely to open the windows to let the world see.

Maritain develops Augustine's line of thought on the divine origin of truth, but he situates it within a framework of critical realism. In his approach he marries the precepts of classical realism with an apologetics approach to modern epistemological debates. Similarly to Augustine, Maritain firmly situates truth with God as the first truth (Maritain, 1932/1959): "...the created intellect knows being only by a light borrowed from the uncreated Truth" (Maritain, 34, 1932/1959). In this short quote, Maritain confirms the nature of God in Thomistic fashion as the uncreated Truth, and claims that truth can only be known or understood by human beings through the lens, or light, that God shares with us. Of fundamental importance in Maritain's explanation is that the truth of things can be *known* by human beings as received from God, rather than created by the individual.

Whilst these could be interpreted as lofty philosophical ideas distant and irrelevant to lived realities, they can, nonetheless, readily be applied to the Catholic teacher. By implication of this call to the whole Church, they are called in a particular way to remember these claims when engaging in any activity with the Catholic school. Within this understanding, they can participate in the truth they have received from God and become bearers of and witnesses to the truth across the curriculum, all areas of which find their source and summit in God.

One danger of not bearing witness to this belief that all truth comes from God is seen in what was referred to earlier in this chapter in relation to education being merely a means of generating future capital. It is what might be called the commodification of knowledge. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis speaks of the commodification of water and land which turns the basic of necessity into: "... a commodity subject to the laws of the market" (Pope Francis, 2015, §30). The market to which Pope Francis refers is not rejected outright by Catholic Social Teaching (Pope John Paul II, 1991) but is required by the Church to operate within a moral framework that both protects the God-given dignity of every individual and which protects the Common Good (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004). The potential commodification of all things, including basic human needs including knowledge and education, contribute to an erosion of awareness or commitment to the Common Good understood as the: "...the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily" (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §26). This quote clearly outlines a commitment to the best context to ensure human flourishing. When this pattern is not followed, the market is at risk of operating solely within a transactional model which can

obscure the Church's understanding of education as a personal right and a public good (Second Vatican Council, 1965).

By extending the commodification of knowledge argument to the person of the teacher, further implications on their role must be considered. If market forces reject any moral framework, and education is seen simply as a marketable good, then the role of the teacher is to provide training in marketable skills, rather than being formators of the whole person. This risks distortion of the teacher's role, especially the role of the Catholic teacher:

The teacher under discussion here is not simply a professional person who systematically transmits a body of knowledge in the context of a school; "teacher" is to be understood as "educator" - one who helps to form human persons. The task of a teacher goes well beyond transmission of knowledge, although that is not excluded (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 § 16).

This quote makes clear that the professional and personal aspects of the Catholic educator do not exist as separate realms or realities but are a harmonious culmination of all aspects. It goes on to state that reducing the teacher to someone who merely transmits knowledge is to miss the point of education understood from the Catholic perspective. By extension, this misunderstanding also impoverishes any attempt to articulate the identity of the Catholic teacher, as Tracy Rowland points out here: "Catholics, better than anyone, understand that education is not primarily or even predominately about supplying members of the workforce with market-driven skills" (Rowland in Convery et al (eds) 2017, 13). Intrinsically linked with this philosophy of education then, is who the person of the Catholic teacher is at the core of their identity. From the literature consulted here, the core of Catholic teacher identity is found in forming a person, a person who is made in the image and

likeness of God and in ensuring that each student is aware of that dignity, and their responsibility to recognise this reality in others.

## **Conclusion**

The intention of this review was to situate the study within key and current literature and scholarship on three approaches to identity and to navigate this in a way that reflected the overarching themes of the research questions. The first part of this chapter examined identity as a concept as well as developments in identity theory relevant to the time period of the research and the rapid changes synonymous with it (Second Vatican Council, 1965). A key point that emerged was the evolution in identity theory of the individual from stable or anchored in their identity, to a fragmented individual (Hall, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Trueman, 2020; Stets, 2021). Though there was consensus regarding the many challenges to identity, whether stability or meaning was possible at all within post-modernity was much debated within the literature (Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1992). So significant was the separation of the individual from traditional socio-cultural anchors such as religious communities that it permeated much of the first part of the chapter.

The impact of the post-war period and the conditions that this created for rearticulation of identity was also explored to ascertain the key drivers of this change specifically in relation to individual and communal identity (Hall, 1996). At the same time, parallels were drawn between the broader social changes, and changes of similar ilk on Catholic identity epitomised by the Second Vatican Council (Blanchard, 2019; FCJ Sisters, 2025; Wilde, 2007). The extent to which these changed Catholic identity, or simply the outward expression of this identity was a point of tension (Catholic Register, 2012; Komonchak, 2009).

Whilst Church teaching was clear about the contingent relationship between individual and community identity for the Catholic, some scholars highlighted tensions within this understanding specifically pertaining to expressions of lived belief (O'Malley 2008; Bullivant, 2019). In response to the questions raised in the first part of the chapter regarding fragmentation of identity, the literature around Catholic community identity highlighted unity amidst diversity (Rowland, 2014; Newman, 1845; Bourdieu, 2003) and the interdependence of the individual upon the community (Pope Francis, 2020). This being said, the temptation to articulate a universal Catholic identity was met with concerns about over-simplification (McDonagh, 2019; Grace, 2020).

The Catholic Church makes objective truth claims about God and the human person that impact significantly on identity. Following this line of thought, the origin of and existence of objective truth was explored at length in this chapter, with much disagreement found between the sources consulted (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1980; Pope John Paul II, 1991).

Part 2 explored the personal and professional elements of teacher identity, paying particular attention to how this has changed within the context of post-modern identity theory, education reforms, and the increased focus on performativity. The awareness of a fragmented and shifting understanding of professional identity dominated the literature reviewed and highlighted tensions between who the teacher is as opposed to what they do (Hendrikx, 2019; Britzman, 1992), as well as loss of teacher agency (Forde et al, 2006). The focus on teacher functionality, fuelled by the demands of constant educational reform (Ball, 2003; (Lefkios, 2013), led to a sense from the literature of teacher identity being sidelined as less important than performance, especially within the

market-driven educational system, as claimed by Ball (2013) and Themelis et al, (2021).

The final part of the review concentrated specifically on Catholic teacher identity and the way that this is shaped by a variety of cultural, theological and professional influences. Firmly rooted in the Imago Dei paradigm (CCC, 1993), this chapter presents literature that counters in a consistent way the notion of a fragmented individual (Maritain, 1939; Pope Pius XI, 1929). This section goes on to explore the ways in which teachers share in the universal mission of the Church and the specific mission of Catholic teacher and Catholic education (Pope Francis, 2019). The literature reviewed highlights some of the challenges to this understanding by looking at the Catholic teacher and post-modernity, as well as some of the internal challenges to Catholic identity such as the sexual abuse scandal (Abts, 2022; Mescher et al, 2022). Throughout, the literature recognises that Catholic teacher identity is not static but instead is best understood as a dynamic relationship between personal and professional elements of identity (Congregation of Catholic Education, 1982). The sources consulted explore both the potential and expose the vulnerabilities of Catholic teacher identity.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The principal aim of this research is to investigate the many complex issues around the concept of teachers' professional identity when it is directly associated with religious affiliation. This will allow an analysis of the identity of Catholic Secondary School teachers in Scotland over a designated period of time in order (1965 to the present day) to ascertain whether there are perceptible, common qualities or distinct characteristics within this group and this period. The research will also examine whether and how these qualities and characteristics might have changed in the perception of a selection of those teachers who qualified during the timeline chosen.

The following chapter seeks to not only explain the practicalities that were applied to the research such as recruitment of Participants, ethical approval, data generation and transcription and analysis, but also to explore the underlying principles that shaped the approach such as positionality, ethical implications and distinct understanding of knowledge.

### **3.2 The What, Why and How of Research**

Every researcher approaches their chosen field of enquiry with a unique and complex web of experience and attributes, (Carrie, 2022; Wingrave, 2014) and I am no different in this regard. At the same time, my research takes place within a social sciences environment where there are, of course, tried and tested methods, such as semi-structured interview techniques and focus groups that tend to be applied to this particular type of study. Although I will be employing a standard analytical toolkit for this enquiry - including data preparation, coding and analysis, I intend to take a fresh look at the methodological approach that

underpins the study. The researcher, and the framework in which they choose to situate their study, are always part of a dynamic relationship from which a distinctive contribution to knowledge can emerge and where positive social effects can then result (Kearns, 2014).

As and when appropriate, I will continue to write this chapter in first-person voice. I am aware of the risks involved with this approach: namely giving the inaccurate impression that my objectivity as a researcher is diminished by employing this technique. I have, however, chosen to do this because it allows both for a more natural description of the practical steps involved within the construction and execution of an appropriate methodology for the present study, as well as communicating a personal passion for the subject area – more so than passive-voice constructions sometimes allow. This is in keeping with Creswell's (2014) succinct description of a qualitative ethnographer, which is also appropriate to my positionality within this study. I am aware that the opposite of the passive voice is not necessarily use of the first person, but rather the active voice. However, Creswell advises "...deleting the passive voice (using the active voice)..." (Creswell, 2014: 90) in a way which I believe to be in keeping with my approach to this research.

The first subtitle of this chapter - *the what, why and how* is a technically accurate summation of the process with which one engages to be able to select critically and then enact any given methodological approach. Any set of social research questions can (according to Blaikie's (2010) assertions), be reduced to these three overarching types of questions. However, beneath the apparent simplicity of this terminology it is incumbent on the researcher to ensure that there exists a solid foundation of active and reflective engagement with each of

the three terms in a way which results in a cognisant and coherent engagement with the research questions posed. Therefore, throughout this chapter, the overarching research question of this study: *To what extent are issues of personal and professional identity essential for teachers in Catholic schools in Scotland to discharge effectively their responsibilities to the state and the Church?* will be situated within a critically examined framework and methodological philosophy.

The *what* of this research is concerned with the identity of the Catholic secondary teacher in Scotland and with seeking to understand something of the reality of their existence within this particular geographic, religious, educational and political context.

### **3.3 Research Paradigms**

Discerning and then understanding and practically applying the paradigm in which any given research project is situated is of paramount importance since it articulates and justifies the approaches taken at each stage of research. The emphasis of the overarching research questions as well as those asked during interviews means that this research most naturally sits within an interpretivist paradigm given that within this framework: "...it is theoretically understood that the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants" (Thanh and Thanh, 2015, 25). However, given that there are multiple definitions of what constitutes an interpretive framework, more specifically (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), it is necessary to unpack this further to ensure a philosophically coherent approach.

### 3.4 The Intellectual Puzzle

The *what*, or the ontology that frames this research, does not, of course, exist in a vacuum. In fact, Mason states that, “Usually a research topic will express something of the researcher’s ontological or epistemological position, as well as their fascination or commitment to it” (Mason, 2018, 10). Throughout this same work, Mason encourages an approach to research that explores and critically reflects upon the researcher’s ontological and epistemological positions. In light of these positions, the researcher is then asked to consider the nature of their particular *intellectual puzzle* (Mason, 2018, 12). Each PhD seeks to contribute original knowledge to a given field of study - in other words to *puzzle* something out by seeking to understand it at a deeper level. The purpose of this approach is to ensure that the *what, why and how* remain cognitively consonant with the ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches of the researcher to their investigation.

The approach outlined below fits most naturally with Mason’s *Experiential*

*Puzzle* proposition:

Your puzzle might be about how life is experienced, how the world is encountered, or how ‘lifeworlds’ are lived. This kind of puzzle will be seeking to explore how the world and experiences are connected (Mason, 2018, 12).

How the world is perceived, and the connections that are forged between the sources of these experiences, from the perspective of the Catholic teacher, are of key importance to the research questions of this specific study. This intrinsically qualitative puzzle seeks to comprehend a problem, “...through the experience of individuals, and the particular details of their lived experience” (Bourke, 2014, 3), which is, itself, hence *interpretivist* in nature.

### 3.5 Positionality Focus

Positionality, of course, can result in possible bias (Bell, 1999); however, when criticality examined and acknowledged, it can also be an asset. I am both a doctoral researcher and Religious Education Adviser employed by the Archdiocese of Glasgow and the Diocese of Motherwell. My day-to-day role principally involves working closely with and advising Head Teachers and Principal Teachers of Religious Education, in both formal meeting settings and on an ad hoc basis, on any number of areas that fall under the broad banner of Catholic Religious Education. Although there is no formal arrangement with either of my employers about the nature of this research project, or the use of any data that will be generated as a result, I cannot “un-know” the findings of this study, nor can I deny that they will impact upon my professional practice. It must be acknowledged, however, that as a Religious Education Adviser, the majority of my professional life is spent working with and providing CLPL for teachers in Catholic Schools. I, therefore, have a vested interest in the data generated as part of this research as it will have an impact on how I discharge my professional duties.

As stated throughout this work, I am a member of the community being researched, whilst also being juxtaposed to it in the role of researcher and in my employed role of Religious Education Adviser. My positionality could be described as fitting broadly within Merton’s Insider/Outsider description (Merton, 1972). However, Dwyer and Buckle 2009, state that: “To present these concepts in a dualistic manner is overly simplistic” (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, 60), suggesting instead that the space found between these two positions captures the unique orientation of many qualitative researchers. This

positionality, however, must fit coherently with the theoretical framework and subsequent research design, data collection and analysis. Though cognisant of the risks of role confusion when conducting research as an Insider/Outsider (Asselin, 2003, 102), and possible bias or misunderstanding that may result, the positive emphasis on meaning as contextual or situated (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Terry, 2019) *can* translate the subjectivity and embeddedness of the researcher into a resource for the benefit of the research. This, however, requires a continued commitment on the part of the researcher to “Disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection...with a close awareness of one’s own personal biases and perspectives” (Bukamel, 2022, 59). The use of the word disciplined here suggests a constant awareness of, and reflection on, potential bias on the part of the researcher. This reflexive posture creates a space in which researchers can acknowledge and critically analyse their subjectivity and positionality in a manner which bolsters rather than impedes the credibility of the research.

As a theologian as well as a social science researcher then, it is incumbent upon me to recognise that I straddle two distinct disciplines and that I seek to reconcile them within a coherent ontological position in order that my methodological approach remains consistent throughout. I am, therefore, approaching this research from a uniquely informed position, one that most other people do not have and which in turn offers me a stronger platform from which to conduct this study and will in turn enhance the basis for this research.

In my academic experience, and perhaps untypically for social scientists, the word ontology is evocative of works that seek to understand the very essence of being and of God – and particularly the subsequent ‘ontological arguments’ for the existence of God most readily associated with noted theologians such as

St Anselm of Canterbury – 1033-1109 (Williams, 2020) or St Thomas Aquinas 1225-1274 (St Thomas Aquinas, 1272). These *proofs* (in other words, logical-deductive arguments for the existence of God in Aquinas' writing) are necessarily different from those used most frequently within the natural and social sciences (CCC, 1993), but can be argued to be of equal validity in terms of generating data since:

...methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God" (CCC, 1993: §159).

Within this statement there exists no hierarchy of knowledge but instead a unified approach to understanding all knowledge, regardless of the field in which it exists. The approaches of Sts Anselm and Thomas, therefore, dovetail with what is written in the Catechism - in other words the authoritative summary of the teachings of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

This position does not pit scientific or social scientific knowledge against knowledge gained in other areas of study but rather orients any research (which respects the moral law) firmly within relationship to the Creator, and what we can know of Him through any knowledge gained. This synthesis of knowledge is not universally accepted. Knowledge is a word subject to bias which is more than capable of implying a particular understanding of truth. Though this debate is much more complex and nuanced than this research can address, a brief contextualisation may prove useful in further understanding the quote above.

Richard Dawkins, for example, would claim that only science can provide knowledge (in the sense of what is true about the world) (McGrath, 2015; Dawkins, 2021), and rejects, therefore, the notion that religion has any locus in

contributing to knowledge. Though Dawkins is by no means a universally admired figure either within his own field or the public sphere, he nevertheless serves as a talismanic figure for religion and science stand-offs in the public eye.

Knowledge, in a scientific sense, is only claimed if it can be empirically or logically verified and does not overreach into areas that cannot be evidenced (McGrath, 2015). Conversely, John Polkinghorne (1996) would write and speak in chorus with the quotation above from the Catechism and notes that, unlike Dawkins, his own engagement with religion arose out of his study of science, rather than science emerging from a prior religious commitment.

There is, however no need not restrict the conversation simply to Dawkins and Polkinghorne. Philosophers of knowledge such as Asma, for example, approach religion with a more nuanced stance. While not dismissing the reality or significance of religious experience, they nonetheless raise critical questions about the kinds of knowledge such experiences can legitimately be said to produce, particularly in relation to material, empirical and propositional forms of knowing (Asma, 2018). This broadens the debate beyond the simple binary of “science versus religion,” suggesting instead a more complex spectrum in which different domains of human understanding may overlap, split, or even resist easy categorisation.

In addition to the sizeable contributions that such figures have made to the understanding of knowledge, the Church has also continued to develop this synthesis. This can be seen throughout Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si* (and its partner document, *Laudato Deum* - 2015 and 2023 respectively) where, unsurprisingly, he is at pains to deny any separation of scientific facts about our environment and the implications of human behaviour on the environment (understood as the

created world). Throughout this encyclical, and subsequent apostolic exhortation, the Pope speaks of one singular crisis facing humanity - understanding underpinned by the non-segregation or hierarchy of knowledge. In so doing, he is articulating for contemporaries the traditional Catholic understanding of knowledge as having one source – God.

That my understanding of ontology as a theologian can be most logically applied to this intellectual puzzle is beneficial both to me as a new researcher and to the logic of the theoretical framework upon which this work is based. As demonstrated by the extensive glossary provided by Cresswell and Poth (2018), this crossover of terminology is not limited to a single word, but rather to a number of terms common with theology – ontology, epistemology and hermeneutics. Within a social science, and qualitative research context, the definition of ontology involves discovering reality in the lives of all the participants in a study (including the researcher): “Thus reality is not ‘out there’ apart from the minds of the actors” (Cresswell and Poth, 2018, 326). This is quite different from the Catholic Church’s definition explored briefly above and the difference could raise questions about possible definitional imprecision on the part of the researcher. However, I have sought to build upon the pedigree of insights that my background has provided on these themes and dimensions, precisely because they form my realm, as well as also being (to a greater or lesser extent), the realm/domain of my research Participants. This, of course, is not to suggest that ontology is unique to social science or indeed to theology, but merely to explore the different meanings that terms such as this can hold.

Within the context of a methodology chapter such as this, where the research focus of professional experience most naturally fits within a qualitative

approach, different in this context does not mean discountable, nor does it imply an inferiority to the knowledge and data that natural sciences generate. Indeed, this position seeks only to articulate that a separation of different fields of study can legitimately exist whilst retaining a coherent ontological framework and avoiding any unnecessary hierarchical or polarising views towards the new knowledge emergent from doctoral study of the kind produced here.

This overall approach carries its own risks, namely the possibility of bias and the proximity of the experience of the participants to that of the researcher. I have critically reflected upon these using the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) risk-benefit analysis (BERA, 2018, 5&8). I have carefully considered the fivefold analysis of the responsibilities incumbent on the researcher towards participants through to those that focus upon the wellbeing and development of the researcher. Through this process, I have concluded that that these risks are mitigated by the strengths of the approach within the broader context of the data generated from participant interviews. Given the close relationship of both the professional experience of Catholic teachers and their personal experience or views that the questions may elicit, individual interviews will provide the most secure setting for participants to engage most fully with this process. BERA's is an apt framework to choose since its core focus is improving the practice of educational researchers and *The Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* have proved useful throughout this chapter both theoretically and during practical application. Within Scotland, there also exists SERA, the Scottish Educational Research Association. They too have found BERA's Ethical Guidelines to be comprehensive, (SERA.ac.uk, 2021) a position which further justifies their inclusion as point of reference here.

### **3.6 A Perspective on Catholic Values in the Research Process**

In addition to my distinct positionality as a researcher, my perspective as a Catholic also informs my approach to research.

“A” is used quite deliberately within the sub-title above since, although I attach myself to a long-standing and extensive tradition of Catholic research, I am only able to offer primarily my own experience and understanding of what it means to be a Catholic researcher. In other words, I acknowledge that this is subjective/individual since there may be Catholic researchers who would articulate a differing perspective on how their faith interacts with their role as a researcher but I nevertheless think it valid to explore what this identity claim means for the study.

Whilst many sources that fall within the broad category of wisdom and thought of the Catholic Church and are included throughout the study, of particular importance is the work of Pope John Paul II. During his papacy and beyond, Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) made an enormous intellectual contribution to the already rich tradition of thought within the Catholic Church. During his papacy, he wrote 14 Encyclicals, 15 Apostolic Exhortations, 11 Apostolic Constitutions, and 45 Apostolic Letters, as well as many more texts on a whole range of themes. It is legitimate, therefore, to cite Pope John Paul II's work as a summary of the Church's mind on the role of the intellect in the search for truth and meaning today. For this reason, as well as the fact that his lengthy papacy stretches over a significant proportion of the specified time-period of the research (over 26 years), his philosophical and epistemological influence merit inclusion in the approach explained within this chapter. The fruits of Pope John Paul II's papacy also warrant inclusion in analysis of my own positionality, given

the timeline of his work and the necessity of thoroughly exploring the implications of one's own epistemology and, "...looking at the underlying assumptions you use to make sense of our day-to-day lives" (Ryan, 2006,18).

Referring to study more broadly, Pope John Paul II explains that for: "...the ancients, the study of the natural sciences coincided in large part with philosophical learning" (Pope John Paul II, 1998, §19). In this description, he communicates something to the reader of the understanding of the underlying relatedness of all knowledge, to God as the foundational point of reference, and to each distinct field of study in relationship or harmony with the others. In other words, in the Roman Catholic tradition to which I belong, ontology begins and ends with God (Horn, 2021) as the cornerstone from which knowledge of everything else can be known. This includes intellect, imagination, emotions, experience and the material world – all of which holistically develops.

The relationship between *intellectus* and *ratio* within the Catholic intellectual tradition also provides a fruitful scaffold to understanding qualitative research such as this. Drawing on the work of Augustine and Aristotle, Aquinas tells us that *intellectus* and *ratio* are distinct, but complementary parts of the same faculty of intellect (*Summa Theologica*, Aquinas, 1947) and thus have pedagogical implications. Pieper explains this understanding as follows:

*Ratio* is the power of discursive, logical thought, of searching and of examination, of abstraction, of definition and drawing conclusions; *intellectus*, on the other hand, is the capacity of 'simplex intuitus,' of simply looking (albeit with the 'eye of the mind') and thus grasping reality (Pieper, 1952, 28).

Research into any area of knowledge begins with the *looking of intellectus* as described above. A researcher observes with their mind something of reality that is worthy of further investigation. In this action, which begins with contemplation, they begin a journey of uncovering meaning. This could be applied to both the initial motivation to engage in research, but also to the open disposition required of an interviewer. In the work of the qualitative researcher, the observable actions of *Ratio* can be most readily evidenced through transcription, data coding and thematic analysis. These modes of knowledge work together harmoniously to inform inquiry and order the human mind toward not only understanding, but also truth that finds its origin and end in God (Maritain, 1932/1959; Newman, 1852/1982).

It is also necessary to consider the extent to which experience gained through my current role as a Religious Education Adviser has influenced my decision to engage in this research, and in turn what I consciously, or subconsciously think will happen as a result of this study. Pope John Paul II provides an interesting perspective from which to consider this. He states that the pursuit of knowledge in and of itself is a defining feature of humanity (Pope John Paul II, 1998). This position assumes both the existence of objective truth, and the belief that knowledge, if properly directed (Weigel, 2020), will lead the seeker to the origin and ultimate end or all truth - in other words, to God (ibid. 40). When applied specifically to research, this position in some ways resembles Pure or Fundamental scientific research when understood as the pursuit of knowledge irrespective of pre-determined direction or possible economic gains or practical applications (Leptin, 2023). Though not completely interchangeable, there is a

similarity to be found in the pursuit of knowledge without the expectation or direction towards specific outcomes.

Pope John Paul II expands this thought further by explaining that the pursuit of knowledge cannot be divorced from the desire to translate knowledge into a vehicle through which a more human existence can be lived (Pope John Paul II, 1998). Incumbent on the one pursuing knowledge then is the responsibility to use it in a way which enables *a more human existence*. In other words: “We want to know and understand in order to be able to act ‘better than we did before’” Langeveld (1965, 4, cited in Bell, 1999). Langeveld here links knowing and understanding with improvement in action and highlights a dynamic relationship between knowledge and action. This insight is also shared by St John Henry Newman. Newman is very clear about the pursuit of knowledge being good in and of itself and is opposed to knowledge being treated or used as a means to an end. However, he is equally convinced of the necessary and positive ordering of duties and behaviour that should result from this understanding (Newman, 1852/1982; Pope John Paul II, 1998). This echoes the dual purpose of *intellectus* and *ratio* explored above - in other words, the pursuit of knowledge is imbued with wisdom when ordered towards God as source and end of all truth, and is not, in this view, to be understood simply as an isolated activity. For a Catholic researcher this means that research, although a technical and intellectual activity, is also equally and simultaneously undertaken as a moral and spiritual endeavour.

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II explores the relationship between truth, knowledge of truth and the consequences of this for the Christian’s relationship with Jesus Christ throughout his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (Splendour of the

Truth). In it, he states: “In the depths of his [the human person’s] heart there always remains a yearning for absolute truth and a thirst to attain full knowledge of it” (Pope John Paul II, 1993, §1). This has something important to say to Catholic researchers in particular. Whilst it is desirable and legitimate to pursue research that will positively impact upon practice, this statement reminds us that any pursuit of the truth or increase in knowledge also brings us closer to God as the source of all knowledge. This distinct dimension, when applied to the Catholic researcher, only enhances the commitment to solving the problem that motivates any given research question.

Whether the research task is secular in nature (understood in this context as not directly related to religious matters), or more explicitly connected to questions of faith or religion, both remain firmly within the same intellectual tradition. St Augustine affirms that, “...wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master.” (Augustine II.18.§28; cf John 14:6). Here he makes no distinction between branches of knowledge, but rather situates all truth within God’s realm. Though Pope John Paul II acknowledges that the consequence of increased plurality and scepticism has resulted in a loss of confidence in the truth as presented here (Pope John Paul II, 1998), he nevertheless firmly holds to the principle that all modes or branches lead to truth in its fullest form and, as such, cannot be contradictory.

This understanding of knowledge and truth, however, can raise questions around the ability of religiously affiliated researchers to protect the principle of academic freedom. Texts consulted centre largely on the relationship between religiously affiliated institutions and the academic freedom of those who work in those institutions (Andreescu, L., 2008; Breen, J. M. and Strang, L. J., 2019), but

the principles can also be broadly applied to Catholic researchers. Breen and Strang's (2019) extended article explores not only the history and development of academic freedom but also presents four cases at Catholic universities in America where the principle of academic freedom was tested. The examples contained within this article include the attempted suppression by a member of the Holy Office<sup>1</sup> of the publication of a collection of papers that had been presented at a Catholic University on Church-state relationships - a situation which had (perhaps unintended) consequences with regards the standing of the university - far beyond the publication itself. In addition, it placed the autonomy of the university in direct competition with external ecclesial authorities.

The second example highlights the difference (and difficulties) between Church governance and those same people being responsible for the governance within Higher Educational academic institutions. Within this example, the authors explore the sometimes-complicated situations that can arise when nationally accepted university operating standards clash with the confessional missions of either their founders or governing ecclesial authority. The third example given within this article is also within the sphere of operating systems. In it we read of a member of faculty staff who, concerned about heresy being taught at a Catholic university, appealed to the local Archbishop to intervene in matters of staffing of the university itself.

In the final of these four examples, we read that Catholic theologians on staff at a Catholic university were not disciplined by the Church or the university's administration for publicly dissenting from Church teaching (Breen and Strang, 2019). This instance brought the relationship between the bishop and the university into sharp focus, highlighting the tension that can exist between the

ways in which Catholic universities practically manage academic freedom and ecclesial oversight. Opinions on the outcome of this process may differ greatly amongst individuals, but the example cited serves to illustrate the complexity of understanding, accepting and protecting academic freedom amongst researchers.

These four examples are chosen to illustrate the complicated, and sometimes challenging nature of the relationship between confessional universities and the institutional Church. They also, viewed synoptically with the approach outlined by Pope John Paul II, outline guiding principles as well as possible conflicts for any Catholic researcher.

In the context of my own research, these cases hold particular relevance. As an employee of two dioceses, my professional role necessarily positions me within an ecclesial framework. While this offers opportunities for meaningful engagement with Catholic identity and ethos, it also raises important questions regarding the extent to which I can exercise, or even perceive myself as exercising, full academic freedom. The tension identified by Breen and Strang (2019) between institutional autonomy and ecclesial oversight resonates with my own position: I am both a researcher engaging critically with questions of religion, education, and knowledge, and a diocesan employee whose work is shaped by confessional priorities. This dual identity requires careful navigation, particularly in ensuring that my scholarship maintains intellectual integrity while also acknowledging the ecclesial commitments that form part of my employment context.

### 3.7 Epistemological Foundations: A Catholic Understanding of Knowledge and Motivation in Research Design

Pope Francis often spoke about the importance of *dialogue* between people and cultures, not simply as a conversation between two people, but as a dynamic enterprise between two individuals who *know who they are* (Pope Francis, 2014, 2024). Essential to this process then, is that: "...we are conscious of our own identity" (Pope Francis, 2014: §2). Whether Catholic teachers in Scotland are secure in their own identity (as Catholics or as Catholic teachers), how this presents itself, and in what ways it interacts within the unique educational and political situation in Scotland very much stimulates this research. Part of my identity is also what involves me in investigating these concepts of identity with my colleagues.

The knowledge that has been generated by this research was by no means straightforward to attain. By asking questions that seek to understand more of the relationship between a person's profession and their belonging to a religion, the data also falls into the highly sensitive area of Protected Characteristics (Equality Act, 2010). This has been given due attention in the ethical application process and subsequently enacted in all interactions with Participants (detailed further in the Participant Information Sheet: Appendix 1). It is essential to the research, however, to know the religious identity of Participants, given that the study will focus exclusively on the professional identity of Catholic Teachers. It is these questions in tandem that bolster the original contribution to knowledge that the research will make.

The motivation for the research also includes both a desire to generate new knowledge in an under-researched but important field of study and potentially

to contribute something of practical import to the specific professional context to which I belong- namely Catholic education in Scotland. Bell (1999, 27) notes the trend of researchers in education (amongst other disciplines) to be concerned with the practical impact of any research undertaken. Given the nature of the teaching profession, and the emphasis on continued professional development (SCES, 2016; GTCS, 2021), this trend is entirely understandable. Bell writes: “Having identified a problem during the course of their work, see the merit of investigation of it, and, if possible, of improving practice” (Bell 1999, 7). The problem to which Bell refers, will, of course, be different for each professional and be specific to their particular circumstances.

Teacher researchers are motivated not only to understand their situation, but also to improve it with their research typically grounded in practical concerns arising from their own classrooms (Leat, Lofthouse and Mitchell, 2017; Westbroek, Vermunt and Zitter, 2022). The knowledge generated by them is both contextual and practical since it is embedded within the day-to-day realities of pedagogy rather than abstract theorising (Leat, Lofthouse and Mitchell, 2017). The teacher researcher brings together the analytical tools of research and actions these within their own pedagogical environment. What teacher researchers have in common, however, is the fact that there exists no obvious answer or solution to the problem which they have – hence their motivation to engage in research as a means of finding practicable solutions that can be applied in real educational settings (Leat, Lofthouse and Mitchell, 2017; Westbroek, Vermunt and Zitter, 2022).

Within the literature review of the research there is a presentation and analysis of work exploring the identity of the Catholic teacher. The historical

circumstances that form the backdrop to the emergence of the lay teacher within the Church set the scene for a closer study of this distinct role or “vocation” (with the word choice being dependent on perspective). Crucial, however, is an awareness of what Church teaching and wisdom says about the essence of the Catholic teacher. Important too is an understanding of what is meant by the *call to witness* of the teacher (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977; Pope Paul VI, 1975) and how this has both developed and evolved within the time setting of this research - 1965 onwards. This takes on a particular meaning when applied to teachers in Catholic schools in Scotland where, as a pre-employment condition, every member of staff is legally required to gain Church Approval, thereby committing the way that they witness to their faith to paper:

A teacher appointed to any post on the staff of any such school by the education authority. . . shall be required to be approved as regards religious belief and character by representatives of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school has been conducted” (Education (Scotland) Act 1918; Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 21; Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 Sch).

This process requires that the applicant complete an application form stating their religious belief (if applicable) and character, as well as providing the details of a referee. In the case of a Catholic teacher applying for approval, the referee must be the teacher’s Parish Priest (Catholic Education Commission of Scotland, 2019). This requirement is also reflected in the nationally agreed SNCT framework for appointments to Catholic schools, which stipulates that Church approval is a condition of employment (SNCT, 2022). Academic analysis (Boyle, 2019; McKinney, 2018) highlights both the practicalities and controversies of this process, noting that the approval form provides only a succinct baseline of what the Bishops of Scotland expect from Catholic teachers—namely, that they are in

communion with the Catholic Church and that their Parish Priest is able to testify to this reality.

Of course, the Approval process is only applicable to Catholic teachers within a Catholic denominational setting. Key also, therefore, is that the Participants involved in generating this data have been selected from different points within this historical timeline to enable a further depth of scrutiny to their responses related to the potential impact of both socio-political change or religious situations or events.

As the third part of the literature review of the present thesis demonstrates, it is much easier to speak of what a teacher *does*, rather than *who they are*. Indeed, this question of teacher identity continues to be the foundational question upon which this work is constructed. Although research can be a means of strengthening practice in the field, and this may well be the hope of many educational researchers, it is of great importance that it is not the only motivating factor of research, and neither should it disproportionately affect the direction of the study.

### **3.8 Research Design and Professional Research Guidelines**

BERA's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* has again shaped the approach that I have taken to both the preparation and writing of the literature review, specifically:

When working with secondary or documentary data, the sensitivity of the data, who created it, the intended audience of its creators, its original purpose and its intended uses in the research are all important considerations (BERA, 2018, 11).

The quote above illustrates the importance of recognising and being aware of the contextual complexity of the landscape of the literature itself to any given study. This guidance, alongside Cresswell's (2014) priorities for selecting the material to be included in a literature review, have both shaped and informed decisions made throughout, with the researcher always mindful that, "In qualitative research, the literature helps substantiate the research problem" (Cresswell, 2014, 48). The literature chosen, therefore, has been selected precisely because of what it reveals about the overarching research question, either directly or indirectly. Sources that have informed the literature review have included journal articles, books or chapters relevant to the subject area, as well as conference papers, dissertations and online resources. These have been selected by identifying the key words associated with my research problem (Cresswell, 2014, 48, Bell, 2010, 85) and using these to search for sources via the University Library for in-print or literature available online, as well as employing references in useful sources as signposts to other relevant material. The range of sources consulted, and the range of opinions expressed in these sources, has also been subject to constant evaluation (Bell, 2010).

### **3.9 Authorship, Authority, and Voice in Church Teaching**

Naturally, given the question that frames this research, there are included within the literature review, many sources that could be described as 'religious' texts. It is, therefore, necessary to speak to the nature of these texts, namely their authority and relationship with other documents that have also been included.

As suggested by Muers and Grant (2017), examining and analysing religious texts in the same manner that other documents are approached can reveal insights

about the historical landscape of not only the content of the issue being discussed (as with *Lay Catholics* being written against the backdrop of the changing staff body—from Religious to Lay- within Catholic schools), but also of the religious institution itself, as well as the development or progression of theology within this community (Meurs and Grant, 2017).

Of course, documents do not simply appear, but instead are the product of an individual, or the collaboration of any number of people. Hunter's (2008) exploration of being part of a policy-writing group offers some helpful insights into the group dynamics that can affect writing processes, as well as the power dynamic between writers and institutions that can also exist (Hunter, 2008). Her observations serve to remind the reader of the complexity that underpins any writing of official documents, and the impossibility of extricating a document from its own landscape. However, when referring to religious texts, perhaps the process needs to be elaborated upon since it might be assumed, especially in the case of the Catholic Church where there exists an official teaching body, that all texts associated with the Church should be treated with equal authoritative weight. The result then is that the hierarchy of documents (referring to their importance) is not always apparent. Franchi (2013) highlights how linguistic and interpretative issues can obscure the relative authority of different ecclesial texts, while Franchi and Rymarz (2017) show how cultural and institutional contexts shape awareness of which documents are binding, advisory, or pastoral. Official teaching likewise distinguishes between different levels of authority: the International Theological Commission (1975) drew clear lines between the role of the Magisterium and that of theologians, while the Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) articulated its teaching in continuity with but distinct from

other magisterial pronouncements. As O'Collins and Farrugia (2013) explain, Catholic documents emerge from a layered teaching authority, and this complexity may create problems for Catholic educational policy makers or researchers who hold only a limited or fragmented understanding of what the Church teaches on any given topic.

This is also hindered by the multi-layered way in which the Church communicates and the difficulty in identifying a singular person responsible for writing a document. Church documents often represent a collegiate effort, rather than one singular voice. The journey of any given document then may include theologians, congregations, episcopal conferences, and of course, the Pope. Identifying similar challenges within the sphere of Religious Education, Franchi describes the situation as: "...a challenging mosaic of definitions and terms which seems to defy attempts at harmony" (Franchi, 2018, 2). This quote recognises the existence of potential conceptual irregularities or variations that can obscure a unified voice, whilst not committing fully to the idea of disharmony. In the same article, Franchi (2018) goes on to highlight the added complexity brought by the translation of documents into other languages and the risks that this process carries in terms of changes to meaning or emphasis.

What results from consulting Church documents is the presence of an institutional author, rather than a particular author. This does not mean that there was not a single author or that one person took a lead role in the process. In contrast to the other sources that have been used in this research, this can seem messy and unclear. Despite this reality, the overarching synthesis of thought communicated using these various sources remains intact and legitimate. In other words, provenance overlap does not stop the 'mind of the

Church' being communicated to the teachers who form the body of this study but rather offers a layered repetition or re-expression of the same unified deposit of faith.

In the same way, it is challenging to identify one voice in the many documents and guidelines produced by the statutory and non-statutory organisations with a locus in wider education policymaking. The result is that although there are key agencies which lead educational change, policies and guidelines are not always aligned with one another. Despite noting this complexity, however, it appears that the same intricacy does not exist within the context of the reception of such documents, either Church or governmental. In other words, documents produced by either institution appear to be accepted as either the thought or will of the given body which betrays perhaps a lack of scrutiny usually applied to other types of literature.

To help clarify the range of teaching documents within the Catholic Church, Hitchcock (2020) groups them into six categories. These categories are intended to be used as a primer for beginners to encourage access and understanding of Church documents. Included within these categories are Apostolic Constitutions which deal specifically with dogma or doctrine, and which are binding on the entire Church – at the top of the hierarchical scale – to guidelines issued on a number of issues. Of course, there are a variety of other document types that occur in between these two markers, each of varying authority within the Church. The six categories of documents described by Hitchcock (2020) are listed below. There are other explanations of types of documents within the Church (Kosmowski, 2018; Liturgy Office of England and Wales, 2018), but this one has been chosen because it provides a more manageable and usable outline.

In addition, the documents engaged with throughout this study have also been arranged into these categories to give a visual indication of resources that have been accessed within this hierarchy.

<p><b>Apostolic constitutions</b>, Papal Decrees and The Code of Canon Law:</p>	<p><b>Apostolic Exhortations</b>, Encyclicals, Apostolic Letters and Motu Proprio:</p>	<p><b>Instructions</b></p>		<p><b>Bishops' Conference Pastoral Letters, <i>Recognitio</i></b></p>	
<p>This is the most formal document type that can be issued by the Pope, usually addressing issues of faith affecting the Universal Church (or a part of it).</p>	<p>These are examples of Papal teaching documents that seek to explain or expound existing Church Law.</p>	<p>These are documents issued with the Pope's approval by congregations, which explain Church documents.</p>	<p><b>Dubia</b> A sub-category of instructions. Dubia are questions that may be asked of instructions that need further clarification.</p>		<p><b>Guidelines</b>  Issued by individual Bishops with authority only in their own diocese (but which cannot contradict</p>

					Universal Church Law).
<i>Fidei Depositum, The Code of Canon Law, Gravissimum educationis, Nostra aetate, Ad Gentes, Gaudium et spes</i>	<i>Veritatis Splendor, Amoris Laetitia, Evangelii Gaudium, Laudato Si', Centesimus Annus, Humanae Vitae, Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>	<i>Circular letter on religious education in schools - Congregation for Catholic Education, Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith - Congregation for Catholic Education  The Religious Dimension of Religious Education in a Catholic</i>		<i>This is Our Faith - Scottish Catholic Education Service</i>	<i>Archbishop J. Michael Miller C.S.B, Five essential marks of Catholic schools.</i>

		<i>School.  Congregation  for Catholic  Education  International  Theological  Commission.  Communion  and  Stewardship:  Human  Persons  Created in  the Image of  God.</i>			
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There are also more informal sources that may be referred to, such as an interview, web article or tweet from Pope Francis, for example. Though these examples are not binding in an authoritative way upon the Church, as is the case for an Apostolic letter, they are still able to show something of the *wisdom* of the Church. Examples include:

*Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to the United States: Meeting with Catholic educators at the Conference Hall of the Catholic University of America in Washington*

Pope Francis, *Messaggio del Santo Padre al Presidente della Conferenza Episcopale Spagnola in occasione del Congresso Nazionale dei Laici*

*Pope Francis, Message for World Mission Day*

In addition, the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, the official journal of the Holy See, also provides a further platform from which to communicate, and record Church teaching.

The choice to include any formal or more informal items within the literature review has been done sensitively and mindful of the context (both past and present) of the particular topic being discussed. Perhaps the most important point to be made about these documents, however, is the fact that all of them must be consonant with wider Church teaching, thus ensuring a consistency of message across all forms of communication. In other words, inclusion within this hierarchy of documents is reliant upon this premise. This too, is what I have sought to do specifically when deciding which Church literature (in its broadest definition) to include within this study. This claimed consistency of message, however, does not mean that the Church in all times expresses the same thoughts on any given topic. For example, this applies to the development in thought on the person of the teacher, since the transition from mainly religious to mainly lay people occupying these positions (McKinney, 2020). In the case of lay Catholic teachers, for instance, the practical reality of the methods and contexts in which they discharge their duties has changed significantly in the last forty years. This includes the integration of technology, pupil-centred learning, demands of continued professional learning, assessment arrangements and

inclusive education, to name but a few. The same is true of all teachers since the factors affecting change are not specific to the Catholic subset.

With regards to Catholic teachers specifically, and the changing demographics of Catholic schools, an evolving approach to catechesis in the school has been necessary. Catechesis applies only to those of the Catholic faith and candidates for sacramental initiation which, forty years ago would have represented the vast majority of those children and young people enrolled in Catholic schools. There is now a broader approach to Religious Education within Catholic schools which is cognisant of the demographic and pluralistic reality of Catholic schools in Scotland (Franchi, 2013).

This both recognises the wide-ranging debates surrounding the legitimacy of Religious Education forming part of any curriculum in modernity (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2009), whilst also recognising that the variety of background from which the recipients of RE in Catholic schools emerge impacts on approach. The Church maintains that Religious Education continues to be part of the Church's evangelising mission (*ibid*), but wider Catholic educational literature articulates the evolving, challenging or complementary (depending on perspective) relationship between catechesis and religious education (Franchi, 2013; Sultana, 2020). This is an important distinction for Catholic teachers which merits further exploration.

### **3.10 Ethical Approval**

It is standard practice that any researcher who wishes to engage in research involving participants must gain ethical approval from their institution. In the case of this research, my application was submitted to the University of

Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Ethical Review Board and approved in April 2023. This was a complex and time-consuming process but one which was fundamentally necessary to ensure the ethical legitimacy of the proposed research. In addition to this, it was key in helping crystallize both the practicalities of this study, as well as the ethical principles underpinning it.

### **3.11 Ethical Implications for Catholic Researchers**

BERA's 2018 guidelines take account of the diversity of those conducting educational research and the legitimacy of understanding and application of terms in a variety of contexts (BERA, 2018, 3). In addition, Guba and Lincoln (2018) state that: "Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective" (Guba and Lincoln, 2018, 11). Undoubtedly, there are many variables that can impact on research, but as stated above, every researcher approaches their research with a unique biography, each with its own complexities and possible partiality. Awareness of this, as well as the stringent process of applying for ethical approval within the institution sanctioning research, safeguards the validity and legitimacy of the research.

As well as the ethical standards applicable to all researchers, regardless of background and inherent within the ethical approval process, it is also worth reflecting on the intrinsic obligations to be found within a Catholic understanding of ontology that express something of the Church's expectations on the researcher. Though not separate from existing expectations, does the Church provide a unique understanding of ethical guidelines for Catholic researchers? For instance, within the Roman Catholic tradition, the human person is understood as being made in the image and likeness of God and is to be

treated in a way which not only respects this unique position, but which also allows this person to flourish. Translated into a research approach, Kearns (2014) argues: "...that the person represents the ultimate end towards which all research is ordered just as the person is the ultimate end of society" (Kearns, 2014, 149). If this is accepted as true by the Catholic researcher, then there is a particular way in which they are obligated to treat the subjects of their research. Rather than a claim to ethical superiority of Catholic researchers, these questions simply explore the impact on the application of ethical standards in light of the researcher's background. Not only is the Catholic researcher bound by the ethical demands of their educational institution, but they are also bound by the ethical demands placed on them by their personal faith commitment - demands not time limited to the duration of their research, but rather a life-long obligation towards others.

As a Catholic social science researcher, it is also important for me to reflect upon the perspective that my own biography affords me. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: "It is an illusion to claim moral neutrality in scientific research and its applications" (CCC, 1993, §2249). This statement echoes the reality of the existence of a biography for any given researcher, but it also goes further, articulating clearly what is implicit within ethical approval applications – that research carried out is about more than technical performance and also is subject to "fundamental moral criteria", specifically that respect of the human person remains central to any research conducted (CCC, 1993, §2249). This lens is, of course, applicable to all aspects of this research and not simply something which is limited to a sub-section within a methodology chapter.

### 3.12 Research Questions: A Foundation for Inquiry

The study will be framed around three main questions which will allow a broad exploration of the following key themes:

- a. Are there identifiable characteristics of a Catholic Teacher in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?
- b. How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity?
- c. To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed education system?

By seeking to investigate whether there are professional and personal characteristics distinct to Catholic teachers, the research aims to analyse deeply the very essence of the Catholic teacher, as experienced by Participants who live and work in a particular place at a particular time. Flowing from the overarching research question, questions a-c above incorporate the personal and professional, political and religious spheres of existence for Participants. They do this in a way which seeks to understand further the relationship between each, and any subsequent effects these have on the conceptual and self-understanding of the Catholic teacher for each Participant, both as individuals and as representative/reflective of Catholic teachers in Scotland more broadly. Consequently, the research will require Participants to reflect critically upon their own professional experiences. The nature of the phenomenon to be investigated in the study lends itself to qualitative rather than quantitative research since qualitative research delves into the context and experience of participants in order to understand and excavate more fully the problem identified as a motivation for research (Schmid, 1981; Kirk and Miller, 1986). The overarching research question framing this study is driven by seeking to understand whether there is shared understanding of professional identity across

a sample of Catholic teachers which is best suited to this type of qualitative approach.

### **3.13 Historical Context of Teacher Formation: Education Reform and Vatican II**

In keeping with the qualitative nature of the research, the data for the enquiry was generated via semi-structured interviews. This type of interview, without strict parameters determining all aspects of the interaction between researcher and participant, is, "...the most direct and straightforward approach to gathering detailed and rich data regarding a particular phenomenon" (Barrett and Twycross, 2018, 52). The interviews took place with 16 teachers who qualified in, or after, 1965.

1965 is a year of great significance both in terms of educational development in Scotland and in the life of the Catholic Church. In the sphere of education, these changes are captured in the Primary Memorandum (Scottish Education Department, 1965), signalling the move toward a more child-centred pedagogical approach. This climate of change and educational reform continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s with the shift toward comprehensivisation and, ultimately, the reshaping of Scottish secondary schools (Paterson, 2003; Bryce and Humes, 2013). The subsequent effects of these changes would continue to influence Scottish education across the second half of the twentieth century (Bryce and Humes, 2013).

For the Catholic Church and, by extension Catholic schools, 1965 coincides with the closing of the three-year Second Vatican Council, a watershed event that saw the Church discern how best to engage with the modern world (O'Malley, 2008). Among the Council's sixteen documents was *Gravissimum Educationis*

(Second Vatican Council, 1965), which is of particular significance for Catholic schools and Catholic teachers (Abbott, 1966). Scholarly reflection has noted both its historical context and its ongoing importance for Catholic educational philosophy (Grace, 2002; McKinney, 2008). As such, 1965 signals a point of departure in which Catholic schools and Catholic teachers were presented with a dual renegotiation of conceptualisations of education and of Church.

The examples explored above simply direct our attention to the changes and developments that took place during a period characterised by widespread social and cultural change, paralleled in both society and the Catholic Church.

Greenwood and Guner (2010) state that: “There may be no better illustration of social change than the sexual revolution that occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” (893). Brown (2009) also speaks of: “...the cultural rift between Catholicism and the liberal-pluralist societies of Europe culminating in the rift of Vatican II in the 1960’s and the complex changes in religious practice that resulted” (Brown, 2009, 226). All of which makes this time period an especially rich one to explore.

Questions used during interviews were based on the three key themes researched as part of the literature review: namely *Identity*, *Teacher Identity* and, finally, *Catholic Teacher Identity*. Whilst there are undoubtedly practical limitations on the number of interviews that a sole researcher can undertake, advertising for participants in all eight dioceses of Scotland, provided a meaningful and representative sample.

### **3.14 Research Setting**

It is important to understand the context in which the research is situated.

Within Scotland, there exists a unique statutory Church and State partnership, a partnership that has existed since the Education (Scotland) Act, 1918. According to the Scottish Catholic Education Service (2009), there are currently over 50 Roman Catholic Secondary Schools in Scotland, representing around 14% of the overall secondary provision in Scotland. These establishments exist entirely within the state provision and receive no financial support from the Catholic Church. It should also be noted that there are currently two independent Roman Catholic Secondary Schools within this landscape who each belong, along with their state colleagues, to a diocese.

### **3.15 Recruitment of Participants for this Study**

I am a member of the National Association of Religious Education Advisers in Scotland (NARCREA). This association includes representatives in education from every Roman Catholic diocese in Scotland. In order to ensure a geographical and historical spread of Participants from across Scotland, colleagues from this association were asked to promote participation in this research via their Diocesan Education Office webpages and social media platforms. The Bishops' Conference of Scotland was also asked to grant permission for an advert for Participants to be placed in parishes throughout their dioceses, as well as for their permission to utilise Diocesan offices for interviews, rather than Local Authority establishments. The advert detailed that Participants should be teachers (both active and retired) who may work within or outwith a secondary schools denominational setting and gave an indication of the time commitment involved (between 60 and 90 minutes). At all times I sought to ensure that, as

far as was possible (based on those that had volunteered), an even number of men and women from a cross-section of Scotland (representative of each of the eight Catholic Dioceses) were approached for interview. Cognisant of the time period specified in the study, ensuring a spread of Participants who are or were working as Catholic teachers in Scotland from 1965 to the present day was also important (Please see Appendix 2: Research Participant Summary).

The response to the call for Participants was very positive and necessitated some discernment (based on the points above as well as the limitations of a sole researcher) to determine which Participants would be interviewed. Of the 54 people who made contact (23 men, and 31 women), the majority resided in the Diocese of Motherwell and the Archdiocese of Glasgow. Given the number of Catholics, as well as schools and parishes within these two dioceses, this was to be anticipated (Catholic-Hierarchy, 2026).

After each volunteer made contact, a Participant Information Sheet was sent to them, accompanied by an email that asked in which year they had qualified as a teacher and explained the subsequent steps of the research process. This initial stage was important for ensuring that Participants were fully informed about the aims of the study, the expectations placed upon them, and the ways in which their data would be used. Once this information was collected, I grouped Participants into five-year intervals according to their year of qualification. This strategy allowed me to visualise and organise the potential sample across the wide timeframe under consideration, and to ensure that experiences from different periods of educational and ecclesial change were represented.

Selection priority was first given to ensuring representation across the full historical range of qualification dates (1965–present). Within each five-year interval, participants were then selected to achieve as close as possible to gender balance and diocesan spread. Where multiple volunteers fell within the same interval and demographic category, decisions were guided by the aim of maximising diversity of subject specialism and school context. This structured approach ensured that selection was criterion-led rather than convenience-based.

At this point, three Participants decided not to proceed to the interview stage, either because of time commitments or other personal reasons. Even with these withdrawals, more volunteers remained than could feasibly be interviewed. . . . This necessitated the adoption of a purposive, criterion-based sampling strategy (Patton, 2002), whereby participants were selected according to their capacity to contribute meaningfully to the aims of the study rather than for statistical representation. In this case, mindful of both the historical spread of experience and the importance of gender balance, I deliberately chose Participants who together could offer the broadest possible coverage of professional and ecclesial experience across the timeframe.

This selection process was not straightforward, since each volunteer brought unique insights and experiences that could have enriched the study. Making these choices required balancing inclusivity with the practical constraints of time and resources, and I sought to manage this tension with transparency and sensitivity. Accordingly, I contacted those who were not selected for interview individually, explained the rationale for my decision, and expressed gratitude for their generosity in offering to participate. This step was significant both

ethically and personally, ensuring that all volunteers felt respected and valued, even if they were not included in the final interview sample.

While the number of volunteers exceeded those ultimately interviewed, the depth of engagement required for semi-structured interviews and subsequent thematic analysis meant that approximately 15-20 interviews represented the upper limit that could be undertaken rigorously by a sole doctoral researcher within the timeframe of the project. Sixteen interviews therefore reflected the maximum feasible sample size while still allowing detailed and iterative analysis of each participant's contribution.

This approach resulted in 16 interviews in total, made up of 6 men and 10 women, representing 5 of the 8 Roman Catholic Dioceses in Scotland. Though the project was open to all Catholic secondary teachers, regardless of whether they had taught or were teaching in a Catholic school, it should be noted as a potentially influencing factor on the representational nature of the data that there are no Catholic secondary schools in two of the dioceses (Argyl and the Isles, and Aberdeen). This may, in part, explain why there were no volunteers from these dioceses. Although Galloway Diocese has 4 Catholic schools, this Diocese was also not represented by Participants. The Dioceses of Motherwell and Paisley represent the most balanced ratio of Participant to schools (12 schools - 7 Participants and 8 schools - 4 Participants respectively), with St Andrew's and Edinburgh and Dunkeld Dioceses being more sparsely represented (10 schools - 1 Participant and 4 schools<sup>4</sup> - 1 Participant respectively). The

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<sup>4</sup> This is the branch of the Roman Catholic Curia charged with defending Catholic teaching on faith and Morals. Since 1965, this office has been known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and is now, since 2022, known as the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Archdiocese of Glasgow, in which 21 secondary schools reside, represented the biggest imbalance with only 3 Participants taking part in the study. Whilst these statistics are important to acknowledge in terms of transparency, and in terms of impact on the study to fully express local variations, achieving exhaustive coverage of the whole of Scotland was not possible given the make-up of the cohort of potential Participants.

At the recruitment stage, women volunteers represented 57% of those that came forward, whilst men represented 42.5%, showing a female majority. This majority increased slightly at interview stage to 62.5% of women and 37.5% of men. Although this is roughly in line with the fact that women now make up almost two-thirds of the Scottish secondary teachers in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2024), the slight decrease in men from recruitment to interview phase was owing to duplication within 5-year spans of male volunteers. Of the 12 potential increments, male volunteers accounted for 8, with the remaining 4 attracting no potential Participants. Of these 8 potential Participants, 1 withdrew owing to ill-health, and 1 decided they no longer wished to be part of the project. Female volunteers represented 10 of the 12 potential increments, with the remaining two increments receiving no potential Participants. The study would have required 24 male and female volunteers to cover every 5-year increment, and although possible in theory, this would have been ambitious in practice for a sole researcher. However, despite there being no available or suitable Participants for two of these 5-year increments, given that time periods overlapped (1965-1970, 1970-1965), broad coverage over a 6-decade period was still achieved by this sample.

In total, 54 volunteers responded to the initial call. Three withdrew prior to interview. From the remaining volunteers, 16 participants were purposively selected to ensure generational coverage and gender balance within the practical constraints of a sole researcher. The reduction from initial expressions of interest to final sample therefore reflects structured selection rather than attrition or exclusion based on perspective.

### **3.16 Data Generation**

Interviews were chosen as the sole means by which data will be generated for this study.

Whilst the initial ethics application also included a focus group, ongoing methodological discussions with my supervisors ultimately resulted in my removing this method from the application. Key to this decision was the nature of the relationships among key stakeholders who would be invited to take part. After further reflection on available methods, it was felt that the group environment of a focus group could impact negatively on the data generated, specifically when considering personalities involved and possible negative impacts on group discussions (Barbour, 2001; Morgan, 1997). These various individuals, and the groups that they represent, are well known to each other, their professional paths having crossed through national committees and working groups. In addition to these cooperative activities, there also remain individual remits and organisational objectives which, whilst serving the Scottish Catholic educational community, can also sometimes differ significantly. Mindful of the observations of Sim and Waterfield (2019), I ultimately decided to remove focus groups as a method within this research: “Although focus group participants can decline to respond to a particular question...they may not be able to divert the

discussion away from a topic that they find uncomfortable” (Sim and Waterfield, 2019, 3005; Newcomer et al., 2015). Conscious of the potential for this to lead to weakened consent of each individual taking part, this decision seemed logical to safeguard the ethical obligations implicit within the research approach.

Semi-structured interviews are a standard method of research within an orthodox social science enquiry. I used this method precisely because it is a well-tested toolkit for researchers. Similar approaches show that themes and commonalities will emerge from this style of interview, though I am also aware of the risk of a reluctance of Participants to mention material other than the agreed list of topics to be covered (Corbin, 2015, 39). One of the key reasons for selecting this method of data generation is that “...the semi-structured interview also allows for discovery, with space to follow topical trajectories as the conversation unfolds” (Magaldi and Berler, 2020, 4825). In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews fits very well within the intellectual puzzle framing the research - namely a reflective dialogue that explores the lived experiences of Participants (Galletta, 2013). The Interview Guide that was prepared broadly followed the structure of the literature review with questions centred on four main areas. These were: Identity; Teacher Identity; Catholic Identity and The Scottish Context. In addition, there was an initial *context* section at the beginning of the interview which asked broad questions about the timeframe of the research as well as the professional journeys of the Participants.

The majority of interviews took place in a diocesan office. Where this arrangement was not convenient for the Participant, a suitable alternative was discussed with them and with my supervisors and risk assessment protocol

applied. Each interview was preceded with a brief explanation of the project, and the interview process itself (See Appendix 4: Interview Guide). The sections into which the questions were divided reflected the way that the overarching research questions had been explored in the Review of Literature. In addition, I clarified how generated data would be protected and processed, as well as the timeframe for withdrawal of consent. Time was also set aside for Participants to ask any further questions and to read and sign the consent form.

Each interview began by inviting Participants to speak about their own teaching journey, where this featured within the timeframe of the study, what kinds of contexts that they had worked in and what they were able to observe more broadly about events or changes that were also happening during this period. The subsequent three sections (2-4) sought to acknowledge the complexity of the concept of identity by asking questions that moved from the conceptual to the personal - from an enquiry about Participants' understanding of identity in the abstract to how they understood their own identity as a whole, and then through the lens of professional and religious identity. The final section of the interview was geographically specific to Scotland and sought to elicit observations from Participants about the relationship between denominational schools (specifically Roman Catholic) and the Scottish Government.

Time was built in at the end of the interview for any questions that Participants may have had about the process or next steps, but also any observations that would improve the interview process for others. The interview guide was refined using a small-scale pilot test with two volunteer individuals who had not volunteered to participate in the research itself. These individuals qualified as part of the target group but because of personal relationship with me as

researcher, and the potential of this to compromise the data, they were not suitable for participation in the project. The purpose of this exercise was not to produce data, but to create a space in which the interview guide, timing, and my interview style could be tested. The informal interactions of these pilot interviews afforded me the opportunity to clarify the wording and ordering of some of the questions as well as address more practical issues such as time management and use of recording equipment.

The thematic coding and analysis of the data was largely shaped by Braune and Clarke's (2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Building on the foundations of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), this re-articulated approach allows the coding process to be understood as a living part of data analysis which serves as a safeguard to the creativity and integrity of both the data and the research project as a whole:

The coding process requires a continual bending back on oneself - questioning and querying the assumptions we are making in interpreting and coding the data. These are analysis outputs developed through and from the creative labour of our coding (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 594).

The process described above was a lengthy one in practice, both because of the volume of data collected, but also because of the desire to faithfully and comprehensively present this data to the best of my ability. What Braun and Clarke (2019) describe here is the core work of the qualitative researcher - an organic and iterative engagement with data.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis : Approach, Structure and Limitations**

Having outlined the research design throughout this chapter, as well as the data collection methods employed, the following section introduces the data analysis methods and how these have addressed the overarching research questions of the study. These questions shared the common thread of seeking to comprehend at some level how those interviewed understood questions around identity. More specifically, the questions asked sought to probe the many facets of a person's individual identity and how this interacted with, or was shaped by, the relationship between their personal and professional identities, as well as the context in which these interactions took place.

Data generated via interviews was transcribed and reflexively thematically analysed using methods and principles of qualitative data analysis, most notably: "...deep and prolonged data immersion, thoughtfulness and reflection, something that is active and generative" (Braune and Clarke, 2019, 591). This activity is far from passive (Hennink, 2007), and is not limited to analysing an interview transcript, but rather occurs on a continuum from initial contact right through to the writing of research findings. In other words, "themes do not passively emerge from data" (Braun and Clarke, 2019) but are instead the result of constant reflexivity on the part of the researcher. The themes, and indeed sub-themes, that emerged from analysing the data evolved over time and through my continual interaction with the data. The thematic analysis, however, was continually guided and directed by the over-arching research questions and the theoretical framework in which the study is situated. A detailed overview of the iterative development and refinement of codes is provided in Appendix 5. Information gathered was studied and compared to identify concepts and

relationships - in other words it was thematically analysed. Boyatzis (1998) argues that thematic analysis is not a method in and of itself and goes on to say that rather it is a method that can be found in many different approaches to research - and is therefore not tied to one approach. Conversely, Braun and Clarke (2006) state that it *is* a method in its own right and should be viewed as: "...a foundational method for qualitative analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 26). Though Boyatzis and Braun and Clarke may think differently about thematic analysis, all share the sentiment of the freedom and flexibility inherent in this approach to analysis without diminishing the rigour and academic soundness necessary in any form of data analysis.

The research looks at the responses and actions of individuals and as a collective group of Catholic teachers to "...organizational changes, establishing and maintaining workplace practices, identity transformations..." (Flick, 2017, 3). The type of data gathered throughout this research is hence often referred to as "soft" (i.e. rich in descriptive data), as opposed to the more 'scientific' algorithmic data associated with quantitative research. However, given the key research questions above, and the intention that this data inform policy and practice, this qualitative framework was deemed most likely to yield fruitful results.

The sixteen semi-structured interviews that I undertook between September 2023 and September 2024 were transcribed and coded manually according to emerging themes that related directly to the overarching research questions. This method of interviewing allowed a level of flexibility and encouraged a conversation between interviewer and interviewee. There were five distinct areas for discussion within each interview: (1) Context; (2) Identity; (3) Teacher

Identity; (4) Catholic Identity; and (5) The Scottish Context. The way these were approached and ordered varied for each interview in recognition of the overlapping nature of the themes, but also to allow interviewees to feel comfortable and to encourage a level of ownership over the sharing of their own story, an approach in line with the 'adventure' aspect of Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 592).

Data analysis software was carefully considered and discussed with my supervisors, but I decided, given my positionality as expressed in the Insider-Outsider paradigm within which this research resides, that manually coding the data would retain the orientation towards relational and reflexive interpretation most fruitfully. Although recognising the research benefits of data analysis software for larger projects, I felt that computer assisted coding frameworks and the subsequent risk of fragmentation of meaning, could result in the minimisation of the primary analytical lens of the study. In other words, I engaged with the data from the dual perspective of someone who is a member of the group being researched and is apart from the group in the role of qualitative researcher. The audio data from interviews was revisited on multiple occasions and the transcriptions reviewed simultaneously to elicit key themes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage process outlined below:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the report

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, 87)

The first stage of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis process asks the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data. I did this by listening, and revisiting iteratively each of the recordings, sometimes as whole, individual interviews, and sometimes listening to the same section of each of the 16 interviews. This allowed me to gradually compile a list of initial codes based on themes that emerged from the data. As anticipated, and reflective of the attention paid to the valuable data collected in each of the recordings, these initial codes were abundant and wide-ranging. Although all of the data generated is of potential interest to the broad area of Catholic educational research, it was necessary for the integrity of the research focus of this study to continually review and distil the themes through the lens of the three overarching research questions. The transcribed data was then arranged into a singular, thematically coded document which broadly outlined the chapters in which the findings are presented. This process ensured an intimate connection and depth of understanding between researcher and the generated data.

The chosen methodological framework yielded much illuminating data which will be explored in the forthcoming chapters. A section exploring limitations of the study follows.

#### 4.1 Methodological Limitations

While the research has contributed original knowledge to the field of Catholic teacher identity, it is also important to recognise and reflect upon the limitations of the study. This is a necessary and important reflexive process for any researcher, both for the researcher's own continued development and competency, and as a methodological contribution to future projects. These limitations concern the scope of the study, the chosen data gathering technique and the positionality of the researcher.

The scope of the study is limited to active and retired Catholic Secondary school teachers in Scotland and therefore it cannot be assumed that the findings would be reflected in an equivalent primary cohort, or indeed in cohorts of Catholic teachers in other geographical contexts. Therefore, there is no suggestion or presumption within the study that the Participants interviewed are in any way representative of the whole teaching community of Scotland.

The decision to employ semi-structured interviews as the sole means of data generation, is discussed and defended earlier in this chapter. The focus on depth rather than breadth that this approach afforded allowed me to explore in detail what it was like for Participants to be teachers in this period, in a way that reflected my own ethnographic interest in telling their stories. Despite the richness and breadth of the data, however, it should be acknowledged that this resulted in a smaller sample size. Therefore, the data gathered has limited statistical and generalised value (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Rather, what is presented provides *analytical* generalisability (Yin, 2018) whereby the findings, although not representative, can nevertheless contribute

to debates around Catholic identity, secularisation and the intersectionality of faith and education.

Whilst not in any way undermining the sincerity of Participants, the possibility of recall bias must be flagged as a potential limitation. To editorialise experiences is instinctual but can result in a compromised recollection of past events whereby Participants reorder or mis-remember experiences from their current perspective. This includes key historical events from the timeline of the study and the possible distortion of memory that may occur between the first-hand experience of an event, and the recollection of the same event. This makes it essential for any experiences reported by Participants within interviews to be benchmarked against wider changes in the time-period in question, as well as against the whole data set and key texts.

In a study such as this, concentrated as it is on the intersection of the personal, professional and faith life of the Catholic teacher, it is also pertinent to address the possibility of social desirability bias in Participant answers. Given my own positionality as an employee of the two dioceses, as well as the nature of the issues discussed, it must be acknowledged that the inclination toward or probability of this particular bias may be increased (Fisher, 1993). Though my current role carries with it no recruitment or interview responsibilities, it would be remiss not to entertain the possibility that Participants may have wished to present themselves in way that they deemed more acceptable to the Church, and therefore to me as a representative of the Church.

In order to mitigate these risks, I explained both in writing (by way of the Participant Information sheet), and at the beginning and end of each interview,

that any data would be treated confidentially. I also explained, as per my data management plan, how interview data would be treated, as well as the process undertaken to remove any identifiers. This approach was adopted to ensure Participants felt secure and comfortable in expressing their thoughts and experiences, even if these were at odds with the Church's position, or in tension with my role as adviser in the diocese. Supervision meetings were also an essential part of my own reflexivity throughout. These discussions, and the advice received from my supervisors, helped me to constantly and consistently reflect on what I had heard in interviews, but also on my own practice as an interviewer and analyst of the data.

On occasion, when Participants shared personal or upsetting experiences that had shaped or changed their understanding of their own identity, I found it difficult to maintain the required analytical distance. In these instances, recognising the emotional cost of recounting such difficult experiences, my response was primarily empathetic towards Participants. This posture meant that the usual degree of detachment associated with analytical work was, at times, temporarily disrupted. However, far from invalidating the data, this acknowledgment highlights how important it is to be aware of, and reflect upon, the impact that emotional dynamics can have upon the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Indeed, empathetic engagement is not only an instinctual way to treat another person in distress but is also essential in building trust between interviewer and Participant and creating a safe and secure interview environment where sensitive experiences and issues can be freely explored (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Some of the experiences shared in interviews were not only personally distressing for Participants but also impacted on my own emotional well-being. Whilst acknowledging at the outset the emotional cost involved in qualitative fieldwork (Hubbard et al., 2001), these particular experiences required me to seek, under the guidance of my supervisors, professional support. My actions demonstrate not only practitioner reflexivity, but also an awareness of the integral relationship of researcher well-being with rigorous and ethical qualitative research (Wray et al., 2007).

Although constant attention is paid to the inclination toward potential bias born of the positionality and experiences of the researcher, and reflexive safeguards employed to mitigate this, interpretation of data is never objective in the purest sense but rather mediated by the researcher and interpreted through their own interpretive framework. The data generated during the interview process is co-constructed between researcher and Participant (Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2018) and, as such, is shaped by interview settings and relationship dynamics between interviewer and Participant. In addition, the freedom and flexibility of semi-structured interviews gave Participants room to explore their experiences more deeply and allowed nuance to emerge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). At the same time, it is prudent to recognise that this *can* result in inconsistencies of Participant experience depending on the order and phrasing of questions (Finlay, 2002). This possibility of inconsistency increases especially where an unforeseen issue or experience is introduced by the Participant to the interview.

Limitations can never be completely eliminated from the research process. Rather, by acknowledging the limitations of the study in parallel with explanations of the strategies and actions put in place to mitigate against any

undermining of the research, the findings of the research are strengthened, not weakened.

## **4.2 Data Analysis Structure**

The following sections provide a comprehensive summary of how the data has been arranged to address the research questions:

- a. Are there identifiable characteristics of a Catholic Teacher in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?
- b. How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity?
- c. To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed education system?

It is important to emphasise that the themes and sub-themes presented in the analysis were not pre-determined. Instead, they emerged inductively from the interview data through a process of coding, categorisation, and reflexive engagement with the transcripts (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019). This allowed the participants' own accounts to shape the structure of the findings, ensuring that the analysis is grounded in their lived experiences rather than imposed from a pre-existing theoretical framework.

The subsequent data analysis chapters are therefore arranged around these three guiding research questions, but the thematic content within each is derived directly from the participants' responses.

## **4.3 Research Question 1: Are there identifiable characteristics of Catholic Teachers in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?**

This section encompasses 54% of the data collected, and therefore a substantial number of themes and sub-themes into which the data has been organised:

Themes	Sub-Themes
1.2 Identity	
1.3 Teacher Identity	1.3.1 Changing role of the teacher  1.3.2 Changing view of the teacher
1.4 Catholic Teacher identity	1.4.1 Interactions with young people  1.4.2 Catholic teacher as witness  1.4.3 Catholic teaching as vocation
1.5 Nature of education	
1.6 Distinct identity of Catholic schools	

The volume of data collected is reflective of the inherent dynamism of a concept such as identity. Hall (1996, p222) states that identity should not be viewed as “an already accomplished fact”, but rather as a “production’ which is never complete, always in process”. Several Participants, when asked about

events that may have changed or shaped their understanding of their own identity, certainly attested to Hall’s observation when they quickly and articulately spoke of significant events - both positive and negative - that supported the evolving nature of identity. It is also reflective of the complexity that surrounds the interaction of personal and professional identities, and the concepts that underpin the environment within which this reality is exercised - namely the school, or more specifically for 13 out of the 16 Participants interviewed, the Catholic school.

**4.4 Research Question 2: How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity?**

Themes	Sub-Themes
2.1 Catholic Identity	2.1.1 Catholic Community Identity
2.2 Changes in Education	2.2.1 Qualifications
2.3 Catholicism and contemporary Scottish society	

The second research question, explored through the themes and sub-themes identified above, sought to shift the perspective of Participants to events or changes outside of the classroom or the school that may have changed a personal or shared understanding of Catholic teacher identity. Almost 12% of the

entire data set is contained within the first theme of this section alone: *Catholic identity*. Of course, the teaching profession, or the Catholic school was used as a reference point in approaching the interview questions within this section, but answers and observations were wide-ranging: from personal experiences and crises, to an articulation of the lived reality of communal Catholicism. In addition, Participants expressed cognisance and criticality of changes in education that had taken place during the time period being discussed, specifically in relation to Scottish society.

**4.5 Research Question 3: To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed education system?**

Themes	Sub-Themes
3.1 Catholic schools in Scotland	3.1.1 Catholic schools and the Scottish Government
3.2 Governmental overreach	

The third section into which the data has been collated differs from the first two sections. This is because the data collected is specifically about the existence of Catholic schools in Scotland and their relationship with the Scottish Government. However, this is not to say that the data will not be of value to those in other geographical and political contexts. Observations from Participants that explore the politicisation of education and the challenges that denominational

educational offerings within school systems could be applied to other circumstances, especially where this relationship is contentious. Participants expressed both positive and negative opinions about the Scottish education landscape – through lived experiences as well as potential future situations. Whilst the first two sections contained broad and deep question areas that were answered or approached quite individually, this last section proved more straightforward for Participants to engage with.

In summary, this chapter has outlined the theoretical framework, research design, data collection methods, and ethical considerations of the research. In addition, I have contextualised my approach by further exploring the unique perspective with which the work has been undertaken thus establishing the foundations upon which the interpretation and exploration of the data will seek to address the research questions. The decision to move straight to data analysis was made to retain a direct link between the choice to employ Reflexive Thematic Analysis explored so thoroughly by Braun and Clarke and the subsequent understanding of the researcher as “Storyteller” (Braun et al, 2019, 848) within their interpretation. I am, however, mindful of the disadvantages associated with Narrative Research and the possible bleed of approaches that could occur because of lack of vigilance on the part of the researcher, namely that the researcher loses sight of their role as “story analyst” (Ntinda, 2019, 420). In addition, it was my desire to avoid “domain summaries” (Braun et al, 2019, 846) which, given the framework outlined in this chapter, I felt would dispassionately present the data, rather than capture the “...fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience” (Bukamal, 2022, 60). Rather than

presenting a distinct findings chapter therefore, the analysis will be presented concurrently in the following chapters.

## Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Findings

### Introduction

The present chapter analyses each one of the research questions, examined within the context of the literature review, and answers them in light of the data collected from 16 semi-structured interviews. The questions asked find their origin in the overarching research questions:

- a. Are there identifiable characteristics of a Catholic Teacher in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?
- b. How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity?
- c. To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed education system?

The interviews produced data and themes much wider and with greater depth than anticipated. Despite the high-quality nature of the data collected, and my desire as a researcher to present as full and comprehensive a picture of the data as possible, space dictates that not every theme can be discussed within the study. My intention, however, is that some would prove to be a valuable data source for future publications in the same field.

This chapter will focus on what I have determined are the core themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the data, and which serve to answer the first of the three over-arching research questions referenced above. Data not referenced in this chapter has been thematically coded as *adverse formative experiences* (which emerged from questions about events that changed or altered an individual's understanding of their own identity).

What follows is a presentation of reflexively analysed data, from the perspective of the researcher as a vigilant "Storyteller" (Braun et al, 2019, 848) and "story

analyst” (Ntinda, 2019, 420). As explored within the Methodology chapter, it was my desire to capture the “...fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience” (Bukamal, 2022, 60) whilst avoiding any sense of detached analysis of the data. The sections that follow each research question have emerged from the transcribed data.

## **5.1 Research Question 1: Are there identifiable characteristics of Catholic Teachers in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?**

### **(i) Identity**

In recognition of the challenging nature of concept-based questions, I asked a word association question about the term identity, before moving onto questions specifically related to the Participant’s understanding of their own identity.

Though pauses before answers are not captured within transcripts, *all* Participants did just that before articulating a response to how they would describe their own identity. It could be argued that this was the case because the previous question simply asked about their teaching journey and contexts in which they had taught and that the juxtaposition of an experiential versus an existential line of questioning took a period of adjustment. It could also be argued that the pauses contained an awareness of the much-debated nature of identity and the fragmented individual understanding that can follow (Hall, 1992). There again, the pause may represent the effects of a cognitive dissonance present in much of the identity literature reviewed, whereby traditional cultural contexts through which individuals would have articulated their identity have either been replaced, confused or fused with an individually created identity inherent to post-modern, post-structural theories of identity (Trueman, 2020). In this case, an interviewee (to a greater or lesser extent depending on the individual and their experience) may well be processing these

changes and evaluating the impact upon on their understanding of their own identity. In other words, Participants were consciously or sub-consciously navigating the "...individual agency and control" (Stets 2021, 298) that much of the literature observed was characteristic of modernity (Britzman, 1992; Hall, 1992; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011).

There followed a range of responses to this question. Participant 42 observed the complexity of discussing identity by stating: "It's so big and so small all at the same time (PI42)". Participant 10 commented on the challenging task of separating aspects of identity reflective of the experiential and existential observation made above: "And I think it's really difficult to describe it [identity] without doing it in terms of roles" (PI10). This last comment highlights the transition of thought required to consider and articulate identity, the stripping away of the things that we do to reflect on the things that we are. In other words, the functional aspects of the job, and the sociological backdrop in which we have been formed, can obscure a holistic understanding of identity (Britzman,1992) and make it more challenging to articulate.

Participants 49 and 6 spoke of their identity in relation to God very early on in their interviews, despite God not having been mentioned in the questions: "I know who I am and I know how I am immersed in this great mystery of God, God's life and God's vocation for me..." (PI49) and: "With identity - it's about my closeness to God and that helps me do everything else" (PI6). These comments speak to a personal faith and relationship with God founded on the belief that identity is found within this relationship - and from this flows all other actions. It is important for the integrity of the study when conducted within an Insider/Outsider paradigm (Asselin, 2003) to diligently undertake the required

detailed reflection (Bukamel, 2022) to avoid bias and consider why Participants used religious language in the first instance.

The immediate referencing to God could be because the Participants understood that they were participating in research which looked specifically at the experience of Catholic teachers, or that my professional positionality was known to them, or even that the place of interview (most often a diocesan office) created an environment where they could safely express their thoughts using religious language. They could also have used this language because of a perceived expectation of what they thought I would like to hear as a Catholic researcher. The sometimes private and challenging nature of Participant contributions, however, would suggest that Participants were authentically engaging with the questions presented to them (See Appendix 1: Adverse Formative Experiences).

In a similar way, Participant 11 referenced Christian obligations as key to their identity: "Your identity has to be, and maybe in particular in a Catholic and Christian context, about giving yourself to other people in a way that's not about your self-aggrandisement" (P11). Each of these responses approaches self-identity not as a blank canvas to be populated by the individual, but rather as a question answered through the lens of relationality with God. Words such as "immersed" and "closeness" when describing God, as well as the confident tone used by Participants 49 and 16, project an assured and secure understanding of self-identity. Participant 11 further develops this line of thought by describing a disposition congruent with the earlier comments of Participant 49 and 16, namely one that serves the other without seeking personal advancement. This sentiment echoes Taylor's theory that selfhood or self-identity is intimately

connected with morality (Taylor, 1989). In other words, what an individual holds as guiding values is where their identity is to be found (Forde et al, 2006).

Three Participants referred to the changing cultural understanding of identity in their lifetimes, or currently: “within the time period I’ve grown up in...” (P149); “The world we’re growing up in is much more about self, more about me” (P15); and: “Obviously, the word identity is in the media and in the news a lot at the moment, but that’s to do with how people are choosing to identify versus what might be inherent to them” (P110). These responses mirrored Giddens’s (1991) observations of the fluidity of identity in post-modernity. They also indicated an awareness of identity being covered more frequently in the media and society in general. This view is in chorus with the “Profound and rapid changes” of the age commented on in *Gaudium et Spes* (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §4) as well as modernity’s unsettling of established cultures (Hall, 1996), and therefore by implication, individuals within those cultures.

The comments made in the paragraph above by Participants 5 and 10 point towards broader issues such as identity as a personal, rather than communal reality and Trueman’s (2020) observation of the move towards identity by choice, both of which are at odds with the Church’s position as set out in the review of literature (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*; Pope John Paul II, 1999; Pope Francis, 2016) in which a person’s identity finds its origin in God. Though this by no means oppositional towards individuality or unique talents or gifts, it is consistently emphasised that individuals are invited into relationship with God: “...not individually or in isolation...” (Pope Francis, 2020, §4), but rather as individuals in harmony with a relational community (i.e. As part of a faith community within this study).

The mention of the focus on self by Participant 5 was not done (when considered within the context of the Participant's answer in its entirety) to highlight any perceived freedoms that may accompany individual choice (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982), but more as contraction of *selfish*. It was not, in other words, expressing agreement with a Marxist interpretation of the agency of an individual. Perhaps, given that every interviewee is or was (before retirement) a Catholic teacher, it is unsurprising that an identity focused on 'self' or 'me' would jar with the relational community understanding of identity as articulated by the Church- however well, or consciously this may be understood. Even if this relational community aspect isn't interpreted through a faith lens, the very nature of schools - from their campuses, uniforms, work with community stakeholders and catchment areas means that they exist as *de facto* communities, with these communities very often choosing to express a corporate identity of sorts through mission statements, values, virtues, mottos or various school or house group patronages. In other words, they have a community identity in which each individual shares in some way rather than simply a collection of individuals who exist in isolation from each other and who share nothing in common aside from geographical location. From whichever perspective these comments are made, there exists an obvious challenge to reconcile individual identity with community-based identity if the individual identity is so particular to the person and so transitory in nature that it is divorced entirely from community-based enterprises which are often characterised by a consistent set of values or principles.

The very deliberate choice of words used by Participant 10 ("...choosing to identify versus what might be inherent" P110), further unfolds this individual

focus by not only invoking choice, but also by describing this as oppositional to inherent identity. This is a viewpoint in line with Trueman's memetic understanding of self-identity: "...the true self in traditional cultures is therefore something that is given and learned, not something that the individual creates for himself" (Trueman, 2020, 30). The fragmentation of the individual that occurs as a result of the self-creation of individual identity, often lamented in the literature reviewed (Pope Francis, 2016; Hall, 1992), is therefore accurately described as versus - understood in this context as against - since it is contradictory to hold both positions described above.

## **(ii) Teacher Identity**

Participants spoke freely about traits and characteristics associated with teacher identity using words such as 'trust' (PI50), 'honest' (PI50), 'fairness and equality' (PI14), 'respect' (PI29), 'tolerance' (PI49) – some of which overlapped with the GTCS Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021). Other terms and descriptions went further than the Standards (GTCS, 2021) and instead reflected an understanding of the person of the teacher more in harmony with the Church as presented in the Review of Literature (Pope Paul VI, 1975; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982; 1988). Educating pupils about 'right and wrong' (PI01), teaching as a 'holy encounter' (PI49) and teaching as 'vocation' (PI29) all featured as responses, as well as the function of the teacher being about more than 'imparting knowledge' (PI10; PI06), instead being described as 'person-centred' (PI10).

Five Participants (Participants 6; 14; 18; 49; 02) spoke of teacher identity in the first person, rather than listing expected or aspirational qualities or characteristics of teachers more generally: "I've got a real will for young people

to develop the best that they can. I think that's really important and that's a characteristic that I bring to the profession, if you like" (PI18); and "I try to have that idea of fairness and equality I suppose that crosses both personal and professional, doesn't it really?" (PI14). Here, both Participants are indicating a personal ownership of the attributes described, going as far as identifying where in their own practice or approach these can be evidenced. In addition, Participant 14 highlights that the values described are not simply professional ones, but that they also feature in their personal lives and conduct. Participant 18's use of the phrase: "...that I bring to the profession..." also supports a cohesive understanding of the interplay between personal and professional values in the lives of teachers. They do not embody these qualities or attributes *because* they are teachers, but rather they enhance their professional identity with pre-existing qualities and attributes.

Participant 10 commented on changing societal attitudes towards teachers: "It possibly meant more to be a teacher. A long time ago, in terms of teachers, were held on more of a pedestal in society than they are today" (PI10). Despite this observation, Participant 10 followed this comment by including how proud they were to be a teacher, highlighting their feeling that not all changes in attitudes towards teachers were necessarily negative. Participant 11 commented: "They [teachers] don't have the status they had, but actually I think in some respects that they are more professional now that they ever were in the past" (PI11). In some ways, these statements match the general trend away from institutional authority of pre-modern times (Stets, 2021) which impacted not only teachers, but other professionals and social structures (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982).

Changing attitudes towards teachers was also picked up on by Participant 2:

I started teaching the year that belt was abolished. I'm glad that there's a lot of things that have changed, but I'm also sorry that people don't think that teachers are intelligent enough, wise enough or have got the ability to actually do their job without somebody else sticking their neb in...  
(P12)

This quote explores the complex process of deconstructing the pre-modern order where institutions and their authority over individuals communicated a very different concept of society. As Participant 2 explains (in a way similar way to P10), there are positives associated with a changed view of the teacher, but not all changes are beneficial to the individual teacher, or the teaching profession. A poor opinion of teachers from those outwith the educational community is clearly expressed in this quote, as is interference from external forces.

Participant 2 further elaborated on this line of thought by stating a difference in society's view of the teacher as opposed to other professions: "I don't sit at the doctor's and tell them how to do their job, or a dentist, or a lawyer, or a nurse. And you wouldn't because you'd think it was really unprofessional...people don't trust teachers to do their job" (P12). Given that trust forms part of the GTCS Professional Standards (GTCS, 2022), and the complex and multifaceted nature of education, communication of lack of trust in the profession is an important observation.

### **(iii) Changing Role of the Teacher**

Questions that asked about how the role of the teacher had changed, if at all, over the time period of the research yielded answers that explored the changing teacher-student dynamic: "I see a lot of younger teachers now who try to do that, it's more about trying to be their pal with the kids, and the kids totally know" (P11). This response suggests that the prioritisation of being 'relatable'

can also impact upon the perceived authority or authenticity of the teacher. Participants also commented on how the role had adapted to an evolving understanding of children and learning more broadly: “I think we’ve moved away from the idea that you’ve just got a sponge here, and you’ve got to fill them with information and send them on their way. It’s much more person-centred” (PI10) and: “...there certainly has been a, over the period of my career, in general a greater emphasis and a greater desire to understand the process of learning, pedagogy etc” (PI42). Participant 10’s use of the term “person-centred” implies a shift in educational paradigms - from transmission-based models to models that not only take account of the needs of learners but also views them as active participants in their own learning. This is in stark contrast to the passivity of the learner inferred by the word “sponge”.

The critique of historical pedagogy offered by Participant 10 touches on a broader discussion concerning the relationship between person-centred education and self-constructed identity. Critics of the reliance on person-centred learning would assert that, as a conceptual framework, it relies too heavily upon the faculties of the individual. This in turn leads to a self-constructed identity drawn only from the knowledge and experience that the individual already possesses, rather than from sources outwith themselves (Biesta, 2010;2015;2023). Though this debate is worthy of mention, it is not suggested that Participant 10 shares the same understanding of person-centred education. More likely, given the context of the rest of the Participant’s contribution, is that person-centred is used to mean tailored and individualised as opposed to more traditional rote-based pedagogies. In this interpretation then, person-centred is less of a reflection on an individualised approach to self-

identity, and more of a positive appraisal of differentiated pedagogical approaches.

Whilst the increased focus on educational theory and practice observed by Participant 42 may be implicit within the scope and range of professional learning activities required to be evidenced in the GTCS' five-yearly Professional Update, how effectively does this impact upon any given learner's experience? This is especially pertinent, as will be explored further on in the data analysis, given the focus upon qualifications in schools and formulaic course structures.

Participants cited the impact of societal changes including inclusion, GIRFEC (*Getting it Right for Every Child*, 2006), and Covid as significant markers in the developing role of the teacher. They also spoke of increased expectations and responsibilities placed upon teachers and resultant changes to workload:

I would say that there's a lot more to juggle now in terms of paperwork, in terms of communication with parents, be that parents' evenings, tracking - lots of tracking- social media, that's quite a tough one (P13).

The comment above describes some of the responsibilities of the modern teacher. The use of the word "juggle" could simply indicate the dexterity needed by teaching professionals, but it could also, within the context of the rest of the statement, be drawing attention to a burdensome bureaucracy that has become part of the education system. Undoubtedly, this observation has implications for teacher identity. Perhaps most obviously, this could result in a teacher internalising an identity based solely on external administrative expectations or create identity strain or competition between (Day et al, 2006) the functional and formative aspects of teacher identity. Participant 3's comments also reflect a paradox found in the literature: namely that whilst

markers such as qualification requirements and Professional Update structures evidence increased professionalism, teacher experience often communicates a lack of autonomy and closely monitored performance (Ball, 2003; 2012).

Similar comments regarding teacher professionalism were also made by Participants 11 and 42: “They [teachers] don’t have the status they had, but actually I think in some respects that they are more professional now than they were in the past” (PI11) and: “It [teaching] probably has become more professional...” (PI42). Lost status alongside increased professionalism highlights a movement from unquestioned to earned authority of the teacher.

There were also a number of ongoing changes and challenges described during interviews that impact on teachers’ passion and well-being. Participant 6 expressed concerns about the impact of constant reforms on teachers: “Constant upheaval...that sense when you’re never really finished development” (PI6). And whilst this is a requirement of the professional both formally via Professional Update, and informally via the many Career Long Professional Development opportunities available to teaching staff, the use of the words “constant upheaval” suggests a weariness on the part of the Participant, a lack of stability in the profession, or perhaps even hint at governmental interference in education. Another participant articulated the effect of continuous change on teachers as follows: “Sometimes you forget you really love what you do because you’re tired, or you’re overworked, somebody’s changed something else again” (PI50). The feeling of constant change and subsequent demands on teachers is expressed clearly here and is perhaps part and parcel of the “epidemic of reform” which Ball says not only changes what teachers do, but also who they

are (Ball, 2003, 215). Of interest, or concern, however, is that this would obscure the love the participant has for teaching.

Still in the area of changes but from a different perspective, Participant 49 mentioned the technological shifts evident within schools: "...when you come into a classroom now, it's ordered to the screen, and the teacher sits in the corner" (Interview 49). Whilst this physical arrangement would be common in many classrooms, what does it communicate to say that the teacher is in the corner? Of course, given the pace of schools and lessons, teachers rarely sit to teach so the Participant's statement must be metaphorical in nature. In other words, if the teacher is in the corner, then they are not at the centre of the educational experience. They are secondary, in this case, to the technology used within a classroom. Though the emphasis is different from the comments on change made by Participants 50 and 6 in the previous paragraph, all three viewed together form a picture of a professional identity undermined by change, rather than enhanced by it.

Despite the increased workload, a number of Participants also spoke of enhanced teacher professionalism and preparedness:

They [teachers] don't have the status they had, but actually I think in some respects that they are more professional now than they ever were in the past. In the past, people busked things a lot more than they do now. The nature of modern education is such that a far higher proportion of teachers have to be better prepared for the delivery of the education they're trying to give" (PI11).

This statement articulates the juxtaposition of increased professionalism of teachers, with the decreased status of the teacher. It would be logical to expect that an increase in professionalism (and therefore accountability and transparency) would result instead, in improved perception of the teacher.

Further, the statement charts the evolution of the profession from a vocational (understood here as practical experience, rather than vocational within a Catholic understanding) role, to one grounded in professional standards, planning and performance. The Participant does not however, say that professionalism has increased wholesale, simply that “a far higher proportion of teachers” (PI11) have become more professional indicating an awareness of discrepancies in individuals.

Perhaps as a consequence or awareness of professional scrutiny or societal attitudes towards teachers, Participant 18 felt that: “...as a profession, we’re aiming to protect ourselves now...we have to be very careful in terms of how we frame things...” (PI18). On the one hand, teachers should be conscious of how things they say or do will be interpreted by young people. However, the use of the word “protect” implies more than caution and instead infers fear of professional ramifications. The next part of the Participant’s comment draws attention to the specific perspective of Catholic teachers working within state denominational schools in Scotland: “...I think as well a lot of the time we have to kind of try to be impartial and not give as much of ourselves” (PI18). The retention of part of the teacher’s identity, the holding back, is not framed within this comment as professional good judgement but instead points towards a fear that giving of oneself as a Catholic teacher could in some way, negatively impact you as a professional. This is in conflict with Pope Paul VI’s desire for teachers to be witnesses (Pope Paul VI, 1975) and impedes the ability of the Catholic teacher to engage in that “...unique participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, carried on through one’s teaching” (Congregation for Catholic

Education, 1982 § 16) to which every teacher (however they may ultimately choose to respond) is called by the Church.

#### **(iv) Catholic Teacher Identity**

When asked about Catholic teacher identity, Participant 18 spoke of the complexity of their situation as a Catholic teacher within a state system:

My professional role as a teacher, well, there's a tension there of course in that I'm an employee of [a] council, I'm an employee loosely of the Scottish government as well really. So, you've got to carry out that role to the best of your ability, to carry out that job also according to your own conscience (P118).

Is the tension highlighted here specific to Catholic teachers? Or is it simply that any member of a professional body must, in some way, shape or temper their own beliefs and values to be a part of any given body? There lies in this comment a conscientious commitment to the execution of professional duties to both local and national government - as well as an implicit recognition of the authority of both to demand this of teachers. There is also a recognition of another authority that has a claim or bearing on the execution of these duties, namely the Participant's conscience, and by implication, their own faith and relationship with God. The use of the word "also" infers equality of authority. This recognition of something distinct that shapes Catholic teachers specifically was expressed by other Participants in a variety of ways. Some of these are harmonious, whilst some indicate disappointment in the attitudes and behaviours of Catholic teachers and the interpretation of aspects of the faith. Participants described themselves as "representatives of another community" (P142) and detailed the "intimate link" (P16) between personal and professional identities. They spoke of a "sacred trust" between teachers and young people

and of modelling “values and model[ing] my faith in my work” (PI5). These statements could be broadly described as residing within the GTCS’ definition of Integrity as a Professional Values: “Integrity is the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values” (GTCS). More than embodiment or replication, however, they also augment it, or at the very least, provide a different, distinct perspective through which to view the Professional Values.

This point is highlighted further by Participant 10’s observation: “I think that all teachers are expected to be role models, but there’s a slightly different way of being a role model if you’re also representing the Church in a way” (PI10). This communicates an awareness of responsibility or obligation as part of the Catholic teacher’s identity that goes beyond only professional expectations. The Participant developed this point further by explaining the shadow side of being a poor role model or representative of the Church:

...the way you are with, you know people, that is going to influence how they feel about religion in general. So, if you are unapproachable and standoffish, or anything that they see as negative they could remember that for a long time, and that could be how they feel about Church in the future (PI10).

This expresses an active engagement in a space where the professional and personal identities of a Catholic teacher converge. It is more than a comment on the responsibility of an individual teacher to teach the faith, whether this is transmitted in a formal, academic way or via religious observance within the Catholic school. There is here an obligation expressed that reaches far beyond the school community (and indeed a pupil’s time in school, I would argue) and instead articulates an understanding of the Catholic teacher as a face of the Church in Catholic schools. Consequently, this face is able to impact, either

positively or negatively, a young person's feeling about, or relationship with, the Church. In other words, it embodies an aspect of Catholic communal identity as explored within the Review of Literature and summed up succinctly here by Pope Francis: "We belong to Him, and this implies not only having been incorporated into Him through baptism but living in coherence with that gift received" (Pope Francis, 2020 §4). A Catholic (and therefore by extension, a Catholic teacher) is firstly incorporated into God and His Church via baptism as a moment in time, but they are also called to live coherently - expressed by Pope Francis as continued life and growth in relationship with God.

Participant 11 articulated an awareness of their responsibility as a representative of the Church as follows: "Obviously you're working with young people - that is a sacred trust because they will remember the slightest interaction they have with you" (P11). The Participant understood their role as Catholic teacher to be not only a professional activity, but a *holy endeavour*, characterised by trust between student and teacher (and by implication, trust between teacher and parents and teacher and Church), aware also of the ability of the teacher to encourage or stunt growth in young people. Similarly, Participant 6 reflected on the importance of coherency: "You do actively think about the way in which you're going to put the message across so that hopefully you don't make the hypocrisy thing kick in with the kids" (P11). This expresses a recognition perhaps of the Participant's awareness of their own shortcomings pertaining to "the message" understood as the Catholic faith, but also of how this could impact on young people in schools. In other words, how a lack of coherency could shape or form students. This view was shared by Participant 6:

Personally and professionally, there has to be an intimate link there and otherwise I can't do my job because if I'm going to be a Catholic teacher, then there has to be an authenticity there. You know, with all my weaknesses, with all the things that can take me away from God...I am there to - where I can - give examples and to share examples that are appropriate in my life. That's a thing that you need to be careful with (P16).

Participant 6 expresses a clear understanding of their role as educator and witness, not as exclusive realities, but as two sides of the same coin of the Catholic teacher, as they see it. Whilst membership of professional bodies often requires certain standards of behaviour from members to prevent the profession being brought into disrepute, what is being described here goes further.

The GTCS Professional Values have been mentioned several times throughout this data analysis because they are applicable to all teachers in Scotland in a formal way. However, any teacher in a Catholic school in Scotland is also required to be approved by the local ordinary before employment commences. This is indeed formal in that it is a legal requirement, but it is also a moment in time; approval is not revisited unless there is a change in contract. For Catholic teachers, this process requires a personal statement and reference from the teacher's Parish Priest pertaining to the religious belief and character of any given teacher. At the time of applying for approval then, a teacher is asked to reflect (and often pointed towards the Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland as a reference point by which to consider their statement) on their faith and how this is lived and demonstrated in their own life and, by implication, how this informs their professional life. Past the point of approval being granted however, there is no formal process to rescind this, should someone choose to abandon their faith or begin to live in a way that is incompatible with the Church. Therefore, the commitments expressed throughout this section directly

answers the question: *Are there identifiable characteristics of a Catholic Teacher in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?*

An identifiable, or at least repeated characteristic within this sample study, is the articulation of responsibility directly concerning the roles and responsibilities of a Catholic teacher that reach far beyond any professional or legal requirements placed on such teachers. Those who expressed similar opinions echo the words of *Gravissimum Educationis*: “But let teachers recognise that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965, §8). The dependence of the Church upon Catholic teachers in the Catholic school achieving its educational goals is clear from this statement. This makes logical sense in any school, but unique to this is the implied responsibilities within this dependence toward the Church’s mission.

This sentiment of living coherently bled from reflections on the intersectionality of personal and professional, to coherency of education: “I’m not just there to teach them skills, I want to point to them a way of life and being that isn’t just about material existence. There is something greater to who we are and what we’re called to be” (P16). A spiritual life, and the feeling of responsibility of this Catholic teacher to model or point towards this, is clearly inferred by the Participant. Their description of the role could also be understood more broadly as a commentary on the politicisation of education (Lefkios, 2013), or the reduction of education to creating a skills-based workforce for the economy (Rowland in Convery et al (eds), 2017).

A number of Participants also expressed concerns about the potential damage that could be caused by Catholic teachers who didn't necessarily prescribe to the same understanding of responsibilities associated with the role explored within this section: "If you've got teachers, God forgive me, but particularly Catholics who are disillusioned and part of your school, it's worse" (P11). Implicit in this comment is an acknowledgement of the challenges inherent to Catholic education but the use of the word "worse" describes an increase in difficulty when Catholics who are unsympathetic to the Church are part of a school staff. Of course, disillusionment can have many causes, but Pope Francis speaks about the dangers of secularisation as one example (Pope Francis, 2013), with the Congregation for Catholic Education describing it as a "contagion" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 §6) invoking a negative image of a disease spreading indiscriminately. The latter also adds several other challenges that exist for the Catholic educator, and by extension the Catholic school, including:

Identity crisis, loss of trust in social structures, the resulting insecurity and loss of any personal convictions, the contagion of a progressive secularization of society, loss of the proper concept of authority and lack of a proper use of freedom (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 §6).

This list is wide-ranging and comprehensive, exploring broad societal changes, as well as the impact of these changes on the lives of individuals and specifically how these might influence the student teacher relationship. However, the Congregation also recognises in the next sentence that these are only a few of the difficulties that young people bring to their Catholic teachers, and that there are many more struggles not articulated here. One of these further difficulties is illustrated by Participant 11's comment, and comes from *within*

the school itself, *within* the community of Catholic educators, rather than as a result of outside forces. Of course, teachers themselves live in the same world as the young people they teach and are not immune to experiencing similar difficulties, but they experience them whilst occupying a distinct position within the dynamic of the Catholic school. Similarly, Participants 29 and 42 shared related points of view: “What really disappoints me is like, I don’t know, people saying one thing and doing another...See as a teacher? That’s what I think - you need to live the values” (PI29) and: “There’s a lot of kid on around Catholic schools. People pretending they’re Catholics that aren’t” (PI42). The disappointment in fellow Catholic teachers not living the values of the Catholic school conveyed here again points to undermining factors such as hypocrisy and lack of integrity within the community itself.

Participant 18 reflects on this point further by adding:

Another serious issue is the fact that I think that now we’re in a situation where we have young people coming into teaching who quite simply don’t really understand the teachings of the Church themselves and I don’t know how that’s happened because they’ve gone through Catholic schools, but it has and I think we have to be very aware and very honest with ourselves there that this is the situation that we’re facing and what do we do? And where do we go with that? (PI18).

This comment begins with the observation that younger teachers are lacking in their knowledge of the Church’s teaching, with the implication that this results in a lack of faith. That young people are distracted from faith and knowledge, of course, is not a novel lament (Pope Pius X, 1905), but it also not the whole story. Recent increased Church attendance rates amongst young adults (Bible Society, 2025) point toward a more nuanced picture. This complexity is explored at length by Ash (2025) who characterises the journey of faith as constant back-and-forth, rather than a linear experience.

However, the same comment then goes onto to question why this might be the case and implies a more searching question about the efficacy of Catholic schools since the assumption is that the majority of Catholic teachers are products of them. It also, perhaps only sub-consciously, points towards the idea of the Catholic school as the chief formative influence in the lives of its Catholic pupils.

The third part of this quote asks firstly for honesty from the Catholic community to which the Participant belongs, when evaluating the current situation and secondly, for direction after this honest assessment: “And where do we go with that?” (P118). Participant 29 asks a similar future-focused question: “What is Catholic education going to look like? Because, so many people, and I sound dead judgemental here - I'm really not, it's like they've not got a clue what they're talking about” (P129). Both Participants communicate an awareness of the weaknesses that exist in the system and a sense of uncertainty through the questions which they ask. The repeated use of “we”, “we're” and “ourselves”, however, does not portray an image of one person in isolation shouting questions into a void, but of someone who realises that they are part of a community and that they share, to varying degrees, a communal responsibility to assess the situation and to ask questions of it, and of its future.

#### **(v) Interactions with Young People**

When describing their interactions with young people, four Participants used parenting or family references which chime with Pope Francis' thoughts on the role of the Catholic teacher: “It is a little like being parents, at least spiritually. It is a great responsibility!” (Pope Francis, 2015, §2). Though Pope Francis is speaking of teaching as a spiritual parenthood, each Participant approached this

concept from a slightly different perspective. For instance, as Participant 1 spoke about difficult pupil behaviour at school and the need to correct or challenge this as a teacher, they said: “I’m coming from the point of view as almost hearing my mum and dad in my voice” (P11). Within this quote, the Participant recognises the influence of their own parents and how they now represent that parental role in some way to young people in school, clearly linking some aspects of the role of the teacher with the role of a parent. From a slightly different perspective, Participant 18 acknowledged that teachers can take on a parental role where it is missing in the lives of young people: “There’s some children, for whatever reason, don’t have a mum and we get that privilege of having that opportunity as a teacher” (P18). Rather than being understood as an added responsibility on them as a teacher, it is understood as privilege. In addition, Participant 18’s comment speaks implicitly of the sense of community that underpins their actions to the extent that not only do they act in place of the parent in a school context, but that they fill this role in some way when it is not experienced at all in the home life of pupils.

Three Participants used the word “love” when describing young people. One Participant told a new class: “...last week I told my first years that I loved them...for me that’s a real privilege, that’s really precious...” (P149). This comment demonstrates not only another aspect of the parental role of the teacher, namely, to love the young people in your care, but also demonstrated is an assured and mature confidence in the teacher to not only do this, but also to articulate it in this way to a class full of young people.

Love was referred to in a slightly different way by Participant 16, who spoke about it within the context of challenging behaviour: “I remember with children

that I would struggle to see the face of God, I would think somebody loves them the way I love [my child], or worse than that, nobody loves them the way I love [my child]...” (PI16). This comment on pupil interaction is interesting since it begins by referencing children as being made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). Although the Participant honestly reflects on the power of negative exchanges with young people that can blur or obscure what they describe as “the face of God” (PI16), nevertheless, the anthropology that underpins this clearly resonates with the exploration of *Imago Dei* explored in the Review of Literature. What anchors the Participant to this anthropology, or understanding of the young person’s identity, is love. In this case, the love expressed is done so by exercising again Pope Francis’ spiritual parenthood (Pope Francis, 2015), which in this example builds upon the Participant’s own experience of parental love towards their own child. This is further underlined in the final part of the comment where the Participant recognises that not all children will experience love from their parents. Though the relationship between teacher and young person is not characterised formally as family in the same way as a parent and child, there is indicated here a sense of family since the teacher assumes similar responsibilities to that of a parent, responsibilities that stretch beyond the professional. This thought was in harmony with Participant 49 who stated that:

They’re someone’s son or daughter so there’s that family dimension...we are stewards, we are in *loco parentis*. And because the family is such a unique, divinely inspired institution that’s a privileged place so they’re not my pupils as in just names on a spreadsheet or even just bums on seats - when I’m teaching children, I’m doing something profound for them as individuals, but also for their parents and then for us as a whole community (PI49).

*In loco parentis* understood as acting in place of a parent is, on the one hand, a logical thing to state since young people spend so much of any given week with

teachers in school, but the addition of the words “steward and “family” adds further depth to understanding how the Participant embeds this role into their own professional practice. This results in a richer translation of being in place of a parent for the Participant. Furthermore, the family as a holy institution, and their participation as teacher in this dynamic, is viewed as a privilege, rather than a burden. This holistic interpretation of the interaction between family and school then results in more than simply an educational encounter, but a transformative and relational activity – “something profound” that the Participant is not only engaging in for the young person but also, by extension the family and the wider community to which the young person belongs.

When describing their interactions or relationships with young people in school, Participants used words such as “consistency” (PI01), “fair” (PI14), “equally” (PI14), “open” (PI 50), “honest” (PI50), “patient...kind...gentle” (PI06) and “precious” (PI29). These words communicate something much more profound than an educational exchange. Rather, they describe a virtuous person - someone who treats people fairly and equally, who values honesty and openness, who is patient, kind and gentle. Someone who recognises the value of consistency in the lives of young people and who sees each of them as precious. Put another way, these words describe someone in possession of quite a number of positive psychology's Character Strengths – namely positive characteristics that benefit individuals and their communities (The Positivity Project, n.d.). Participant 29 added, understandably so given the words used by other Participants, that fulfilling the role of a Catholic teacher was a “big responsibility” (PI29).

Several Participants asserted that young people need teachers to live the faith values of the school: “Children look to you, how you behave, how you speak to people and that’s a big responsibility...As teachers you need to live the values kind of thing” (PI29). The responsibility described here reaches beyond a teacher’s classroom, into every interaction they have. Participant 5 described themselves as: “Being a role model. I try to model my values to my pupils” (PI05). The use of the word “my” in this statement is understood as ownership of the faith values of the individual and of the Catholic school in which they work, as well as taking responsibility to witness to these values.

Two Participants spoke about motivating factors with regards witnessing or modelling their faith to young people. Participant 14 identified that lack of church-going pupils in schools as one of the factors:

I suppose some pupils, well, a lot of pupils now, won’t be Church goers, so I suppose, in terms of my faith it’s more about talking about God and about Jesus and faith in everyday language. Like, you know, ‘when I was saying my prayers the other day’, or ‘when I was at Mass’, or I tell them about my community cafe so things like that, you know, that kids know that your faith is important to you (PI14).

This comment implies that the role of the contemporary Catholic teacher, or at least how this particular teacher understands their role and chooses to respond to it, also now includes bridging the gap that exists for many young people between the Church and the home. Though educational reform and the many negative consequences that this can have on teacher identity (Forde et al, 2006; Hendrikx, 2019) is explored within the Review of Literature, the Participant’s comment should also draw attention to the impact upon the Catholic teacher’s sense of identity as a result of the dislocation of pupils and their families from the faith life of the Church. Although the Church recognises its almost complete

reliance upon Catholic teachers to realise its educational mission (Second Vatican Council, 1965), reflection upon the added responsibility generated for teachers by such societal and behavioural changes in terms of support or advice is lacking. The destabilising of what Hall describes as the “old identities” (Hall, 1992, 274) – religious identity being one such example – and the resulting fracturing of an individual’s identity, should also be looked upon within the specific context of the Catholic teacher.

#### **(vi) Catholic Teaching as Vocation**

Ten Participants specifically used the word vocation to describe their journey to becoming a Catholic teacher (PI’s 50;29;12;16;03;11;49;18;14;06), although all did so from different perspectives. Participants 10 and 05 also used the word vocation, but not in relation to their own understanding of their role as Catholic teacher. Participant 2 described their role as a calling which has the same root origin as the word vocation, whilst Participant 3 used neither vocation nor calling, but did speak about the Holy Spirit’s influence upon them becoming a Catholic teacher. This equates to 87.5% of Participants expressing a view using language with religious connotations.

Given that exploring teaching as a vocation in the Catholic Church is, in the Church’s 2000-year history, in relative infancy, it is perhaps not surprising that each Participant had a slightly different perspective on what vocation meant to them. Although there is earlier evidence of the place of education as formation and its standing within the Church’s mission before the Vatican Council (For example, Pope Pius XI, 1929; Pius XII, 1943), these documents do not explore teaching specifically as a vocation. Of course, these were written at a time where clergy and religious, rather than lay people, would have made up the

main body of teaching staff in Catholic educational institutions. There are other examples, mostly associated with the religious orders, where teaching is spoken of as an apostolate or mission, both of which imply a vocational character. These include: The Jesuits' *Ratio Studiorum* (1599); The Christian Brothers' *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (1730), and the Salesians' *The Preventive System in the Education of the young* (1870). These documents highlight the foundational role of teaching within the wisdom and practice of the Church, a role which we then see developing and evolving through documents such as: *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965); *The Catholic School* (1977); *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982) right up until the most recent example: *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* (2013).

The language of vocation that finds its roots in the teaching orders above has then been extended to include lay people. In which ways then did Participants express their own understanding of vocation and how does this interact with their own sense of identity? Participants 2 and 29 expressed a level of discomfort at the idea of applying the word "vocation" to teaching and preferred the word "calling" despite the shared meaning of both words. The reason behind this choice was articulated as follows: "...because vocation seems really holy to me" (PI02). This answer implies that some vocations in the Church are holier than others, and that teaching, therefore, is less holy than the vocation to priesthood or religious life within the Church. Participant 5 did use the word vocation but applied a qualification in doing so: "Yes, I do see teaching as a vocation, but maybe it's a different type of vocation. I've not had to give anything up for it-it's a calling" (PI05). That teaching is a different type of vocation from priesthood or religious life is true, but inherent to this comment is an

understanding that isn't simply about difference. The Participant retreats from expressing that teaching is a vocation by the end of the comment and opts instead to describe it as calling. By mentioning the lack of sacrifice of being a teacher, as opposed to the sacrificing of a spouse or family associated with priesthood, for instance, they also imply a sense of a *lesser* vocation. Both comments infer a hierarchy of vocations, rather than the universal call to holiness that comes from baptism as articulated in *Lumen Gentium* (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964) and the subsequent exploration of the equality and sanctity of the many different vocations within the Church that follows in the same document. Furthermore, such hesitation could also reflect the way that the word *vocation* has become secularised, often used in modern discourse as shorthand for certain careers or occupations (Hansen, 1994; Collinson, 2006). This reappropriation possesses the potential to dilute or obscure theological meaning, potentially making it difficult for teachers to maintain a spiritual understanding of vocation alongside the professionalised language of modern education.

Participant 29 expressed a broader understanding of types of vocation in the Church, in concert with the contents of *Lumen Gentium*: “We’ve all got a vocation for something, we’ve all got a purpose” (PI29). This comment is definitive about vocation being inherent to every individual and encompasses a sense of discernment of vocation - of discovering an innate individual purpose. The sense of a universal call to holiness and mission was also shared by Participants 3 and 10: “As a Catholic I believe that everyone’s got a vocation, be it to priesthood, or as a married person, or yeah, I think there's a vocation of some sort for everyone” (PI03). The understanding of call and purpose shared

here begins with priesthood, but also names married life as an example of vocation, as well as leaving room for other types of vocation. Participant 10's response followed a similar pattern:

I think I always think of vocations week, and you think about people wanting to join the priesthood, or wanting to become a nun, but also the vocation of marriage, the vocation of maybe becoming a teacher or going in for something medical...It's something to do with God's plan, and you acting accordingly in with God's plan, and maybe not chasing the money, but chasing you know, more of a sense of fulfilment from life (PI10).

Again, priesthood and religious life are mentioned first, followed by the vocation of marriage. This may simply be that priesthood and religious life are the most visible examples of vocation within the Church - the people in these vocations look and live differently. However, the Participant also expands this explanation further by naming two examples of secular vocation, namely teaching and medicine. Though all these examples are distinct from each other, they are brought into unity under the plan of God with which every individual is in dynamic relationship, a relationship which allows them to discover purpose and be fulfilled. Importantly, Participant 10 articulates a sense of vocation serving the sacred, rather than the secular when they pit money against fulfilment in the final part of the quote. This expresses an understanding of vocation that values and seeks more than temporal benefits.

Two Participants expressed disappointment towards teacher colleagues who they felt did not own or understand the idea of teaching as vocation:

Growing up, I always thought teaching was a vocation, it's not just a job, it can't be. And maybe that's what I think now with some teachers coming into the profession. They feel as if it's a job to do, tick a box and get the holidays and whatever (PI29).

The use of the word “now” suggests that the Participant thinks that this attitude has not always been the case amongst teachers. Though the Participant describes their own role as vocational, it isn’t clear from this comment whether the proceeding observation applies to Catholic teachers, or teachers in general entering the profession. Participant 5 expressed similar reservations about fellow teachers’ motivations: “I work with people who, in their own words, for the holidays and the pay...for me that always just jars...” (PI05). Present in both of these observations is a recognition that teaching is more than a professional role, but there is also an implication that Catholics who become teachers would or should have some awareness of the vocational nature of teaching. Participants 10 and 3 offered another perspective on this assumption:

When I decided I wanted to do teaching - whether for the right reasons or not - when I properly got back into being much more involved in the parish...Maybe I was doing it because I was working with children a bit but like, so...I feel like my faith was sparked up a lot more. Like, I feel the Holy Spirit sort of was working at that time to get me more involved (PI03).

Participant 3 speaks of an individual decision to become a teacher but also recognises that the Holy Spirit was directing them in a certain way which suggests an interplay between individual desires and their awareness of and co-operation with the plan of God in their life. There is also a recognition in this statement that their initial motivation to become a teacher was in some way wanting. By describing these as “right reasons or not”, the Participant is indicating an awareness of right and wrong motivations to become a teacher. Rather than entering for the “right” reasons then, the Participant has instead come to understand the vocational role of the Catholic teacher precisely by *being* a Catholic teacher. Participant 10 expressed a similar sentiment:

It wasn't something that, at the time I thought, oh yes, I've been inspired to do this and I'm going to change everyone's life...it's definitely something that I've settled into more, and I appreciate the privilege of my position a lot more now than I used to (P110).

Both testimonies suggest that vocation is not always grasped prior to entering teaching, but can be discerned gradually through lived experience. Here the participants highlight a truth expressed in Catholic teaching: vocation is both a personal decision, requiring an individual's free response to God's call, and a communal reality, discerned and confirmed within the life of the Church and through relationship with others (Second Vatican Council, 1964; Pope Francis, 2019). This discernment involves not only an interior relationship with God, but also a growing awareness of connection to the wider Church and to others. It is through these relationships and experiences that a sense of vocation can be both awakened and deepened. Within this context, their accounts echo the Church's emphasis on communal discernment whereby vocation is rarely an isolated individual choice but is clarified and affirmed within the context of the Church and its mission (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997).

When looked at alongside Participants 29 and 5's comments regarding what they see as lacking in some Catholic teachers, this provides an interesting pause. Although each Participant belongs to the same credal faith, these responses, when viewed together, suggest not a homogenous group but a differentiated and internally varied expression of Catholic identity. This should not be understood as implying fragmentation or stratification of the self, however. Rather, what may appear as "layered" Catholic identity is an integrated configuration of personal faith, professional commitment and ecclesial belonging, lived with differing degrees of depth, coherence and emphasis.

Such variation is consistent with the Catholic anthropological vision of the person as unity called to communion (Gaudium et Spes, 1965), in which identity unfolds relationally, rather than through accumulation or execution of discrete roles. Although not every Catholic teacher will have entered the profession with an understanding of it as a vocation at the outset, nor come to that awareness through undertaking the role itself, this example highlights the interesting and dynamic ways in which each individual – through conscious engagement and formation – can come to a deeper sense of purpose and identity in their work.

Participant 49 approached their answer from a different perspective again, instead comparing their understanding of vocation with the GTCS' standards:

We are representing Christ and we're recognising Christ in them so our fundamental relationship is - You know, whenever I look at the General Teaching Council's Standards I think, ok- I can see all that technical description of rights and responsibilities and duties and values, but similar to much of the language in education, it's kind of dry, it's kind of weak sauce. It doesn't seem to - I just don't think it's something you can get excited about. Maybe others can. Whereas for me it's vocation, it's an act of service and love for the children, for their mums and dads (PI49).

The Participant characterises their role as witnessing to Christ, accompanied by the responsibility of recognising Christ in those that they teach. Whilst situating themselves within the teaching profession and the expectations set out by the GTCS, they go on to cite these, as well as language used around education in general, as dry and uninspiring. Whilst acknowledging the technical aspects of the job as accurate, these do not form any part of the Participant's motivation to be a Catholic teacher. The subtext here is that they express the minimum required or baseline standards required of teachers to be technically proficient. Although the GTCS describes teacher professionalism as a "...way of being..." (GTCS, 2021), the Participant still believes that it lacks substance. Despite this

mention of being, rather than simply doing of the teacher, there is little mention of the motivation or drive necessary to be an excellent teacher i.e. of the holistic and dynamic interplay between personal and professional identities, or as Taylor would argue of identity more broadly "...an identity is something one ought to be true to, can fail to uphold, can surrender when one ought to" (Taylor, 1989, 30). This approach is in unison with the Participant's own explanation of teaching as a vocation expressed through an act of service performed not only for the young people in school, but also by extension for their parents.

#### **(vii) Nature of Education**

The theme of service was taken up by Participant 42 who stated that: "A big part of any school, whether it's Catholic or otherwise, is about that sense of service and about that sense of trying to improve the lives of others..." (PI42). Participant 42 also went on to say that their approach "...was not much different..." (PI42) whether they were working in a denominational or non-denominational setting. They articulated education as an activity centred around improving the lives of young people, regardless of environment, or means: "...whether that's through qualification or whether that's through just generally the way they live" (PI42). This statement broadens the scope of schooling far beyond formal qualifications and leans into the idea that the professional identity of the teacher also encompasses the values and beliefs of that teacher and, by extension how these shape their approach to, and understanding of, education (Forde et al, 2006).

There were several other observations made about the nature of education.

Similar to the sentiment expressed in the paragraph above, Participants spoke to

the holistic nature of education: “What’s going to make our young people better citizens? A rounded education? Exams?” (PI02). They followed this set of questions by answering: “Let us put out well-rounded human beings that can contribute to all sectors...” (PI02). This last statement harbours a level of resentment or disagreement with the focus on exams in schools by asking what education is trying to achieve. The implication here is that the focus on formal qualifications in schools risks obscuring this Participant’s understanding of education – an understanding echoed by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1982). The teacher under discussion here is not simply a professional person who systematically transmits a body of knowledge in the context of a school; “teacher” is to be understood as “educator” - one who helps to form human persons. The task of a teacher goes well beyond transmission of knowledge, although that is not excluded (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, §16).

This statement captures the essence of what both Participants 42 and 02 are trying to communicate, that is – education *is* formation (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, §16) and that to reduce the role of the teacher to instructor of knowledge is to miss what is unique about the profession.

Participant 14 agreed with the essence of the statement above but felt, differently from the time they had entered the profession, that there was now more of an even-handed approach, not solely focused on qualifications: “...that we’re recognising, you know, that kids be able to contribute to society, to be good people, and to achieve their full potential is actually more important than just coming in and getting a bunch of A’s” (PI14). Although the Participant recognises the swing back from an intense focus on exams over their career,

they also express their own understanding of the purpose of education - namely to ensure that each young person is able to fulfil their potential. In fact, this activity is described as more important than ensuring academic success. Formation, therefore, is the preeminent educational activity of the teacher properly understood as educator.

### **(viii) Distinct Identity of Catholic Schools**

Two Participants referred back to their own experience of school when speaking about what was unique about Catholic schools and added comments regarding the wider environment in which Catholic schools, and the young people within them, exist. Participant 42 spoke of the importance of Catholic teachers as sincere witnesses being key to this:

The most important thing for me was Catholic teachers showing that they're real people and they eat and drink and have families and are normal, but they believe and have faith and how that faith influences what they do and that the young people can relate to them as human beings and hence relate to them fully in terms of their religious conviction (PI42).

This statement not only rings true with Pope Paul VI's assertion that to be a good teacher, one must be a good witness (Pope Paul VI, 1975), but it also expresses something significant about the role of a Catholic teacher. Within the subtext is a call for Catholic teachers to be realists in their role as witness to the faith, to demonstrate that to be a person of faith is about being a "real" and "normal" person. This description of the Catholic teacher above echoes the following observation of lay people found in *Lumen Gentium* (1965) and repeated in *Christifidelis Laici* (1988) "...the laity are given this special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth" (Second Vatican

Council, 1965, §33; Pope John Paul II, 1988, §15). Key here is the link between the Participant's call for Catholic teachers to be witnesses in the places that they exist as the only link, not only with the institutional Church, but also with faith in general. Although priests are regular visitors to Catholic schools, the lay Catholic teacher occupies a unique role according to both Participant 42, and within *Christifidelis Laici*.

Participant 5 spoke of their own comprehension as a school pupil of the uniqueness of Catholic education: "We were very much aware that faith was the foundation of our education" (PI05). This indicates a clear awareness of the root of the educational approach within the Participant's Catholic school. However, they also spoke of the changes that may have taken place since they were at school that could perhaps impact on young people's perception of their own Catholic school: "...I suspect that, as time has gone on and the more outside influences that have come in, that might have been watered down slightly" (PI05). The outside influences which are referred to here could be interpreted as a natural product of rapid globalisation and the accessibility to other peoples and cultures that happens as a result (Second Vatican Council, 1965). The watering down of identity, which is articulated by the Participant as an effect of outside influences, is also in keeping with Hall's claim that a disturbance has happened in previously stable communities, because of this rapid change. The Participant is suggesting that outside influences and the watering down of identity are causal, rather than simply being correlated.

Participants 16 and 18 spoke about the distinct nature of Catholic schools as a balancing act of sorts: "We have to strike a balance between what is different? What needs to be different about a Catholic school?" (PI18). This statement

recognises the place of Catholic schools within the national school offering (an observation shared by Participant 2: “We are a school, yeah, within a faith school” (PI02), but it also asks what *needs* to be different about them. Within a Scottish context, reference to *A Charter for Catholic Schools* (2004) and its ten distinct characteristics, would provide a framework with which to examine what should be distinct in Catholic schools. However, I would argue that this comment is asking a more probing question regarding parity of schooling provision for young people whilst retaining a shared identity. In addition, the Participant is asking the question using an evaluative framework – essentially asking in what ways are we different and how could this difference be retained and improved upon? This desire to be secure in an identity, whilst also seeking to improve and reach out aligns with Bishop Barron’s thoughts on walls and bridges. Although speaking about the Church, the mission of the Catholic school is routinely spoken of as an extension of this, rather than separate (Hall, Sultmann and Townend, 2019). Bishop Barron states: “We need both the walls that define who we are, and the bridges that allow us to bring the light of Christ to all the nations” (Bishop Barron, 2025). The building of walls can appear a negative activity, an action that indicates a community being closed off, even insular. What’s being offered instead is an option in sync with the Participant’s original questions who we are and how do we exist in relationship with the world around us?

The “who are we?” of Catholic schools is often answered by invoking the word *ethos*, and indeed three Participants used this word (29;02;16), whilst one other used the words “community” (PI02), and “values” (PI02) to explain what was unique to them about Catholic schools. Participant 02 offered this observation:

It is a difficult again to put your finger on, and it's usually outsiders that tell you...they'll come into your school and say that there's a tangible...you walk in here and you know, there's a feeling. It's not a sense of identity, I think it's a sense of community (PI02).

Of note within this is the distinction drawn between a sense of identity and a sense of community. This distinction is an acknowledgement of the diversity of nationalities and faiths (or lack of) in the student and staff population of Catholic schools in Scotland (Curriculum for Excellence: Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools, 2010) and the resultant multiplicity of identities that exist within any given school. Whilst identity understood and expressed differently from person to person, community is evocative of a group of people, or a school in this context, who exist and interact around a set of shared values. Though individuals may have different and sometimes opposing values, the implication of Participant 02's statement is that the Catholic school offers something that draws its members together as community, in such a way that even visitors to the school are aware of it.

In trying to practically articulate what the ethos of a Catholic school looks like, or what ways it might be different, Participant 14 offered the following observation:

So, is it because you've got priests hanging about, you've got Mass regularly, you've got prayer twice a day, is it because of these things? Or because you have teachers who are talking about faith in a very open way, you know? Maybe that's it, maybe that's a huge contributing factor (PI14).

This comment begins with examples of what could be described as formal expressions of faith - the presence of priests in the school, Mass and prayer, but concludes that perhaps the most important example of Catholic ethos is the staff and how they witness to their faith in the school. This would be in line with

Rossiter's (2011) proposition that formal aspects of the faith do not necessarily lead to an experience of lived Catholic faith for pupils.

Participant 50 expanded on the diversity of the staff population within their school: "I work with three people who are atheists, and we have the best conversations. They will respectfully challenge my faith...you can disagree on things, but you don't fall out, d'you know?" (PI50). Not only did the Participant enjoy interacting with people who did not share their faith background, but they also spoke positively of the impact that this exchange could have on young people: "Everyone is allowed their own opinion, and everybody can have it and that has an effect on the children you teach" (PI50). This comment describes the space that exists between individual and communal identities within Catholic schools.

Participant 16 highlighted the challenges that arise when staff are openly opposed to the values of the Catholic school in which they work: "We get this hard time from people who - don't come in and embrace our ethos or absorb our ethos of - you don't celebrate this, you don't celebrate that, you don't mention this and everything is hush hush..." (PI02). This attitude conflicts with the idea expressed above that individual identities can exist harmoniously within an overarching set of communal values. Rather, this example pits the individual against the community because they are unable to assent to the values, or what they understand to be the values of the school. In response to this challenge, Participant 16 stated their belief that despite the differences that staff or pupils may have from one another that: "...every individual that walks through that door is a reflection of God, they're a manifestation of God." (PI16). This comment strips back any notion of identity – individual or communal – to its

most basic level – the underlying Catholic theological principle of *Imago Dei* and the “...entering into communion with other persons” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 357) that the Church states naturally flows from this recognition. In terms of the values of the Catholic faith, Participant 29 explained that: “There will always be things [about the Catholic faith] that we all have a bit of an issue with...you think ‘well, I’m not sure about that or whatever’, but that’s the values” (PI29). This is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s view of the individual as “a structural variant” (Bourdieu, 2003). The Participant speaks as an individual, but still as an individual who, in the context of this work, belongs to a faith community. In contrast to Participant 02’s example of a staff member’s difficulty with the values of the Catholic school, Participant 29 goes on to say:

One of the girls I used to work beside, she used to say ‘join the golf club, you need to abide by the golf club’s rules’ and this is true. Whereas folk want to, it’s like ‘I like that bit, but I don’t like that bit’ and, I don’t know, for me it’s maybe a really simplistic thing but I think that the basic, basic is that you go to Mass on a Sunday and if you’re not doing that, what’s the point? And why are you hell bent on teaching in a Catholic school when you don’t see it? (PI29).

Whilst we are unaware of whether Participant 02’s staff member was Catholic themselves, or from a different background entirely, Participant 29’s comment speaks specifically of Catholic teachers, given the reference to attending Mass. Alongside their earlier comment regarding the individual variants that exist with the Catholic faith, there is frustration in this statement towards staff members who express contrary views about the faith in a faith school setting. Part and parcel of working in a Catholic school for this Participant is the acceptance of a set of values that individuals may not necessarily subscribe to themselves. The example given about members having to abide by a club’s rules underlines this point further. The Participant subsequently questions the authenticity of

commitment among Catholic staff who do not actively practice their faith but nonetheless seek to teach in a Catholic school. An essential characteristic of a Catholic teacher for this Participant therefore is authenticity.

### **5.1.2 Patterns Across Participants**

Clear tendencies emerge when responses are considered across age and length of service. Older teachers with longer service often spoke with certainty about teaching as a stable vocation, while also lamenting the loss of cultural respect once afforded to the profession. Mid-career teachers described vocation as both gift and struggle, balancing the call to authentic witness with the pressures of reform, accountability, and workload. Younger teachers tended instead to narrate vocation as a process of gradual discernment, shaped by professional experience and spiritual growth.

These generational patterns are not absolute, however. Parish life, diocesan context, and subject specialism also coloured responses, with RE specialists and those in schools with strong chaplaincy provision more ready to speak of vocation in explicitly religious terms, while others preferred the language of calling, values, or community.

Taken together, the data suggests that Catholic teacher identity develops dynamically across time, deepening over time as teachers negotiate professional expectations alongside their participation in the faith community.

### **5.1.3 Conclusion**

Throughout this first data analysis chapter the themes that have emerged can be grouped into three broad categories. The first of these categories encompasses the integration by Participants of the personal and professional aspects of their

identity. Participants recognise no separation or fracture between these two aspects of their identity and commonly express the interrelatedness through their answers. Participants highlight both the need for authenticity and value witness as part of their role both as individuals, but also as members of a faith community. However, they also recognise the challenges both internally (expressed through varying levels of commitment found in Catholic teachers) and externally, as professionals who operate within secular structures.

The second category that emerges encompasses vocational awareness and transcendent reflections. Within this category Participants shared their understanding of their own vocation which, although sharing a broad notion of calling, was expressed in a variety of ways. They spoke of the pseudo-parental aspects of their role, and duty to the family and community. Participants also perceived education as being of value beyond the temporal and highlighted the tension that can occur between this conception of education and the structures within which they operate.

The third category contains the comments and observations made by Participants with regards the vulnerability of their role as a Catholic teacher in Scotland, as well as their awareness of the deficit between the ideal and reality of Catholic schools in this context.

## **5.2 Research Question 2: How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity?**

The questions asked throughout Participant interviews were, in some ways, a set of arbitrarily separated questions about personal, professional and communal identity. In reality Participants wove these aspects of their own identity together, to a greater or lesser extent, in their answers. Within this section of

the interview, Participants were asked their opinions about whether there was a distinct Catholic identity, and, if so, what was distinct about it. They were also asked about the personal and communal aspects of the Catholic faith, as well as the ways that their faith may be evident to other people. Lastly, Participants were asked to reflect upon Catholicism within contemporary Scottish society. These questions sought to explore how Participants' identity as Catholic teachers interacted or was influenced by the wider life of the Church, and how this manifested within a Scottish context.

### **(i) Catholic Identity**

The first question - *Is there a distinct Catholic identity?* - was closed in nature to allow Participants to answer freely. Only one Participant answered "no" to this question. Though the sentiment was shared by other Participants, as will be explored throughout this analysis, the answer was notable due to its definitive and unambiguous stance: "So, is there a uniqueness to a Catholic identity, or a Catholic person? No, there isn't...because those qualities are shared by many faiths and none..." (P116). The Participant challenges the notion of uniqueness in Catholicism and states their opinion that the qualities found in Catholicism and in individual Catholics, are replicated by people who belong to other faiths as well as those from no religious background. This reflects a critical self-awareness and a recognition of commonalities amongst people from different backgrounds. Uniqueness cannot be claimed therefore, since the effects are mirrored in those who are not Catholics. In other words, uniqueness of Catholic identity here has been associated primarily with the actions of the individual, rather than with a set of beliefs. The Participant then goes on to state what is different, rather than unique, about their Catholic identity: "...but the

difference with my Catholicity is I know God loves me unconditionally” (P116). This is the turning point of the statement and where we see a sense of uniqueness reintroduced. However, this uniqueness centres around the Participant’s relational experience of God rather than doctrinal certitude. The Participant’s statement does not suggest that only Catholics can know and experience God’s love but emphasises their own personal appropriation of this love as the unique foundation and motivational force behind their actions.

Five Participants spoke to a broader Catholic identity that was experienced or identifiable outwith their immediate context. Participant 42 observed: “I suppose it’s in the word, that kind of universality of it...” (P142). This demonstrates an awareness not only of the root meaning of the word Catholic understood as universal but also articulates something of the Church’s identity first expressed by Ignatius of Antioch early in the second century - namely the word *katholikos* (Ccel.org, 2025) used to describe the universal Church as distinct from local assemblies though still joined through belief.

Participant 42 went on to say: “I mean, you can go anywhere in the world - there is something different about, I think about being a Catholic” (P142). This is a clear assertion of a distinct Catholic identity that surpasses the boundaries of geography and culture, whilst also residing in and being a part of these. Though the first part of the sentence refers to being able not only to access, but also to enter into worshipping Catholic communities all over the world, the use of the word *different* also evokes a sense of otherworldliness- different points towards there being something inherently unique about being a Catholic.

Participant 29 illustrated one of the ways that this commonality can be experienced, rather than simply known theoretically: “It’s so nice when you go on holiday, for example, and you might not understand a word of the Mass, but you know exactly” (PI29). Being able to participate in the sacramental life of the Church, despite not speaking the same language, demonstrates in quite a tangible and commonly experienced way for many Catholics, that an aspect of Catholic identity cannot be contained only within local environments. Rather, it transcends these to the point that community can be felt even within transitory instances.

Participant 29 also added the experience of attending Mass in another country: “...everyone here thinks what I think” (PI29). This statement speaks of the credal nature of the Catholic faith as expressed through the Mass in this instance, as opposed to the suggestion of a homogenous and unthinking Catholic identity assimilated by all Catholics simply by virtue of their baptism. It is instead trying to tease out what it means to share an identity, *despite* other external or discernible differences. This shared identity is demonstrated through the example of the Mass, the “...source and summit of the Christian life” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, §1324).

Of course, within any group of Catholics there will be a representation to a variable extent of the broad nature of the Church, described by Participant 18 as follows: “The Catholic faith is very broad. I mean, we’ve got everything from very liberal people to people who wear mantillas and are really quite right-wing” (PI18). Although the comment contains a reference to an external identifier - namely a mantilla in this instance (a veil that some Catholic women wear when they enter a church as a sign of respect), this is mentioned simply as

a signpost. Though the sight of women wearing mantillas in church would have been more common in the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church (though this, and other types of formal dress were also more commonly seen in general), the mention of this followed by the words “really quite right-wing”, highlights an observation on the Participant’s part of identity tensions within the Church, with the mantilla serving as a marker of tradition - the marker in this case being an item of clothing that can signal a particular theological position.

Though the comment speaks broadly to the diversity found within worldwide Catholic identity, there is a sense of juxtaposition within this identity as described by the Participant, or, in other words, a spectrum of belief and practice within the Church. Participant 29’s comment above speaks to the sense that those people present at Mass share the same beliefs (“...they think the same as me” (PI29)), and, as a credal faith this is a justifiable assumption on the part of the Participant. However, when looked at alongside the words “liberal” and “right-wing”, the idea of a unique Catholic identity becomes more complex to discern. This thought was articulated by Participant 02: “I think there are millions and millions of distinctive Catholic identities. There’s not just one by a long chalk” (PI02). This comment acknowledges the many variations of Catholic identity that can be found, identities that remain under the umbrella of Catholicism, but which contain their own differences and distinctions. It also broadens the distinctions out beyond the crude terminology of right or left wing. The remainder of Participant 02’s nuanced observations provide further insight:

It maybe just depends where you are, what particular cultural form it takes, as much as anything else. And I think that’s partly to do with what is entailed in being a Catholic as well. I can recognise connections without any fuss. I mean I can recognise connections that make us Catholic between if I’m in Rome, for example, and I’ve got Latin Americans in

front of me, Germans behind me and I've got my own wee contingent here in the middle and I can recognise where we're all connected, but the way it's expressed is quite different and so I don't see how I can pin it down to one identity...it's multiple, but it's recognisable - with a bit of luck sometimes" (PI02).

In the first part of this statement, the Participant resists reducing Catholic identity to one reality and instead thoughtfully reflects on a spectrum, or plurality of Catholic identities. This observation would certainly be in line with McDonagh's call to recognise and nourish the complexity found within Catholic identities (McDonagh, 2019). Despite this diversity, the Participant is effortlessly able to pinpoint a recognisable unity amidst a variety of cultural expressions, and to some extent avoiding the fragmentation of identity in which McDonagh's (McDonagh, 2019) approach could result. The Participant grounds their observations in the embodied experience of visiting Rome, the home of the seat of Peter and place of pilgrimage, where many different nationalities and cultures are brought together within a shared context. As I analyse this data the Catholic Church is celebrating the inauguration of a new pope, the 267<sup>th</sup> successor of St Peter, where the multitudinal diversity of the Catholic Church is visibly demonstrated through flags, nationalities, and even other rites within the Church that form part of this Mass.

In his homily at the Mass on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2025, Pope Leo spoke of the: "...different backgrounds and experiences..." (Pope Leo XIV, 2025) of the Cardinals who formed the conclave, in much the same way as Participant 02 above. However, he also spoke to the origin of this unity: "Accompanied by your prayers, we could feel the working of the Holy Spirit, who was able to bring us into harmony, like musical instruments, so that our heartstrings could vibrate in a single melody" (Pope Leo XIV, 2025). This describes more than a sharing of

liturgy, or even purpose (in this case to elect a new Pope). Pope Leo describes the prayers of the universal Church in such a way that it evokes an image of every member of the Church not simply praying as a remote or separate activity but praying in such a way to spiritually bolster the Cardinals, and therefore actively and unitedly participating in the process itself. This is in chorus with St Pope John Paul II's exploration of the anthropology of relationality which presents the human person as an image of the triune God who, grounded in this trinitarian relationship, finds their identity in *communion* (Pope John Paul II, 1999). Pope Leo XIV then goes on to state in the same quote that the Holy Spirit is the animating cause of this communion - not as a cause fixed in a moment of time, but rather as one which works dynamically at the core of our being, a place of communion beyond external differences. The place and action of the Holy Spirit was also articulated by Participant 49 as follows:

Many of the elements of my life would be true of other people- family, community, work, all these other things. I suppose for me, it's animated by the Holy Spirit, it's animated by my ongoing participation in the life of the Church, so it's a sacramental reality (PI49).

The initial observation of Participant 49 situates them within the commonality of human experience and relationships. However, this commonality is inherently different because of the acknowledgement of the animating presence of the Holy Spirit within each aspect of the Participant's life, as well as their ongoing participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

This echoes the sense of difference or uniqueness of being a Catholic which was shared by Participant 42: "...there is something different about, I think about being a Catholic" (PI42). Participant 49 explored this difference further: "Being a Catholic has always felt more important to me than being Scottish in a

sense...my faith identity goes deeper than a national identity” (PI49). This calls to mind Philippians 3:20: “But our homeland is in heaven” (NJB, 1985) and the subsequent integral identity implied by both this sentence and Participant 49’s statement. The deeper level of identity spoken of by Participant 49 chimes with the bold claim put forth within Philippians of an incarnational identity, one that encompasses the temporal reality of human beings, whilst firmly claiming citizenship of heaven as their ultimate end and fulfilment (CCC §1023; §1024).

Though Participant 49 gave a deeper importance to their identity as a Catholic over national identity, Participant 06 spoke specifically of the impact that the geographical Church had on their identity:

Think about the saints in our country, you know, we think about Columba, we think about Ninian, we think about those places of pilgrimage, thinking about Iona, that shapes for me my identity as well. Yes, I’m part of the universal Church, but where I am, and the history of where I am, has a profound effect as well (PI06).

This description seamlessly connects the Participant’s spiritual identity with the temporal and local aspects of their Catholic identity. It also explores the interplay between being a member of the universal Church whilst being shaped and moulded by a sacred geographical heritage.

Though there can be tension between particularity and diversity, Participant 02 nevertheless maintains that there is coherence to be found within this reality of sometimes competing identifiers: “I can recognise where we’re all connected” (PI02). The connection or link described does not exist *because* of liturgical, sacramental or community contexts explored within this section, but rather predates them. In other words, the contexts are the ways in which the connectedness is most visibly demonstrated. Within the subtext of this

observation is the dismissal of a static form of Catholic identity, in favour of a dynamic and dialogical Catholic identity where local expressions are accommodated and form a shared tradition reflective of the trinitarian dynamism described above by both Pope John Paul II and now Pope Leo XIV.

The final part of Participant 02's statement highlights the need for awareness and perhaps also discernment on the part of individual Catholics to recognise the connections that bind all Catholics together not only externally, but also spiritually: "...it's multiple, but it's recognisable - with a bit of luck sometimes" (PI02). There is a sense of humility on the part of the Participant in this final statement, and an inherent recognition of both the challenge and need to find unity amongst a plurality of expression.

Participants 11, 14 and 03 referred to secularity when articulating their thoughts on Catholic identity. For Participant 14 this took a comparative form: "I suppose you have a value system that's maybe a little bit different to a secular one or other religions" (PI14). Within this statement the values of Catholicism are distinguished not only from secular values, but also from the values present within other religions. Catholic identity, as expressed through its values, is presented here as something unique and set apart.

Participant 03 began by clearly stating their belief in a distinct Catholic identity but expressed an understanding of external secular pressures which may compromise this: "There is no question in my mind that there is a Catholic identity. I think it's harder for some people to maintain that, because there is huge pressure from secular society, and it grows" (PI11). Though the word secular simply means relating to the worldly order, it is often used to describe

something oppositional to a faith view. Within the review of literature, both meanings are referred to. Equipping students with secular knowledge (alongside religious knowledge) is an expectation of Catholic schools set out within *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), for instance. However, Participant 11's use of the word would be similar to the Congregation for Catholic Education's observations of the effects of secularisation on society: "Identity crisis, loss of trust in social structures, the resulting insecurity and loss of any personal convictions, the contagion of a progressive secularisation of society..." (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982 §6).

The challenge to maintain a sense of Catholic identity identified by Participant 11 is something which implies a sense of pressurising and growing and which echoes the meaning of the words "contagion" and "progressive" in the above quotation from the Congregation for Catholic Education. Participant 03 spoke about the stability of belief and teaching found within Catholicism as an antidote to secular values: "...it's something that's stayed the same throughout. Good, especially in a secular - I would say secular world that people change their mind as the wind blows" (P103). Whilst committed atheists such as Christopher Hitchens and Bertrand Russell have argued that consistency of values is not exclusive to religion (Hitchens, C. 2007; Russell, B.1927), the context suggests that Participant 03 is commenting more on the stability found within the Catholic Church and their Catholic identity that flows from this. Another Participant used words similar in meaning: "...the most constant..." (P149), to indicate, in a positive way, the consistency or stability that Catholicism gave to their sense of identity throughout their lives. In comparison, only one Participant

elaborated on the times in their life when they had been away from the Church:

There were times in my career, and again it kind of linked with your personal life and kind of family life where I did not go to Mass...when the kids were born you were back. You know, there were just kind of cycles. When things were going ok in your family life, the Church had more meaning when I was younger. Because when you're younger, you look for something to blame...and the Church is an easy one to blame and get angry at...and then when you grow up and you get a wee bit more mature then you kind of realise well actually that's the thing that's actually saving you and keeping you going through. That's a process... (PI02)

At first glance, this comment appears to contrast with the previous positive comments about the Church. However, it presents a personal narrative of faith and an honest reflection, not on the reality of the role of the Church in the Participant's life, but on how this was perceived by the Participant at any given time, similar to the process of identity autonomy proposed by Hervieu-Léger (Hervieu-Léger, D., 2000). A sense of wrestling with the routine presence of and then self-imposed absence from religion in the Participant's life is described using milestones throughout this narrative. The faith identity across the life of the individual described here is in unison with a dynamic Catholic identity, rather than a static reality. Present also within this statement is a reframing of religious identity sparked by maturity and significant life events such as the development of family life. In essence, this comment demonstrates the interplay between an individual's development of identity within their specific social and religious context as well as providing a nuanced contribution to the wider debate about the co-existence of rupture and continuity within identity formation.

#### **(ii) Catholic Community Identity**

In the review of literature, the conflicting views of whether it is the community that forms the individual, or the individual that shapes the community are

explored (Barnes, 2015; McDonagh, 2019). To what extent the identity of the Church was changed is also investigated alongside the impact that this had on Catholic identity (Blanchard, 2019; Wilde, 2007). The nature of individual identity within Catholic teaching is explained as situated firmly within community identity, but community identity is not oppositional to individual identity; rather it is where the ultimate expression and fulfilment of the individual is to be found. Pope John Paul II describes this dynamic as follows: "A member of the lay faithful cannot remain isolated from the community, but must live in a continual interaction with others, always seeking communion" (*Christifideles Laici*, 1988, §20). This approach recognises the inherent social aspect of human beings (Genesis 2:18; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, §1879; *Gaudium et Spes*, §12) and avoids a binary or mutually exclusive understanding of identity. Rather than a relationship of tension between individual versus community identity, what is presented here is an acknowledgement that no individual lives in isolation, and that the relational aspect of human beings – or community – is of absolute necessity.

Participant 02 spoke of: "...a sense of belonging to something...that's good. And it cares and looks out for one another" (PI02). This statement implies not simply that the Participant belongs to something ambiguous or a loosely associated group, but that the thing itself is morally good or beneficial to them and that it actively expresses or lives out care and concern for its members. Participant 18 echoed the important role of community in their upbringing: "It was just one big community and everybody helped bring up everybody else" (PI18). This suggests a tightly knit community where members assume participation and responsibility for one another, and perhaps in this comment most especially with regards to

younger members of the community. This positive experience of belonging not only to a community of belief, but one where members both provide and receive care and protection was also echoed by Participant 50:

I remember going in [to the Church] after my dad had died...and that just gentle presence of the whole community...it's really powerful, nobody needs to say anything. Not a word needs to be spoken, it's there and it's sometimes not in the spoken bit... (P150).

The unspoken support that this Participant experienced at a time of great loss communicates something significant about the nature of the community identity to which the Participant belongs. Not only is it a physical community where people gather, but is also, by virtue of the very things that the community gathers to celebrate, a spiritual community. It is a place that people come to as individuals, but who then experience something as community. That the Participant felt healing even through silent accompaniment speaks quite powerfully of the ability of a community to be a sacrament of presence to one another.

Not all Participants experienced such a profound or positive level of belonging, however. Participant 10 spoke of an over-emphasis of the celebration of Sunday liturgies to the detriment of a feeling of community: "...I think sometimes you can feel as a member of a Catholic Church that the community is very much centred around our Sunday Mass" (P110). They went on to speak about the lack of community -based activities available throughout the week and what they saw as the outcome of this approach: "I think that definitely it can feel like more of a personal faith" (P110). Though coming together to celebrate the sacraments is a communal act of worship, this Participant's statement identifies a lack of development of community activity within the parish, and therefore community

identity outwith formal expressions. The Participant shares that their lived reality of Church creates a sense of personal, rather than community faith – a reality that stands in opposition to the Church teaching offered in the first paragraph of this section.

Participant 18 identified the necessity of community activities within Church communities: "Things I think are really important are things like Church halls and having Brownies and Scouts and bringing up children as part of that community...I don't think it's just all about worship" (PI18). This Participant was keen to emphasise that a Catholic community should provide for and shape many aspects of life, not only the liturgical. The use of the term: "bringing up children" evokes an image of the Church community akin to that of a family.

That Participants 02, 50 and 18 could have such different experiences of a community of faith from Participant 10 is of note. Participant 10 was themselves aware of the comparative disparity of their own experience: "I've known people that have moved to a Church and immediately have hundreds of friends..." (PI10). The differences could reflect the variety of Church communities and the complex human relationships with which these are constituted. It could also be reflective of the resources present, or even the needs and expectations of each individual as a member of a faith community.

The feelings and experiences above speak of the Church community as experienced through day-to-day interactions of Participants, both formal and otherwise. In contrast, Participant 06 spoke of their understanding of communal identity as follows:

I guess the communal aspect is the Communion of Saints, isn't it? You know, we profess that every Sunday. You know, it's about us on Earth, it's about those who have gone before us in Heaven, it's about the souls in Purgatory...we are so closely linked to that that sometimes people with experiences in life, people can end up thinking that they are so much on their own and actually, my goodness, we're definitely not (PI06).

The first two sentences of this statement articulate all three aspects of what is understood in Catholic theology as the Communion of Saints: the Church Militant, the Church Suffering and the Church Triumphant. Communal Catholic identity for this Participant, therefore, was formed from an understanding of these terms. These traditional theological expressions refer to the Church on earth (Church Militant), the souls in purgatory (Church Suffering) and the saints in Heaven (Church Triumphant). They describe the spiritual communion shared by all members of the Church, both living and dead. The second half of this comment explains why the Participant chose to express their understanding of communal Catholic identity in this way. They suggest that living only as if there is one aspect of the Church - the daily struggle to live faithfully here and now on earth - obscures the reality that all three expressions propose, namely that as a member of the community of the Catholic Church you belong to something holy and eternal.

Participant 06's articulation of communal identity in explicitly theological terms highlights an important dynamic running throughout the data: namely the interplay between the personal "I" and the ecclesial "we". Whilst many Participants described their faith and professional commitments in personal language – referring to conscience, vocation, and individual belief – these expressions were rarely isolated from a broader faith-community based sense of belonging. Even when Catholic identity was experienced as deeply personal, it

was not understood as self-originating or private, but rather as participation in a community that precedes and sustains the individual.

This dynamic reflects a distinctly Catholic anthropology in which the human person is understood as relational and constituted through communion (Gaudium et Spes, 1965). The “I” of Catholic teacher identity is, therefore, embedded within the “we” of the Church, the Catholic school community, and, as Participant 06 expresses, the Communion of Saints. Though tensions may arise between personal conviction and communal expectations, these do not necessarily indicate fragmentation; rather, they reveal the lived negotiation of belonging within a tradition that holds together both individuality and shared faith.

### **(iii) Changes in Education (since 1965)**

Whilst the first two sections of the second overarching research question: *How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity?* focused on Participants’ understanding of Catholic Identity and Catholic community identity, the second half of the data generated in this section sees Participants share their views and experiences regarding changes in education since 1965, with the addition of one Participant referencing *The Education (Scotland) Act 1918*.

Though seven Participants spoke negatively and at length about the changes to education since 1965, and this will be explored below, it is of interest that no Participants spoke only positively about the changes. If benefits were identified, they were accompanied by a caveat. For example, Participant 18 spoke negatively about generic lesson structures: “These pro-forma lessons that are

being put up on posters in classrooms, it's been, it's become like an industry..." (PI18), whilst identifying that "...there's benefits too because lessons are more the same, there's a consistent approach" (PI18). Consistency is identified as a positive by-product of an approach which, in this Participant's view, industrialises education in such a way that can stifle teacher creativity.

Similarly, Participant 11 spoke of the positive opportunities provided by wider access to education: "Through the period [of the research] as well as the changes that we have seen in education, the greater opportunity..." (PI11). They then described the shadow side of this as follows: "...but that opportunity is almost always framed on the context of escaping from your background to a better one" (PI11). This statement acknowledges the educational reform of the time period and suggests that opportunity provided through education is dynamic and responsive. The comment does not, however, claim that the opportunities created are equitable or even universal, but simply that they are greater in some sense than was offered by the education in the past. The Participant proposes, however, that despite the positive outcomes that education can provide, framing these outcomes as wholly successful is problematic. The tensions identified by this Participant highlight the conflicting aims of equity in educational discourse against a narrative that presents opportunity in education as a means to escape a less desirable social or cultural background. This position echoes Raey's work on social mobility as a form of escape, most especially from working-class backgrounds (Raey, 2001; Raey et al., 2009) and, in so doing, highlights an inherent tension between education as affirmation or assimilation to pre-conceived markers of success.

Participant 11 identified that the changes in motion during the time period of this research were far reaching: “From the mid-sixties into the present both in education and society, and in the Church, there has been massive change” (PI11). Changes in education are, according to this Participant, viewed simultaneously with changes taking place in society and in the Church. Participant 01, however, spoke of the changes done *to*, rather than *with* educationalists: “We’ve had about 14 million different variations on what we’re trying to do...” (PI01). This is a sentiment in chorus with Ball’s evocative summation of the many changes within education as an: “epidemic of reform” (Ball, 2003, 215). The use of the word “variations” implies no change to the core role, or even identity, of the educator; instead, the use of this word, alongside the hyperbolic number of 14,000000, infers unwanted or unnecessary interference in education from outside parties. Participant 01 then goes on to explore the resulting feeling that this constant change of approach provoked in staff: “...because no matter what you’re kind of challenged with, everyone just kind of backs each other up to make sure the kids are getting the best benefit out of it” (PI01). The first part of this comment frames equational reform within the context of challenge but resolves this by focusing on the solidarity of teaching staff and their collective focus on what is identified by this Participant as their sole purpose - to be at the service of young people in their school.

When comparing *Curriculum for Excellence* with earlier educational frameworks in Scotland—specifically the *5-14 Curriculum*—Participant 49 offered the following evaluation:

Look, there was a curriculum, 5-14 - people tell me it was coherent, it had a certain flow, teachers knew where they were, assessment was straightforward and this sense of almost having a post-modern curriculum

where all the elements have been separated and deconstructed and, whatever the intention was, now we feel that we are being told to do any combination of these things in any way...and it will probably be all right (PI49).

The Participant expresses a level of frustration and uncertainty in this comment. The use of the term “post-modern curriculum” by the Participant highlights the absence of structure and coherency in the current curriculum model as opposed the previous, more traditional approach found within the *5-14 Curriculum*. The fragmentation and deconstruction described above, and the implications of this reality upon teachers’ role and identity is in chorus with the overarching narratives of post-modernity explored within the review of literature.

Though the literature deals specifically with the impact of post-modernity on identity theory, it is logical that this impact is also identifiable within the structures, or in this case, curriculum frameworks, created by the very individuals shaped and influenced by this sea change in identity theory. Hall’s observation of the “... fragmenting [of] the individual as a unified subject. (Hall, 1992, 274) is mirrored in the fragmentation of the curriculum lamented in the Participant’s comment above. At a superficial level, the deconstruction of the curriculum, and the flexibility that accompanies the comparatively less structured approach of Curriculum for Excellence, could be interpreted as a benefit of the “...individual agency and control” (Stets, 2021, 298) that emerges in modernity and develops exponentially throughout post-modernity. However, the Participant highlights only the lack of clarity and direction for the teachers who are expected to deliver the curriculum in a coherent and consistent manner. The final part of this comment, “...and it will probably be all right” (PI49), betrays a feeling of apprehension about the ability of teachers to manage the level of responsibility and freedom afforded them through the flexibility of

the curriculum structure as well as an apprehension regarding the overall efficacy of the framework.

#### **(iv) Qualifications**

Discussion around the changes within education during the time period of the study also garnered comment from eight Participants about qualifications. That 50% of Participants spoke about qualifications and the exam system without there being a specifically directed question within the interview is justification for its inclusion within this data analysis. Participant 12 elaborated further on the reason for this addition to the conversation: “It seems to me that the professional identity [of teachers] has had to be much more wrapped up in the exam process and measurement...” (P12). The place of the exams in school, and the accompanying data tracking and folio or project work that accompanies so many SQA courses has, in the view of this Participant, impacted upon not only the functional aspect of the teacher, but on the professional identity of the teacher. This is in concert with Ball’s assertion that changes to the functionality of the teacher also results in a change to who they are (Ball, 2003). This Participant’s comment also broadens the conversation around qualifications to take cognisance of what they identify as a culture of quantifiable outcomes within education.

In addition to the impact of this approach on teachers, the Participant also shared their thoughts on how this affects school pupils: “...pupils seeing subjects as something that they’ve got to measure up to somehow. It has become very achievement oriented, in certificate terms, for teachers as well as pupils” (P12). Implied in this comment is a concern for the consequential effect of this system on the pupil and a sub-textual observation on the way that this

approach changes the nature of Catholic schools by implication. It also highlights the tension between market driven educational theories and the Church's holistic understanding of education. Though academic success undoubtedly forms part of the mission of the Catholic school (*Gravissimum educationis*, 1965), it is not the singular priority: In *What Makes Us Catholic* (2002), Groome stresses that Catholic education should not be reduced to exam results or skills for the workplace, but should educate for life in faith, justice, and community. This statement firmly roots the fundamental purpose of Catholic education within the sphere of human formation.

The focus on certificated achievements and the implications of this on teacher identity highlighted by Participant 12 echoes concerns expressed in the literature review: specifically regarding Human Capital Theory and its fuelling of a culture of performativity within the teaching profession, explained by Ball (2003) as follows: "Performativity turns teachers into the 'means of production'—not of knowledge or of values, but of performance" (Ball, 2003, 224). Ball is here critiquing the use of educational policy in subjecting teachers to overly-bureaucratic forms of measurement and target setting to the detriment of the core role of the teacher. In terms of the impact of this change of teacher role and identity upon the pupil and their destinations, Participant 42 offered the following observation: "Often employers actually care more what the person's like, how they interact with other people and you can't really measure that with exams, you know?" (PI42). Similarly to the focus on performance over knowledge and values lamented above by Ball (2003), Participant 42 calls our attention to the possession of valuable attributes not

measurable by certification and, by implication, questions the efficacy of the current system.

Conversely, Participant 16 spoke positively about the introduction of “...certification for all...” (P16) in Scottish schools:

I was teaching O Grades, so the curriculum was changing. Suddenly, the children who didn't have any value in education were now sitting Foundation exams...that was the start of equity when you were starting to see that everybody deserves to sit exams (P16).

The use of the word “equity” infers a lack of fairness within the previous certification system. The Participant also communicates a sense of awareness of opportunity and enthusiasm on behalf of the potential opportunities for young people provided via the raft of policy changes around assessment and curriculum structure in the period following the Munn and Dunning reports of 1997 (Munn, 1977; Dunning. 1977).

Participant 11 expressed a similarly positive view: “In education, we're moving into the so-called meritocracy where people could get on regardless of the background, and there's huge advantages in that” (P11). The Participant uses the word “moving” to illustrate that the Scottish Education system continues to be on a journey towards something better, rather than having arrived at that destination. The Participant also recognises the benefits to young people achieved via social equity and its place in shaping the educational approach within Scotland. However, there is also a stark analysis of the Scottish education system of the time offered in the second line of Participant 16's statement: “...the children who didn't have any value in education...” (P16). The Participant is not only articulating the rigid academic and vocational divides within schools of the time but is also claiming that before the shift towards

comprehensive education and expanded access to qualifications, non-academic pupils were of no value within the education system.

Participant 16 also offered a slightly different perspective by comparing the certification system - and pupil experience - in Scottish schools in the mid 1980's with the current model:

In 1986 those people who were sitting exams and being valued now don't have anything. They've now got course completion; they'll get National 4, but National 4's not a pass or a fail- it's literally an award to say you've completed a course (P116).

The repeated use of the word "valued" by Participant 16 conveys an understanding of education as something that should value each individual young person, and an expectation that the structures that schools operate within reflect this philosophy. Participant 16 also questions the value of an award such as National 4 given that it measures neither success or failure on the part of the young person. This comment expresses criticism of the current certification system and sees it as a return to a pre-Munn and Dunning period and the limited access to qualifications therein for some pupils. The overwhelming tone of the Participant's comment is one of advocacy for young people and a deep concern for the opportunities and outcomes for every child made available through schools.

A similar tone was echoed by Participant 11: "I always saw huge potential in every young person I ever came across. And that's one of the reasons that [I dislike the current exam system]...it diminishes people as individuals. It's not what it could be and it's not what it should be either" (P111). Again, the motivation behind the interrogation of the current exam system is the educational experience of the young person and the tension created between

such systems and the spirit of opportunity and potential that should be offered within schools.

#### **(v) Catholicism and Contemporary Scottish Society**

This is the final section of data to be presented under the broad umbrella of the second overarching research question of the study:

*How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity?*

The data presents Participants' feelings, views and observations of Catholicism in Scotland. Sometimes this is by way of a personal reflection, at times this is presented through a professional lens and sometimes Participants offer a perspective involving personal and professional. As in other areas of the data, no strict compartmentalisation was observed by any Participant - similarly, comments regarding Catholicism in Scotland will feature in other sections of this data analysis. Views shared by Participants often moved fluidly between personal and professional.

Participants 18 and 29 offered observations of Scottish Catholics that highlighted a precariousness around Catholic identity: "Maybe we don't stand up enough, like to people" (P129) and: "I feel like a lot of Scottish people are finding themselves getting brainwashed by political agendas that are being pushed by the press, social media" (P118). The use of the word "we" by Participant 29 implies a collective self-awareness within the Catholic community of Scotland. The comment expresses a reluctance amongst Catholics to assert or even defend their beliefs within public or social spheres. This may reflect a sense of marginalisation experienced as a Scottish Catholic by the Participant but could

also be understood as an observation of apathy and non-practice within the community. Where the former interpretation is the case, a tension is highlighted by the Participant between public and private expressions of faith, although caution should be applied when assuming a link between reluctance to publicly express faith and a weakened Catholic identity. The reluctance to “stand up” to people could also reflect a legacy of the Catholic minority voice within Scottish public discourse. However, as well as a comment on current attitudes, there is also present in the sub-text of the statement, a call for Scottish Catholics to be more confident and courageous in a variety of situations or contexts that may require a defence of the faith.

Alternately, considering Participant 29’s words as a comment on the apathy or disassociation of Catholics from the Church allows space to explore possible causes for this situation which are then elaborated on by Participant 18.

Participant 18’s statement articulates one of these causes, namely that Catholic identity is aggressively under attack. Responsibility for this attack is firmly placed at the feet of political and secular ideologies by this Participant and a distrust of them and their inherent incompatibility with a Catholic moral framework is strongly implied. The use of forceful words such as “brainwashed” and “pushed” evokes images of Catholic practices or moral frameworks being crowded out and coercively replaced.

When viewed together, both comments reveal an awareness on the part of the Participants of being morally and culturally out of harmony as a Catholic within Contemporary Scottish society. Both also hint towards a Catholic identity under strain and suggest that maintaining a Catholic identity is characterised by tension and involves assertiveness and conscious awareness.

Though Participant 18's comment identifies an inherent tension between religious identity and political ideologies, Participant 49 sees this as a necessary characteristic of the relationship: "There has always got to be a creative tension because the Church and the government are distinct, separate entities with different responsibilities and missions, so I recognise the tension there" (PI49). The insertion of the word "creative" by the Participant gives an air of positivity and possibility to the tension identified, rather than exclusively combative. The identification of the different responsibilities and purpose of both Church and state infers the necessity of both, but also inherently recognises the need for dialogue between both since Catholics exist simultaneously within both spheres – much like the overlapping circles of a Venn diagram. The motif of necessary tension between the two is also seen in in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "A tension between the Church and the political community is normal, and it can be healthy" (Evangelii Gaudium §183). Both this quote and the view expressed by Participant 49 assert that autonomy of both Church and state, even where situations of tension arise, is to be affirmed. Participant 49 goes on to illustrate the state's responsibility towards the Church from the perspective of a Catholic teacher as follows:

I would always want the state to protect the appropriate rights of the Church to carry out her mission and the rights of Catholic teachers and nurses and doctors to, you know, work according to conscience and to have their faith and their values and their identity protected and recognised as best they can so they don't feel that they need to choose between one aspect of their civic identity and their religious identity (PI49).

More than simply a commentary on Church state relationships in theory, the Participant's comment explores how this relational dynamic impacts on Catholics within civic society by directly linking the state's protection of rights of the

Church, with the rights of the individual Catholic. The use of the word “conscience” by the Participant is significant since it is understood within Catholic teaching as both sacred and binding - a place where natural law resides and guides an individual’s actions (Second Vatican Council, 1965; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993). That conscience should be respected by political or secular authorities is asserted strongly by the Catholic Church: “In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God...It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §3). This statement claims conscience as an inherent right integral to the Church’s understanding of human dignity, rather than something within the state’s gift to give or control. Participant 49 offers a nuanced understanding of how conscience is integrally linked with all facets of an individual’s identity as well as warning of the risks of fragmentation or disruption to this integrity in situations where conflict or coercion may be present.

Participant 10 recognised that the Church and state can clash in certain instances: “There’s obviously times where the position being put forward by the government can clash with the position of the Church” (PI10) but called for a conciliatory effort to be made to “...find some sort of middle ground where the Church is feeling we’re being true to the Church’s teachings as well” (PI10). Consistent throughout this observation is a desire on the Participant’s part to remain in right relationship to Church teaching – in their official capacity as a teacher employed by the Local Authority – even at times when governmental positions contradict the Church’s.

Participant 18 spoke to their experience of this tension from within the classroom, using words such as “anxious” (P118) and “concerns” (P118) to describe how they and their teacher colleagues felt. They spoke to an uncertainty amongst some teachers in navigating areas where Church and state stance differed, even to the point of being dismissed from employment: “...I’m talking about things like saying the wrong thing or being in the wrong place at the wrong time or believing something maybe even, dare I say it? There’s a real tension now with Church teaching and where our politics is moving” (P118). This comment betrays a climate of fear amongst some Catholic teachers fuelled by an awareness of the growing difference between acceptable secular discourse and Church teaching. It also suggests a sense of the space in which Catholic views and norms are expressed, taught, or lived, being squeezed and implies an element of personal risk on the part of the teacher to speak freely about their faith or its teaching - even within a Catholic school setting. This sentiment is not, however, limited to the classroom, but also refers to engagement of Catholics in society in general through the mention of politics, and the potential professional or personal backlash that may result from expressing certain views or beliefs. That Scottish Catholic state schools are fully state funded must form part of the analysis of this Participant’s sense of vulnerability since this represents a partnership or relationship between Church and state. It raises questions about how secure or supported Catholic teachers feel in undertaking the mandate given them by the Church: “But let teachers recognise that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, §8). This statement of reliance of the Church on Catholic teachers, along with the anxiety expressed by Participant 18, suggests a precarious environment requiring deft navigation.

### 5.2.1 Patterns Across Participants

When reflecting on the data across all Participants, certain patterns emerge pertaining to the ways in which Catholic identity is understood both in relation to the wider Church and contemporary society. Older teachers with longer service often emphasised the stability of Catholic teaching, describing it as an anchor in times of cultural and ecclesial change. They very much valued the continuity of doctrine and sacramental life as sources of affirmation and assurance but also readily expressed concern at the decline of parish life and cohesion, as well as the diminished standing of Catholicism in the public sphere. Their reflections, though emphasising many positives, also carried a tone of loss. This highlighted some of the ways that broader processes of secularisation and social change have altered the Catholic community that first shaped their identity.

Mid-career teachers, particularly those qualifying in the 1990s and early 2000s, tended to frame Catholic identity primarily in terms of negotiation. They described their role as Catholic educators operating in the midst of competing demands from school, state, and Church, and often used the language of tension. Participants in this category also conveyed an understanding that an understanding of Catholic identity could not be assumed, but instead required constant explanation and oftentimes defence, particularly in a context shaped by reform, accountability, and the prominence of secular values.

Younger and more recently qualified teachers, by contrast, were more likely to describe Catholic identity as dynamic and evolving. Their reflections often centred on gradual discovery, shaped by professional experience and by exposure to diversity in classrooms and wider society. Rather than presenting

Catholic identity as a settled or inherited reality, they tended to understand it as discernment-in-progress, open to change and adaptation in pluralist contexts.

Sex and subject specialism also shaped responses in some instances. Female Participants more often articulated Catholic identity through relational and community situated terms that emphasised family and nurture, while male Participants referred more frequently to external structures, authority, or doctrinal stability. Subject specialists in Religious Education were more inclined to frame Catholic identity in explicitly theological and sacramental terms, whereas teachers of other disciplines more frequently used terms such as witness, service, or Catholic ethos. These patterns suggest that both gendered perspectives and subject specialisms may shape the manner in which identity is expressed, even if they do not change Participants' understanding of being a Catholic teacher in any fundamental way.

Diocesan context may also shape responses with teachers in schools with stronger chaplaincy presence or regular clerical involvement appeared more confident in articulating Catholic identity in explicitly religious terms, while others leaned more towards the language of community or values. This suggests that Catholic teacher identity is influenced not only by the individual but also by the wider ecclesial environment in which they are situated.

Together these observations underline that Catholic teacher identity is dynamic and layered. While generational patterns are clear, sex, subject, and diocesan context also add depth and meaning to Participant responses. Identity,

therefore, emerges not as a fixed or uniform reality, but as something negotiated across time, context, and community.

### **5.2.2 Conclusion**

Across the second research question, three broad themes can be discerned.

First, Participants reflected on the meaning of Catholic identity itself. Whilst some Participants resisted the idea of uniqueness and emphasised commonalities with other faiths or none, others pointed to experiences of universality, the sacramental life of tradition as marks of distinctiveness within Catholicism. In doing so, they highlighted both the breadth and the coherence of Catholic identity, describing it as multiple in expression, yet recognisable through shared belief and sacramental life.

Secondly, Participants spoke of Catholic community identity. Their reflections often underscored the formative and sustaining power of belonging, whether this was experienced through a supportive parish environment or the Catholic school. At the same time, they identified gaps or weaknesses where communal life seemed reduced to liturgical attendance and expressed a desire for broader forms of engagement. Community was thus understood as a strength of Catholic identity, but also as imperfectly experienced.

Lastly, Participants situated Catholic identity within wider social and educational change. They described tensions with secular values, the effects of ongoing reform, and the perceived loss of cultural stability. For some, these challenges were experienced as pressures or sometimes threats, while others spoke of them as necessary tensions capable of generating creative exchanges.

In both cases, identity was narrated in relation to the broader currents of Church and society, rather than in isolation.

Viewed together, the data suggests that Catholic teacher identity in Scotland is not static but dynamic, shaped by personal faith, professional context, and wider ecclesial belonging. It develops across time, can deepen through professional and personal spiritual experience, and can be coloured by gendered perspectives, subject specialism, or even diocesan context. In this sense, Catholic teacher identity emerges as a negotiated reality that is personal, but also community situated.

### **5.3 Research Question 3: To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed education system?**

The third and final overarching research question seeks to explore Catholic teacher identity within the Scottish educational context. The questions asked during interviews sought to draw out and understand what views Participants held about the education system in Scotland, specifically in relation to denominational schools. They were also asked their opinions on the relationship between the Scottish Government and Catholic schools, including any challenges and opportunities within this relationship. Building on the data collected and analysed in the first two sections of this data analysis, this third section explores the impact of political structures and educational arrangements on Catholic teacher identity.

#### **(i) Catholic Schools in Scotland**

There were common threads in the views and experiences Participants expressed about Catholic schools in Scotland. Though some Participants recognised that the Catholic community in Scotland was fortunate to have its schools as part of the

state system (PI03; PI29; PI49), the majority of Participants expressed some level of trepidation about the position of Catholic schools in Scotland.

Participants articulated political challenges to Catholic schooling (PI16; PI49; PI05), as well as internal challenges from parents or the home (PI29; PI03).

Although this data is being presented under the heading: *Catholic Schools in Scotland*, some of the views offered speak more broadly to the challenges to Catholic identity within Scotland through the lens of the Catholic school.

The Education (Scotland) Act 1918 is the historical entry point of Scotland's Catholic schools into the state's educational provision. This Act reached its centenary just seven years ago and was marked in various ways by Catholic schools, Diocesan Education Departments, The University of Glasgow, and civic authorities. This occasioned a return to the Act itself by many people, as well as to the historical circumstances which saw it enacted. Perhaps because of this proximate anniversary, mention of the Act and its consequences peppers Participant responses throughout the data. Participant 50 says of their experience of the centenary year: "I think it did us good to celebrate the 100 years and recognise that. I think it brought out a conversation where people realised it [Catholic schooling] was actually giving opportunities" (PI50). This comment speaks positively about the return to the Act that the centenary year facilitated. The second half of the statement implies that the actions of that year also awoke a dialogue between people where they were able to reflect upon the benefits made available through Catholic schools. There is also a subtext within this statement, especially where the Participant states that Catholic schooling was "actually giving opportunities" (PI50), suggesting that an opposite view - one that perhaps saw denominational schools as divisive within

Scottish society, or sub-par in some way - also existed. Participant 02 also touched upon the opinion that Catholic schools are the cause of discord: “I can’t see, if you’re trying to bring people up to be good citizens, within whatever faith and particularly our faith, then what’s bad about that?” (PI02). Participant 02 is appealing to common ground here: namely that one of the key purposes of education is to form good citizens. The use of the phrase “particularly our faith” also suggests the integral nature of this aim within Catholicism and Catholic education specifically.

Participant 49 offered the following observation of the Act: “I find it profoundly moving that over a hundred years ago now, the people that had responsibility at the time had the foresight to say, ‘Scotland is plural, and we can accommodate more than one kind of system’” (PI49). This is, of course, a comment about the Scottish education system and the space created for Catholic schools within it, but it is also a positive appraisal of the recognition of the time that Scottish identity was far from singular. Whilst acknowledging the process that produced the Act, the Act itself was not claimed as a panacea for challenges to Catholic schools:

I’m not a political person, and probably the closest I came to anything spurning passion in me politically was when the Green party said that they wanted to close Catholic schools. I got really upset about that because I didn’t have to fight for Catholic education - my parents did that for me (PI16).

Participant 16 is passionate about the right of Catholic schools to exist in Scotland (and acknowledges the efforts of the Catholic community who fought for their existence). As in the case of this Participant, challenges or criticisms offered by political parties of denominational schools, can mobilise individuals who otherwise self-identify as apolitical. This is because the criticism is

understood by the Participant as not only pertaining to Catholic schools but, perhaps more importantly, as an attack on Catholic identity itself.

In a similar vein, other views expressed about Catholic schools were also intertwined with views about the Catholic community in Scotland more broadly: “...I believe we have a lot to give as one of the communities in Scotland. I believe our faith, our values, our commitment to the human person, to the protection of life from womb to tomb...” (PI49). This comment extends to what is taught in Catholic schools but goes beyond the school itself echoing instead expressions of Church as a people sharing in one mission (Hall, Sultmann and Townend, 2019). Throughout the interviews, and therefore the data analysis, Participants move naturally and fluidly between speaking about challenges to Catholic schools and the Catholic faith more generally. This suggests a coherency of identity, at the very least in areas of challenge and tension- an answer on some level to identity theories that court fragmentation and compartmentalisation.

Participant 29 shared their thoughts on internal challenges to Catholic schools: “I think we do face challenges more and more...I do think people are choosing to send their kids to a Catholic school because it’s a better ethos and all of these kind of things, but they want it on their terms” (PI29). Described here is the struggle of the Catholic school community to maintain a cohesive identity whilst navigating what might be contrary opinions and wishes of families who have chosen to send their children to a Catholic school. If it is the case that some of these families are of the Catholic faith, a parallel line of thought can be drawn between the approach of these families who, in the words of Participant 29 “...want it on their terms” (PI29) and Bullivant’s claim that being selective

about which Church teaching to follow. It “...occasioned no great crisis of faith...” (Bullivant, 2019, 75) for Catholics or their Catholic identity to dissent over a particular discipline or doctrine mandated by the Church. Though the expression “want it on their own terms” might seem more assertive than the apathy communicated through Bullivant’s words, there is a shared sense of discontinuity and lack of coherence in the sense of Catholic identity shared through both comments. Key here, however, is that the approaches adopted may not be recognised as incoherent by those that hold them.

### **(ii) Catholic Schools and the Scottish Government**

Catholic schools have been part of the educational estate in Scotland since 1918. In the more than one hundred years that has passed since the Act, the political landscape of Scotland, as well as Scottish society, has changed significantly.

Several Participants expressed concern and fear regarding both the current political circumstances in which Catholic schools find themselves, and for the continued existence of Catholic schools into the future. Participant 05 began by sharing the following thoughts: “I think that the government rhetoric around Catholic schools is that they’re safe - I think they would shut us down as soon as look at us, first opportunity I think (PI05).” This is a stark comment, and one which at once communicates a sense of instability and uncertainty about the position of Catholic schools in Scotland. It also suggests that a disingenuous posture has been adopted by the Scottish Government. This sentiment was shared by participant 42 who was more specific about the Scottish National Party’s attitude towards Catholic schools: “I think if the SNP had their way, they would get rid of it [Catholic schools] and have non-denominational schools (PI42).” This judgement of the SNP’s thoughts about Catholic schools can’t be

directly evidenced, however. Why then did Participants feel so strongly about a position not publicly held by the Scottish Government?

Participant 18 pointed out that any government: "...is concerned about votes and voters...(P118)". Whilst this statement expresses the reality of any democratically elected government, something more complex is implied. The Participant went on to explain why concern about votes might translate into a political party masking their views about Catholic schools specifically:

...there's a very significant number of voters in very important and strategic places in Scotland who have a vested interest in Catholic schools because they're Catholic themselves...the Scottish government doesn't mind Catholic schools because it gives people an element of choice and that's a good thing...but they operate them, and they want to operate them just the same as non-denominational schools (P118).

Inherent to this statement is the suggestion of a representative pragmatism on the government's part where certain policies or approaches are recognised as electorally necessary even when they do not align with the ideological position of the party, a view echoed above by Participants 5 and 42. The holding of these views, therefore, is essential to maintaining the trust and support of the electorate, an electorate that also includes a significant number of Catholics. Participant 18's comment, however, speaks to a more nuanced position where the government is aware of influential Catholics and the impact that challenges to Catholic schools would have on such relationships and, as a result, on their overall electability. The second half of this statement speaks to the state's running of Catholic schools directly. The Participant states that the Scottish government superficially supports the freedom of parents and carers to choose their preferred educational setting (in this case, the Catholic school), but in

practice, ignores the unique approach of the Catholic school and instead infers intentional assimilation to a model based upon non-denominational schools.

Participant 01 echoed this position by stating: “So, as far as government is concerned, I think we are recognised but I think we’ve only been paid lip-service (PI01)”. Similarly to Participant 18, there is a recognition within this comment that Catholic schools are acknowledged by the Scottish Government, but that this acknowledgement remains superficial. Participant 18 speaks about a universal governing and managing of Scottish schools as an entire estate to the detriment of the identity of the Catholic school. More than simply the logistics associated with managing the school estate, the Participant is implying subterfuge on the part of the government where Catholic schools are publicly supported, whilst being undermined in more subtle ways such as centralised oversight of schools.

Participant 05 was unequivocal in their opinion of the Scottish Government’s attitude to Catholics in Scotland in general: “...there is clearly an anti-Catholic bias in the government...(PI05)”. Their comment was not simply an assessment of the current political landscape, however, and they went on to say: “...Catholic elected members, of whom there are a quite significant number...should be ashamed of themselves to allow that sort of talk to happen (PI05)”. In rebuking Catholic politicians for their lack of defence of Catholic schools, the Participant avoids a simple dichotomy between Scottish Catholics and the Scottish Government and instead nuances their criticism by voicing disapproval of inert Catholic politicians who occupy positions in which they are able to effect change, but choose not to do so. This opprobrium also suggests that Catholic identity, and more specifically, Catholic political identity includes

an obligation upon the individual Catholic to advocate for the fair recognition and protection of Catholic communities within the broader civic and political landscape - not simply as an individual possessing rights and protections to practice a personal faith. This is an important point since it emphasises an understanding of Catholic community that reaches beyond specific and formal associative examples such as Catholic churches and Catholic schools and instead suggests that Catholic community is wherever the Catholic is, rather than being bound by a physical setting.

Participant 06 offered their thoughts on the reason behind the superficial attention paid to Catholics and Catholic schools highlighted by other participants: “We’re in an increasingly secular society, and you know, moral relativism, those things have a profound influence on people in government. That then affects faith life and Catholic schools (PI06)”. This assessment implies an entirely reshaped ideology, and its subsequent consequences, rather than a specific attack on Catholic schools. The Participant instead considers how changes in society and morality have shaped and influenced people in government. Secular society, mentioned here alongside moral relativism, implies a space from which religion is excluded. This rebranding of the notion of the secular in modern parlance to mean opposed to or adversarial towards the sacred is contrary to the Church’s understanding which refers simply to the worldly or temporal sphere as *distinct* from religious or ecclesiastical authority (Paul VI, 1965). The Participant’s viewpoint is suggestive of Taylor’s (2007) contention that modern secularism goes further than simply occupying a space separate or distinct from the religious and instead constructs entirely new structures from which to interpret meaning. When looked at in parallel with the

Participant's observation, these new structures of meaning are implied as not only being apart but being opposed to the old meaning structures of Christianity which they have replaced. This replacement is not idle, however, but has refashioned ways of thinking and being.

Participant 03 explored some concrete examples of these changed structures of meaning and the resulting opposition reality between sacred and secular: "The current government, a lot of their policies or things that maybe they've tried to put through don't really match up with our faith...Pro-life stuff, assisted dying" (PI03). The Participant identifies that the frameworks of meaning of the Catholic Church are in direct opposition to that of the government on the two specific issues mentioned. In other words, the anthropological foundation of the beliefs regarding the sanctity of human life are not respected within governmental policies. Specifically relating this to the Catholic school, Participant 03 added: "...I think there's going to be challenges ahead in the sense, well, what are they going to be expecting us to teach or say? (PI03)". Participant 03 captures here the proliferation of a mindset at odds with Church teaching and how it impacts not only on Catholic teachers, but on the entire vision that underpins the Catholic school. The tension expressed here between the expectations of teachers expressed by the government, and the expectations placed upon them by their faith is made clear by an uncertainty towards the future. Asking what, as Catholic teacher, they may be asked to teach or to say in future expresses an anticipatory anxiety that some content or expectations may present a challenge on conscientious grounds. Although the Participant mentions assisted dying and pro-life specifically (and these certainly feature discretely as well as more generally embedded into the anthropology that underpins a Catholic school),

these terms are instead indicative of what separates Catholic identity from other people or groups within society. More than these things particularly then, the Participant's concern can be applied to anything that threatens the ability of the individual Catholic, school or Church community to live their faith within the public sphere. Participant 50 echoed the same sense of concern, not only towards the current administration, but any change in government:

I always find it very worrying when there is a change in government in Scotland specifically. I think that we're always in danger. The government, when you see things like Kate Forbes being slagged off for her, and not being given roles like that, it's very, very, worrying. The government should be secular as an institution, but it should be secular populated by a cross section of society (P150).

Expressed here is a general suspicion towards the desire of any political party to safeguard the existence of Catholic schools in Scotland. As well as expressing a sense of vulnerability specifically during periods of political transition, Participant 50 also highlights the treatment of MSP Kate Forbes during her 2024 SNP Leadership bid as an example of systematic governmental discrimination towards, not only Catholics, but Christians in general. The view shared by Participant 50 is not only that Kate Forbes was criticised for her Christian beliefs, but that these beliefs were seen as incompatible with the role of First Minister and therefore prevented her from occupying this position, leading to a marginalisation of religious voices within Scottish political discourse. The final part of Participant 50's comment advocates for an institutional secularism whereby governmental machinery is separate from religion but remains clear that this must not translate into a cultural secularism that suppresses or excludes people of faith from participating fully in public life. The Participant ends by calling for the government to be made up of a "cross-section" of people from Scottish society, including people of faith.

Participants 05 and 12 cited concerns regarding governmental guidance on gender and transgender issues and the subsequent impact on Catholic schools. This highlights a conscious awareness not only of the distinct anthropology of the human person as taught by the Catholic Church, but also of the potential disparity of this teaching with other views. Specifically, Participant 06 was concerned about 2021's Scottish Government document: *Supporting Transgender Young People in Schools: Guidance for Scottish Schools* (Scottish Government, 2021) and how this guidance practically impacted upon the family and namely the rights and duties of parents. Participant 06 offered the following thoughts: "...you just need to have a think about the whole transgender issue and schools as well and the fact the government said, you know, you're not to be telling parents (PI06)". The guidance issued by the government contains no direct prohibition against informing parents if their child changes gender and does recognise the rights of parents and carers, but it does, however, state the following:

Staff should not disclose information that a young person shares with them regarding their transgender status or gender identity to others, including parents and carers, without the young person's consent, unless there is a risk to the young person or others (Scottish Government, 2021, 35).

The paragraph above does not categorise transgender or gender identity status as a safeguarding or well-being issue for pupils. It encourages schools to be cognisant of the young person's privacy, and their consent to share personal information about them. However, and perhaps crucially for Catholic parents, it could potentially create a fracture within the family unit, as well as the relationship between schools and families by directly stating that school staff should withhold information about a young person from their parents or carers.

This interpretation is one shared by Participant 06 in their analysis of the situation. They go on to describe it as: "...an interference in family life...(PI06)". It would be difficult to argue against this point since, other than to state that the government guidance is simply *guidance* - rather than a directive within a legislative framework.

Participant 06 also appealed to the principle of subsidiarity, namely that: "A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it..." (Pope Pius XI, 1931, §79). This rule applies to the engagement of any two communities and is not limited to the state/family relationship. This is stated whilst acknowledging that there will be examples where parents or carers require additional and varying degrees of help to fulfil this role. Specifically for the context of the research, however, the instruction to teachers and school staff not to share information about a young person with their parents and carers changes the nature of schools within the lives of families. Rather than supporting or assisting parents in their role as first educators of their children, the state (as represented by the school which enacts governmental directives and guidance), in this example, is understood by the Participant to be supplanting the role of parents.

Participant 05's comments acknowledged a difference of approach between Catholic schools and the government around gender and sexuality but chose to focus on the positive impact that Catholic schools can have on young people's lives:

In terms of government and Catholic schools, I think that the whole, I really do, think that's it around gender, sexuality and the Catholic

Church's teaching on that, there is no, you never hear them talking about an inclusive Catholic Church, or a loving Catholic Church, a Catholic Church where Catholic schools welcome kids from all denominations and none. You know, you support kids who are going through crises of sexuality, gender, whatever. There are kids who are loved, cared for and supported in Catholic schools and I don't know that that message is strong enough, I really don't (PI05).

Whilst the Participant identifies that Church teaching around gender and sexuality can be an area of tension between Catholics and the government, the Participant also recognises that there is a difference between personal adherence to a set of beliefs and the treatment of an individual entrusted to your care. The use of the word "whatever" is not dismissive of the challenges around identity and sexuality that some young people experience but rather places these challenges within a broad spectrum of situations and circumstances experienced by adolescents. Implied in this comment is the sense that schools support their young people regardless of what they are going through or what their background is. In this Participant's view, the Catholic school does not discriminate about which areas of a young person's life that they will provide love, care or support for, but rather that they respect the dignity of the human being and care for the whole person. The final part of this comment expresses the opinion that the service provided by Catholic schools is not celebrated enough, but rather that the areas of tension are the message. The Participant claims that the positive impact of Catholic schools on the lives of pupils is not as strong a message as it should be with the subtext of the comment featuring a gentle admonishment of the Scottish Government for this.

Though much of the data analysed here expresses anxiety towards the Scottish Government, Participant 18 asked a deeper question about what government is doing to support Catholic schools in their particular mission: "How do we

transmit the faith? And how does Scottish Government make provisions for us to transmit the faith, because I don't actually see that they do it (P118)." Many of the comments that feature within this section of the analysis focus on the conditions that threaten Catholic schools in Scotland. This Participant, however, moves the conversation away from simply the right of Catholic schools to exist, and instead asks what the government is doing to support and help Catholic schools flourish as a legitimate part of the educational estate? Simply protecting their existence does not qualify as fulfilling this responsibility. The Participant also goes on to acknowledge that there are other threats to Catholic Schools within the Scottish landscape: "And we have an agenda from the Humanists as well, and that's very real and it's not mentioned very much (P118)". Specifically, they are referring to The Humanist Society Scotland (HSS) and how the organisation actively campaigns to secularise state schools (*Humanist Society Scotland, n.d.*).

### **(iii) Governmental Overreach**

Feelings of apprehension and instability shared in the previous section were extended to a few comments that spoke specifically to a sense of governmental overreach. This is the smallest section of the data analysis, but I felt it was important to include these comments because, although only Participant 02 spoke specifically about education, the other comments that will be shared communicate something about broader Catholic identity in relation to being a Catholic in Scotland and the Scottish Government. Participants have consistently woven together answers regarding teacher identity and Catholic identity throughout the interview process as presented here.

Participant 02 shared a feeling of frustration towards the politicisation of education:

Why do we not have a system in our country where all political parties agree - we set the budget, that budget isn't interfered with and we've got a path that's right for our young people. Not something that's the whim of...whoever's in power, but we've got a strategy. I have been through every major change in education (changing of school leaving age - O'Levels, Standard Grade, 5-14... Let's just have a direction - stability (PI02).

This statement very clearly expresses criticism of the constant changes of policy and approach imposed upon schools by political parties. More than simple criticism of decisions made, or direction taken, however, there is a tone of disapproval towards the political landscape more broadly. The nub of this critique is not only that it lacks strategy, but also, crucially, that it is not centred on the good of the young person. There is a sincere plea in this comment that calls for a depoliticisation of education and a request for something akin to a national bipartisan pact towards educational policy to ensure consistency for young people in Scotland. The mention of the variety of educational reform that the Participant has witnessed throughout their career creates an image not just of constant upheaval (a theme repeated throughout the data analysis), but also of the burden this places upon teachers and the subsequent impact upon young people. There is present in the Participant's analysis of the situation an assumption that educational reform can be harmful when young people are not prioritised within decision making. This Participant speaks as a passionate advocate of young people, with their pleas supported by extensive professional experience. From this context, they articulate a constructive call for educational policy to be granted autonomy in some degree from the manifesto pledges of political parties.

The remaining Participant comments in this section speak to an integrated understanding of professional and personal identity and perceived challenges or barriers to living this authentically within the Scottish political landscape. Participants 06 and 49 both spoke to recent developments in Scotland - namely the *Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Scotland) 2024* and *Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill*. The comments focus on how these developments impact upon their ability to witness to their faith within Scottish society. Participant 06 offered the following thoughts:

[In reference to *Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Scotland) 2024*] There is such an overreach there and limit of freedom of expression. Our faith isn't private. I'm not just being a Catholic for an hour on a Sunday and that's pacifying me and it's all in my head and all is good - that's my fuel for the rest of the week when I go to Church (PI06).

This comment highlights a tension between holding and adhering to a faith whilst living within a pluralistic society. The Participant expresses a concern that the introduction of this law restricts fundamental civil liberties, especially the right to peacefully witness to and express religious beliefs. It also displays a strong understanding on the part of the Participant regarding freedom of expression, as well as the justification needed by a civic authority to restrict this. This is a threshold not deemed to be met in this Participant's view, or in the views of the Catholic Parliamentary Office: "The Bill is unnecessary. Existing legislation already deals with harassment, intimidation, and anti-social behaviour (Catholic Parliamentary Office, 2023)". This statement is in chorus with the Participant's use of the word "overreach", also implying that the Scottish Government is exceeding its rightful authority through the introduction of this legislation, favouring the rights of one group over the rights of another group. Crucially, the sub-text of this comment betrays a suspicion of the state

and a scepticism towards the government's commitment to upholding the rights of people of faith. The Participant makes it clear that their faith cannot be limited to a private and self-contained sphere and expresses instead that it necessarily reverberates through all aspects of a person's life.

Of course, this will not be the opinion of every Catholic in Scotland and there will be a variety of positions present within the broader Catholic community regarding buffer zones and abortion, as well as other areas of tension. Despite Catholics not being invited to faith "...individually or in isolation..."(Pope Francis 2020, §4) there exists an individual element to the practice of faith. Whilst there is no large-scale polling data on the views of Scottish Catholics specifically, the National Centre for Social Research's 2024 UK survey data regarding changing attitudes to abortion does provide a broad overview present within the UK's Catholic community. This survey states that: "58% of Catholics... support abortion if a woman decides on her own she does not wish to have a child (National Centre for Social Research, 2024)".

Rather than a conflation of two separate issues (abortion and buffer zones), the two issues are not only interlinked, but also speak to a complex Scottish Catholic identity. Granted, a Catholic may disagree with abortion but agree with buffer zone legislation, although this is a position difficult to evidence within the public record. There are others who hold a more nuanced view of abortion (namely disagreeing with it in most cases except when the life of the woman is at risk), and who describe vigils outside hospitals and clinics as carrying "... a sense of malevolence redolent of Mississippi in the early 1960s (McKenna, 2018)". The tone of this evaluation is one of persecution and harassment of women seeking abortions- a situation which legislation now claims to prevent.

Despite the variety of opinions amongst individual Catholics about abortion and buffer zones, Participant 06 crystallises what they understand to be at the heart of this governmental overreach and the subsequent impact on Scottish Catholic identity: “There are freedoms and thoughts that we’re being told are wrong and there are other people that they wouldn’t dare say to: ‘those thoughts are wrong’” (PI06). The clear implication of this comment is that the government is attempting not only to curtail the freedoms of Catholics specifically, but also their thoughts. The implication of the second half of this comment is that Catholics are treated differently even from other religious communities within Scotland.

The final comment within this section deals specifically with the *Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill*. Participant 49 offers the following thoughts:

...I think they’ve got that wrong. There’s a utilitarian, reductive concept to the human person that’s being rolled out in the mainstream and I feel that we have to bear witness to the value of life and hope and forgiveness of all people - and the dignity of all people (PI49).

Participant 49’s suggestion of governmental overreach lies in the redefinition of the human person characterised by this specific Bill. Similarly to the previous analysis of the buffer zone legislation above, this Participant demonstrates the complexity of issues such as these for Catholics and Catholic identity. They speak not only of the Bill itself and the terminally ill people that will (if translated into legislation) be able to access the services it provides, but the anthropology that underpins it. The underlying criticism is that it is not within the gift of the government (or any other institution) to determine the nature of life or the value of a human being and that this right resides solely within the

gift of the Creator (Gen 1:27). The Participant also speaks to a Catholic community identity by using the word *we* before articulating what they view as the responsibility of Catholics in this particular situation - specifically to bear witness to the distinct view of the human person fundamental to Catholic anthropology.

A recurring feature within participant accounts was the lived experience of dual accountability. Catholic teachers described themselves as accountable to the local authority as their employer, while also answerable to the Church – not only as the ecclesial authority safeguarding the Catholic character of the school, but as their own faith community and source of theological conviction.

Operating within a statutory state system, yet participating in an explicitly ecclesial educational mission, they navigated obligations to government policy, curricular reform, inspection regimes, and legislative developments alongside fidelity to Catholic doctrine and anthropological commitments rooted in personal belief. This dual accountability did not always generate overt conflict; rather, it required an ongoing negotiation of professional and personal identity. The tension described by participants was therefore not solely institutional but interior, as teachers sought to reconcile compliance within a state-governed framework with commitment to the Church to which they themselves belonged.

### **5.3.1 Patterns Across Participants**

Within this final data set, older teachers with longer service often spoke most firmly about the hard-won historical place of Catholic schools within Scottish society. Their reflections frequently referred back to the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act and to the witness of earlier generations characterised by struggle and sacrifice. They tended to interpret current political discourse through a

longer perspective and expressed both pride in the endurance of Catholic schools as well as anxiety about a future threatened by secularisation or political hostility.

Mid-career teachers, particularly those qualifying in the 1990s and early 2000s, were more likely to frame the relationship between Catholic schools and government in terms of negotiation and tension. They recognised the pragmatic protections offered to Catholic schools by way of political structures, but also expressed frustration at what they understood as attempts to assimilate Catholic schools to non-denominational norms, or superficial acknowledgment of the benefits and distinctiveness of Catholic education. For many in this group, autonomy was not understood as security underpinned by legislation, but as a constantly negotiated reality within shifting policy environments.

Younger or recently qualified teachers offered a somewhat different perspective. Rather than drawing on long historical narratives, they often described the tensions in more immediate terms: anxieties about guidance on gender or sexuality, or concerns about how future reforms might impact classroom practice. Their reflections suggested a more uncertain sense of security, with Catholic identity in schools understood as something contingent and vulnerable, rather than assumed.

Subject background also appeared to shape perspectives. Those working in Religious Education often articulated their concerns in explicitly theological or ecclesial terms, highlighting the role of conscience, subsidiarity, and the anthropology of the human person. Others, particularly in non-RE subjects, were

more likely to frame the discussion in terms of professional autonomy, workload, or the risks to Catholic schools within a one-size-fits-all educational framework.

Gendered differences were less overt, but in some accounts, women participants appeared to highlight the relational and pastoral dimensions of Catholic schooling, particularly around parental engagement and the wellbeing of pupils, whereas men were somewhat more likely to frame their reflections in structural or political terms. These contrasts were subtle but suggestive of different emphases in how identity and autonomy are narrated.

Viewed together, the data indicates that Catholic teacher identity within the state system is not experienced uniformly. Instead, it can be shaped by length of service, subject specialism, and personal perspective, with older teachers drawing on memory and continuity, mid-career teachers emphasising negotiation, and younger teachers conveying vulnerability in the face of rapid cultural and societal change. Across these differences, however, all participants displayed a keen awareness that Catholic teacher identity is lived within a delicate relational balance between Church and state.

### **5.3.2 Conclusion**

The data presented in this chapter illustrates the complex ways in which Catholic teacher identity is shaped by broader questions of Church-state relations, policy reform, and wider cultural and societal change. Participants consistently situated themselves within this tension, acknowledging both the opportunities afforded by full state support for Catholic schools and the vulnerabilities that accompany this arrangement.

Three broad insights can be drawn from the data. Firstly, Catholic teachers expressed a strong historical consciousness: they were acutely aware that their role was made possible by the settlement of 1918, and they voiced both gratitude for this inheritance and anxiety about its fragility both in the present and the future. Secondly, participants identified the impact of educational reform and policy discourse, describing how universal accountability measures and professional demands risked eroding what was distinctive about Catholic education, even as they sought to work faithfully within the system. Thirdly, their reflections revealed that Catholic teacher identity is lived in a climate of constant scrutiny, one where tensions around conscience, values, and political alignment must be carefully negotiated in daily practice.

In conclusion, Catholic teacher identity is shaped by an awareness of Catholic educational heritage alongside the political environment in which it operates. It carries with it a critical recognition of vulnerability yet also demonstrates resilience. As such, Catholic teacher identity can be understood as a negotiated reality, continually balancing fidelity to Church teaching with the demands of a secular state, and marked by both strength and fragility

The preceding Data Analysis chapters have explored Catholic teacher identity through three distinct but related lenses: personal and vocational self-understanding, the impact of broader Church identity, and the negotiation of Church-state relations. Each chapter has traced patterns across participants and situated individual responses within wider educational and ecclesial contexts. Viewed synoptically, they provide the foundation for the following concluding chapter which will draw these strands together, reflecting on the overall

findings in relation to the research questions and considering their implications for both Catholic education in Scotland and beyond.

Central to this lived theology is the dynamic relationship between the personal and the communal. Participants' accounts consistently demonstrated that Catholic teacher identity is not a solitary construction, but rather one sustained through communion with colleagues, pupils and their families, and the wider Church across time and place. The resilience observed throughout the data emerges not from autonomous self-assertion, but from their embeddedness within a shared mission.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Practical Implications**

### **6.1 Aim and Context**

The central aim of the study is to explore Catholic teacher identity in Scotland over a specific time period to discover whether there were any shared or identifiable professional / cultural / religious characteristics amongst the specific group of Catholic teachers who took part in the study. This endeavour finds itself at the very intersection of personal and professional identity, a reality borne out in the rich data presented in the preceding chapters (see *Identity*, RQ1). In addition, the research takes place in a unique context in which Catholic schools are fully assumed into the state system. This, in turn, means that individual Catholic teachers in Scotland are accountable both to the Scottish Government as their ultimate employer, but also (in varying conscious degrees), to the Church (see *Catholic Schools in Scotland*, RQ3). Adding to the complexity, this dual accountability is set within a period characterised by tremendous change for both the Church and society more broadly. Though these changes are discussed at length elsewhere (see *Developments in Identity Theory*), it is their impact upon identity that is most pertinent to this work.

### **6.2 Patterns Across Participants**

Before drawing the main conclusions, it is important to note that patterns across demographic factors were observed, though the cohort size was not large enough to warrant generalisation. For example, RE specialists often employed more explicitly theological language (see *Catholic Teaching as Vocation*, RQ1), while teachers of other subjects tended to frame identity in relational or ethos-driven terms. Younger teachers sometimes voiced uncertainty (see *Changing Role of the Teacher*, RQ1) about articulating Catholic identity, which contrasted

with more experienced teachers who expressed greater confidence and often cast their role as witness or custodianship. Diocesan variations were also mentioned (see *Catholic Schools in Scotland*, RQ3), particularly in relation to chaplaincy and formation support, but the evidence was too limited for any firm conclusions to be drawn. These observations remain suggestive rather than definitive, but they do highlight potential avenues for further research into how sex, subject specialism, diocesan culture, and career stage may shape the lived identity of Catholic teachers in Scotland.

### **6.3 Research Question 1**

#### **6.3.1 Conclusion 1: Integrated Identity**

The first research question asked: *Are there identifiable characteristics of Catholic Teachers in Scottish Catholic Secondary Schools?* The findings suggest that Catholic teacher identity is most clearly and consistently characterised by the indivisibility of personal and professional aspects of their identity (see *Identity*, RQ1). Participants repeatedly expressed and reflected upon their identity as a coherent whole, with teaching being a constituent part of this whole, rather than an aspect that could be compartmentalised or occasionally used (see *Catholic Teacher Identity*, RQ1). The data tells us that the identity of the Catholic teacher in Scotland goes beyond professional or legal requirements and instead finds its fullest expression in the intersectionality of the personal and professional, the secular and the sacred (see *Catholic Teacher Identity*, RQ1). Participants moved fluidly between “I” and “we,” affirming that identity is community-embedded (see *Catholic Teacher Identity* and *Interactions with Young People*, RQ1).

This conceptualisation of identity, however, also highlighted a shared awareness of the tensions that are present when exercising this integrated role within a secular system. This consciousness often expressed itself through a sense of fear or trepidation on the part of Participants when relaying situations in which their faith was at odds with educational policy or guidance and the subsequent navigation that this necessitated.

Despite the evidence provided in the literature of an increased individualism and dislocation from established structures, this was not borne out in the way that Participants articulated their own identity. Though aware of broader trends in self-identity and concerned about the impact of these on pupils, themselves and others, for most Participants, their sense of self was expressed as intrinsically linked to relationship with God, or to the community as extensions of God's presence in the world. Participants did not, however, express their identity by referencing specific Church teaching but rather spoke to broad identifying characteristics applicable to all Catholics, and Catholic teachers as a subset. Some of the characteristics described found common ground with the GTCS's Professional Values, but this document was not the originator of the values for Participants. Rather, when similar language was used, it was often augmented with language of faith – *sacred trust, modelling values, stewards, in loco parentis*.

Participants' understanding of community was also layered in the sense that their identity remained coherent within different community expressions, from the local parish to the school as faith community to the global Catholic community. Participants moved fluidly and frequently between the first-person singular and the plural which, in quite a striking way supports the conclusion

that Catholic teacher identity is never purely individual but rather finds its fullest expression when embedded within a community identity. The values and commitments claimed by Participants not only found their origin in this sense of faith community-based self, also found expression in their professional and personal lives equally and concurrently. Participants not only valued the resultant authenticity that emanated from this coherence but were equally aware of the potential damage that could be caused by contradictory behaviours.

Catholic teachers emerge as community-situated individuals who, though from a variety of perspectives, embrace and embody their identity in a coherent and holistic way. From this position of stability, they constantly negotiate the space between their own personal convictions and the demands of and frameworks in which they live and work.

### **6.3.2 Conclusion 2: Identity as Oriented Toward the Transcendent**

A second defining characteristic that emerges from the data is the orientation of Catholic teachers toward the transcendent. This positionality is expressed through the variety of vocational responses offered by Participants – the incorporation of parental love and responsibilities into their professional roles, and commitment to education understood as formation of the whole person in the context of eternity (see *Interactions with Young People*, RQ1).

A sense of vocation or calling was commonplace within Participant responses, with nearly 88% explicitly using such language (see *Catholic Teaching as Vocation*, RQ1). Catholic teacher identity therefore extends beyond professional requirements or performance markers and is instead identified by a commitment

formed by and directed toward the transcendent. Resilience was consistently linked to vocational witness, not simply endurance (see *Catholic Teaching as Vocation*, RQ1). Participants also described their vocation as being lived out most clearly in their daily interactions with pupils, where modelling faith, safeguarding dignity, and fostering holistic formation were central (see *Interactions with Young People*, RQ1).

Through the individual narrative or faith journey were in no way uniform, Participants consistently described their role as a Catholic teacher as something not contained by the professional demands placed upon them. Some Participants communicated this in explicitly religious language, speaking articulately and confidently of a personal sense of vocation and how this had manifested in their lives. Others communicated the same sense of calling but expressed this within the relational aspects of the role, namely through the love and nurture implied by the Church's expectation of Catholic teachers to be *in loco parentis*.

Within Participant responses there is a unity of conviction that Catholic education finds its purpose in the holistic formation of each person as made in the image and likeness of God. Academic achievement is acknowledged and valued by Participants as part of this holistic formation but is in no way placed at the apex of the Catholic educational project. Catholic teacher identity, therefore, extends beyond professional requirements or performance markers and is instead identified by a commitment that is both formed by and directed toward the transcendent.

Alongside this transcendent orientation, Participants consistently described their relationships with pupils as central to their vocation, emphasising dignity,

nurture, and formation as defining aspects of Catholic teacher identity (see *Interactions with Young People*, RQ1)

### **6.3.3 Conclusion 3: Vulnerability, Realism and Relational Bonds**

Catholic teacher identity is also characterised by honesty regarding the vulnerability of the role, the consequences of educational reform as experienced by teachers, and the imperfections typical of their experiences in Catholic schools. Participants honestly shared their concerns about communicating faith within a secular framework and recognised the tension that exists between some Catholic teachings and the views of the Scottish Government and civil legislation (see *Catholic Teacher Identity*, RQ1). Though this was clearly a source of anxiety for some Participants, their comments were framed within an implied commitment to continuing in their role as faithful Catholic teachers, regardless of the perceived associated risk. In other words, the vulnerability of the role was expressed and accepted, but not translated or articulated into any motivation to retreat or desist, demonstrating that resilience was key in any discussion of Catholic teacher identity.

The majority of Participants were overwhelmed with the pace of educational reform (see *Changing Role of the Teacher*, RQ1), even when the benefit of said change was recognised, and they spoke both explicitly and implicitly of the impact of this on their role. Not only does this demonstrate the flexibility of teacher identity in general, but in a particular way it reveals the flexibility and strength of the Catholic teacher given the continual reshaping and rearticulation in the face of external pressures. Beyond the pace of reform, participants also spoke of a sense of professional devaluation, feeling that their expertise and

contribution were undervalued in policy debates (see *Changing Role of the Teacher*, RQ1).

Despite the Church's structural or formal involvement in schools mainly finding its locus in the RE curriculum and the Approval and appointment procedures, Participants did not communicate the Church's involvement in any reductive way. Neither did they specify in which ways the Church could or should be involved in Catholic education. Instead, there was a clear, but assumed and intertwined nature of the Church and the Catholic school implied in the way Participants communicated (see *Catholic Teacher Identity*, RQ1).

Participants also spoke candidly about the imperfections, both individual and institutionally that can challenge the authenticity of Catholic teachers and Catholic schools. They freely shared the responsibilities they understood as their own as Catholic teachers and expressed disappointment when colleagues fell short. This demonstrates that their identity does not exist as a personal or individual context, but as shared and community rooted reality (see *Catholic Teacher Identity*, RQ1).

Participants also highlighted the cumulative weight of constant reform, noting a sense of fatigue and professional devaluation alongside resilience and adaptation (see *Changing Role of the Teacher*, RQ1).

#### **6.4 Research Question 2**

*How have events relating to broader Church identity directly or indirectly impacted or shaped Catholic teacher identity in Scotland?* Participants' reflections continued the theme of community identity formation as found in the first section. The themes that emerged from the data included an awareness of

a shared Catholic identity and connectedness as something that both set Catholics apart as different from the world, but also as something that provided stability amidst flux.

#### **6.4.1 Conclusion 1: Difference and Distinction**

Broader Church identity has sharpened Participants' awareness of the distinctiveness of the Catholic community. This is illustrated by Participants' cognisance of the instances in which their practices and beliefs contrast, or are in conflict with, prevailing secular and societal norms. Participants spoke positively of being different in the world (see *Catholic Identity*, RQ2), and the benefits offered by this difference particularly with regards to Catholic schools and the unique approach to formation and human flourishing offered by them. They were, however, also conscious of the paradox of being visible and different but often misunderstood.

Within the commonality of the Catholic community, there were also acknowledgements of identity tensions within the Church itself and uneven experiences of community. Whilst Participants freely communicated their lived understanding of the Church as a community different and distinct from the world, this reality was not experienced in a uniform or unproblematic way by all Participants. Rather, Participants' Catholic identity was shaped by diversity of expression, but set within an overarching sense of ecclesial unity.

Wider Church identity affirms Catholic teacher identity. For Participants, the Church provides stability and consistency both in belief and worship as well as the reassurance of belonging to something bigger than themselves. This in turn enables Catholic teachers to recognise and sustain a sense of distinctiveness that

transcends time or place. This distinctiveness was, however, observed as being marginalised or rejected in society and the wider world, and unevenly experienced or embraced by individual Catholics. Nevertheless, what emerged from the data was a faithful commitment to a shared identity amidst difference both within and outwith the Church.

#### **6.4.2 Conclusion 2: Connectedness and Commonality**

Throughout the data, a sense of connectedness, often typified by worship and the sacramental life of the Church, firmly grounds Catholic teacher identity (see *Catholic Community Identity*, RQ2). The examples of this connectedness, perhaps surprisingly, were not described as taking place in schools, but were instead reported as being experienced on pilgrimage, holiday, or at parish level. These instances provided a shared language of belonging that persisted beyond diversity or difference of expression and were most clearly articulated through sacramental worship and pilgrimage (see *Catholic Community Identity*, RQ2).

At the same time, a broader sense of commonality was also experienced between Catholics and people of other faiths and none. This posture very much resonates with the intention of Vatican II to reorient the Church as outward looking and committed to dialogue. In addition, it demonstrates that Catholic identity exists and is shaped in that space between belonging and dialogue, and that it is held and develops within a complex web of relationships.

#### **6.4.3 Conclusion 3: Consistency and Stability**

Participants described the security, stability and consistency that they experienced or associated with broader Church identity (see *Changes in Education*, RQ2). For some, this sense of stability was accompanied by a

defensive awareness that Catholic ethos was at risk of dilution under secularising pressures (see *Changes in Education*, RQ2) This was most especially pronounced as an antidote of sorts to the opposite characteristics of instability and uncertainty that Participants associated with post-modernity. The unchanging nature of the Church was communicated throughout the data, but solely in a positive way that anchored and affirmed Catholic identity, rather than one which Participants railed against.

Even as visitors to unfamiliar places or parish communities, Participants spoke fluently of the recognisability of the Catholic community and the sense of belonging that flowed from this. This both affirmed their sense of Catholic identity but also communicated an understanding of a shared identity firmly situated within a universal community.

Catholic teacher identity then is rooted in personal conviction that finds stability and continued nourishment within a sacramental tradition.

### **6.5 Research Question 3**

*To what extent can Catholic teacher identity retain autonomy within a state governed Catholic education system?* The findings suggest that teacher autonomy exists, but as a qualified and fragile reality within the complex Church and State partnership. The real and perceived expectations placed on Catholic teachers by the Church coupled with their status as state employees, creates a sense of dual accountability. Within this context teachers continually renegotiate the overlap between their personal and professional lives which results in a sense vulnerability and exposure. Despite this complexity,

Participants displayed a resilient commitment to living their Catholic teacher identity with authenticity.

### **6.5.1 Conclusion 1: Church-State Partnership as Tension**

Catholic teacher identity can only retain partial autonomy within the current arrangements (see *Catholic Schools in Scotland*, RQ3). Whilst this partnership provides the financial and administrative structures for Catholic schools, Catholic teachers also feel exposed to political fragility and shifting agendas. Participants recognised both the gift and challenge of the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act, as well as acknowledging a shared feeling of uncertainty with regards to the partnership that this agreement signifies.

Participants spoke passionately about a range of contemporary legislative debates including pro-life issues, assisted dying and gender identity, and they readily shared their fears about how changes would impact them as Catholic teachers. These tensions crystallised most clearly around policy flashpoints such as gender identity, pro-life issues, and relationships education, where participants feared Catholic ethos might, or could, be compromised (see *Catholic Schools in Scotland*, RQ3). These issues brought into sharp relief the potential divergence between Catholic ethos and state policy or legislation, not as an abstract theory, but as examples that typified Participants' sense of vulnerability. Uncertainty about the future of Catholic schools in Scotland added a further layer to this sense of fragility with Participants expressing suspicion and doubt regarding the current government's commitment to denominational provision.

Autonomy for Catholic teachers then is not defined as independence, but rather a constantly negotiated act within the context of a Church-State partnership. A level of autonomy was experienced by teachers in the very fact that they could uphold and witness to a Catholic ethos in their classrooms and schools, but it was also undermined by their awareness of the potentially changeable political landscape in which Catholic education exists.

What emerges from the data is a sense that Catholic teacher identity within the Church-state partnership is not only partial and negotiated but also characterised by a level of uncertainty about the future. These tensions were not abstract but grounded in specific flashpoints such as gender identity, pro-life issues, and relationships education, where participants feared Catholic ethos might be undermined (see *Catholic Schools in Scotland*, RQ3).

### **6.5.2 Conclusion 2: Employment Status and Dual Accountability**

Catholic teacher identity is complicated by a sense of dual accountability. Despite their employment status, Participants also require Church Approval to undertake employment. This means that they occupy a distinct professional space shaped by two distinct authorities (see *Catholic Teacher Identity*, RQ1), each of which has its own expectations. Despite this duality, Participants consistently expressed an understanding of their teacher identity that incorporated *both* their professional responsibilities and what they perceived to be the Church's expectations of them. In reality this means that Catholic teacher autonomy is continually interpreted through intersecting, and sometimes oppositional lines of authority.

For some Participants this dual accountability created a sense of strain since employer expectations and commitment to the Church did not always comfortably align. Participants expressed concern regarding flash points that highlighted the difference of perspective. Notably, these flash points (assisted dying, gender identity, pro-life issues) all centred around the difference that Participants recognised in the anthropology of their own faith in comparison to the anthropology being communicated via various policy and legislative debates. By the virtue of their employment status, therefore, moments of potential conflict require deft negotiation from Catholic teachers.

Catholic teacher identity is also further limited by routine misrepresentation of Catholic education both at the government level, as well as in wider society. In response to these misconceptions, Participants were keen to communicate their experience of the positive and life-affirming education offered in Catholic schools, as well as their commitment to upholding the dignity of each young person, regardless of faith or background. Underrepresentation of Catholics in political life reinforced a sense that Catholic teachers themselves were marginalised and undervalued within national discourse. Catholic teacher identity then emerges as one that is lived at the threshold of the personal and professional. It is a role in which Catholic teachers are asked to be coherent witnesses in a context where external conflict continually complicates their role.

### **6.5.3 Conclusion 3: Reliance, Expectation and Vulnerability**

To a significant extent, Catholic teacher autonomy is constrained by the reliance that multiple constituencies place upon them, producing an identity that is often stretched in nature. The unequivocal expectations placed on teachers by the

Church (and the increased intensification of these in light of reduced engagement of families with the Church), both elevates the teacher's role, but also increases their responsibility. Participants not only recognised their collective obligation to the Church as Catholic teachers but also communicated a strong sense of individual responsibility.

At the same time, the state also systematically impacts on teacher autonomy with a plethora of professional demands (see *Catholic Teacher Identity*, RQ1). based upon measurable performance resulting in teachers feeling undervalued. In addition, these expectations are not always aligned with the Church's emphasis on formation, pastoral care and moral and spiritual development of pupils. This results in Catholic teachers holding two distinct educational philosophies in tension: one centred on outcome and professional accountability, and one rooted in Christian anthropology. This dual responsibility forces teachers to reconcile priorities that are not always harmonious.

Parents added a further dimension to this model of reliance and expectation, especially in instances where aspects of the Catholic school were contested, where Participants characterised this involvement as an attempt to dilute or challenge the distinctive ethos of the Catholic school (see *Catholic Teacher Identity and Interactions with Young People*, RQ1). Parents then occupy a separate but related sphere within the Church state partnership and bring with them their own expectations of teachers and schools more broadly – all of which further reinforces the complexity and impact of reliance and expectation on Catholic teacher identity

The convergence of these overlapping pressures left teachers with a sharpened awareness of being pulled in different directions, which in turn created a sense of vulnerability. Participants, however, demonstrated resilience and an ability to navigate the complexity and focus on core principles, namely the dignity of every young person as made in the image and likeness of God. Autonomy in this respect is less about freedom from external control then, but more accurately described as the ability to be an authentic witness even when under pressure. In this sense, teacher autonomy is a negotiated reality that survives precisely because teachers remain committed to mediating between competing claims whilst remaining faithful to both their personal and professional commitments.

#### **6.5.4 Conclusion 4: Autonomy as Negotiation**

The extent to which Catholic teacher identity retains autonomy within the Church state partnership is best understood as identity lived through negotiation (see *Interactions with Young People*, RQ1), rather than independent of external influence. Participants' reflections revealed that, whilst their personal and professional identity was formed within a pluralistic society, that the same society was not always welcoming of Catholicism. Participants were conscious of the suspicion expressed in broader society towards Catholic schools, and that they were sometimes caricatured as exclusionary.

Catholic teacher identity was sustained most clearly in the school interactions shared by Participants. Though little specific mention was made of Religious Education as a distinct subject, Participants demonstrated agency through their descriptions of interactions with pupils, staff, and in their own lives more widely. Autonomy in this context was evidenced by remaining recognisably Catholic within the expectations and constraints of both Church and state. The

ability to recognise nuance is, therefore, characteristic of Catholic teacher identity.

The partnership with the state secures a space in Scottish society for Catholic schools, yet this is undermined by misconceptions and political fragility. Dual accountability that Catholic teachers are subject to, as well as their responsibilities to parents and wider society, can put Catholic teacher autonomy under strain. Therefore, Catholic teacher identity retains autonomy in Scotland's educational framework only in a limited and negotiated form.

### **6.6 Summary of Research Conclusions**

This study has shown that Catholic teacher identity in Scotland exists at the intersection of both personal and professional identity. It is marked by an understanding of vocation underpinned by a desire and willingness to credibly witness to faith within a professional setting. Catholic teacher identity is shaped by the wider Church, which affirms teachers' role in the Church's educational mission and provides stability, and community belonging, through worship and the sacramental life of the Church. Within the Scottish educational setting, teacher autonomy is only partially retained, and is continually negotiated: constrained by dual accountability – accountable to the state as employer and regulatory authority, and to the Church as both ecclesial institution and personal faith community – yet resilient in its capacity to witness to core beliefs within a contested and sometimes misunderstood space. Catholic teacher identity, therefore, emerges as dynamic and relational. It is grounded within a community of faith and a personal sense of vocation, as teachers integrally negotiate the claims of Church, state and community in their personal and professional lives.

## **6.7 Catholic Teacher Identity within Post-Modern and Post-Conciliar Frameworks**

Catholic teacher identity both in contemporary Scotland and beyond is best understood as being forged at the intersection two unsettled frameworks. Post-modernity, as explored in this work, is characterised by fragmentation experienced at societal and individual level, as well as by the resultant sense of uncertainty and instability. On the other hand, post-conciliar Catholicism is characterised equally by renewal *and* unresolved internal tensions relating to self-understanding and mission.

### **(i) Catholic Teacher Identity in Post-Modernity**

The experiences of Catholic teachers within this research, however, represents a countermovement to the breakdown of traditional identity markers associated with post-modernity. Rather than experiencing identity as disjointed or even situational, Participants consistently expressed an integral understanding of their identity. Yet this coherence does not fully shield Catholic teachers from the pressures of post-modernity, as seen in the vulnerability they experience at the points where personal and professional life intersect. Catholic teachers do not withdraw from these situations of tension but rather navigate them by reasserting a faith-community shaped understanding of self. Within a cultural landscape characterised by rapid change, this positions Catholic teacher identity as unique.

### **(ii) Catholic Teacher Identity in a Post-Conciliar Church**

The post-conciliar Church, shaped by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, provides an ecclesial framework in which Catholic teacher identity is affirmed and relied upon – but also challenged. The Conciliar documents firmly situate

the vocation of the Catholic teacher within the Church's broader educational mission, as well as emphasising their role as witnesses in the world.

Internalisation of the Church's attitude towards, and expectations of, teachers is evident throughout Participant responses. At the same time, their experiences highlight those moments of tension precipitated by the call to engage with the world - most particularly when this involves dual accountability of Participants to the Church and to their employers. The experiences shared by Participants, illustrate both the fruits of Vatican II with regards lay witnesses, and openness to dialogue, but they also unearth some of the challenges of sustaining this vision amidst uncertain political landscapes and conflicting anthropologies.

The post-conciliar articulation of the vocation of the laity finds tangible expression within the accounts of several Participants. Whilst Vatican II is not consistently or explicitly named within the data, its ecclesiological vision is evident in the way Participants understand their role as witnesses within the school community. Participant 42's emphasis of Catholic teachers as "real people" (PI42) whose faith is observable through the ordinary rhythms of life mirrors the Council's assertion that laity are called to make the Church present in all places, particularly in those spheres of family, work, and society that they inhabit by virtue of sharing the same state of life as those they serve (*Lumen Gentium*, 1965).

In practical terms, this means that Catholic teachers understand their daily presence – in staffrooms, classrooms and parental interactions – as a site of ecclesial witness rather than as a neutral professional function.

Moreover, Participants' recognition of their responsibility to sustain Catholic ethos within a fully state-governed system, illustrates the practical outworking of this expanded lay vocation. The Council's renewed emphasis on collaboration in mission situates Catholic teachers not as passive transmitters of inherited doctrine, but as active co-operators and co-workers in the Church's educational mission. Although Participants experiences also reveal tensions – particularly in negotiating dual accountability to Church and State – this very negotiation may be read as characteristic of post-conciliar Catholicism as outward-looking and dialogical.

### **(iii) Points of Tension**

When these two frameworks are brought into dialogue, a complex picture emerges. On the one hand, Catholic teacher identity emerges as distinct within a post-modern identity landscape, with the post-conciliar Church offering teaching and wisdom to support and affirm this position. On the other hand, Catholic teachers' daily existence is marked by their position at the fault line of these two frameworks. The post-conciliar openness to dialogue can, in fact, be experienced as exposure, particularly when the Church's teachings are in direct opposition to cultural or societal norms. In a similar way, the post-modern pluralistic posture offers opportunities of encounter but can also reduce Catholic identity to one option amongst many.

### **(iv) Theological Synthesis**

Viewed synoptically, Catholic teacher identity in Scotland can be understood as a form of lived theology: a coherent witness, sustained by community and continually negotiated in the shifting space between Church and society.

Teachers are *signs of contradiction* – articulating values that resist

fragmentation and affirm transcendence both in their personal and professional lives, and as *agents of dialogue* – inhabiting contested ground with both resilience and authenticity. The dynamic and relational identity of Catholic teachers becomes, therefore, a sacramental sign within the educational landscape and exists as an outward sign of a deeper theological reality. In this way, Catholic teacher identity points beyond itself and towards God’s continued presence in the world by offering a distinct yet dialogical contribution to Scotland’s contemporary pluralist society.

### **6.8 Methodological Reflections**

This study has demonstrated the ways in which Catholic teacher identity has developed and been reshaped between 1965 and the present day. The methodology adopted – qualitative historical analysis combined with interviews – enabled a nuanced exploration of both continuity and change, giving voice to teachers’ lived experiences nested within wider ecclesial and educational developments. My role as a diocesan Religious Education Adviser offered particular insight into the context and significance of these narratives, while at the same time requiring careful reflexivity to avoid over-identification with the perspectives under study. The focus on a specific national context inevitably limits the statistical generalisability of the findings; however, the study offers analytically indicative insights into patterns of Catholic teacher identity within this cohort. The depth afforded by the Scottish context provides conceptually transferable understandings that may resonate in comparable ecclesial and educational settings.

A further consideration concerns the extent to which the participants may be viewed as representative of Catholic teachers more broadly, particularly in

relation to the depth of their Catholic commitment. Participation in the study was voluntary, and it is possible that those who responded to the call were individuals already inclined toward reflection on their vocational and ecclesial identity. In this sense, the cohort may reflect teachers for whom Catholic identity is consciously articulated and personally significant. This does not invalidate the findings; however, it suggests that the data may be more indicative of teachers who perceive their Catholicity as integral to their professional self-understanding, rather than of those for whom Catholic affiliation is more nominal or culturally inherited. The findings should therefore be read as illuminating the experiences of committed practitioners within Catholic education, while recognising that the spectrum of Catholic self-identification across the profession is likely to be broader.

### **6.9 Concluding Reflections and Implications**

While this study builds on existing research into Catholic teacher identity, its originality lies in bringing the distinctive Scottish context into focus. To date, little scholarship has examined Catholic teacher identity as it is negotiated within Scotland's integrated but contested system of denominational education. By situating teachers' lived experiences within this framework of dual accountability to Church and state, this study contributes a new dimension to the field. It demonstrates that Catholic teacher identity in Scotland is not only shaped by broader ecclesial and cultural currents but is uniquely marked by its negotiation within a nationally integrated system. This adds both depth to the UK picture and provides a comparative lens for international contexts where Catholic schools also operate under state frameworks.

This study has shown that Catholic teacher identity in Scotland cannot be reduced to a professional role defined by state accountability, nor to a private faith separated from the public sphere. Instead, it emerges as a vocation lived in community, one that integrates both the personal and professional, as well as the secular and the sacred. Such theological framing, however, cannot remain abstract. The lived reality of Catholic teachers raises pressing questions for practice, policy, and formation. Their experience of negotiating identity within contested spaces invites renewed attention from the Church, the state, parents, and educational institutions alike. If Catholic teacher identity is to flourish, it must be sustained not only by personal conviction but also by structures of support that acknowledge its complexity and vulnerability.

**(i) For Catholic Teachers**

The integration of personal and professional identity requires consistent support and continued formation if teachers are to sustain their witness in a pluralist society. Professional learning should explicitly address the negotiation of dual accountability within the Scottish context, the development of resilience in situations of tension, and the capacity to act with integrity when policy and conscience appear in conflict. From my own role as a provider of formation, it is clear that such opportunities, while necessary, are not always easy for teachers to access. Practical challenges – such as the difficulty of being released from school commitments, the optional nature of engagement with diocesan education departments, and the varied support of Head Teachers – significantly shape the extent to which teachers can participate. This study therefore underlines that formation cannot be left to individual goodwill alone but must be

enabled structurally, with leadership support, diocesan collaboration, and systemic recognition of its value.

The practical implication of this is that professional formation for Catholic teachers cannot be conceived purely in terms of skills acquisition or policy compliance. What is required is a formational accompaniment that includes regular spaces for reflection and discernment in which teachers can integrate their faith, vocation, and professional responsibilities. Such accompaniment would allow teachers to process the tensions of dual accountability, to recognise resilience as a spiritual as well as professional practice, and to cultivate integrity in the face of cultural and political pressures. This could take the form of retreat opportunities, mentoring relationships, or structured reflection groups, facilitated either at diocesan level or within school clusters. By embedding such practices into ongoing formation, Catholic education can ensure that teachers are not left to carry these burdens in isolation but are instead supported to deepen their witness in a way that is sustainable and life-giving.

**(ii) For the Church**

The Church must continue to affirm Catholic teachers as vital lay collaborators in its educational mission. This involves clarifying and systematically expressing the Church's expectations of teachers to avoid unrealistic burdens, ensuring accessible spiritual and theological formation, and cultivating communities of belonging to counter feelings of isolation as they navigate contested educational landscapes. At the same time, diocesan education departments – often under-resourced and carrying multiple responsibilities – require greater support if they are to provide consistent formation and meaningful accompaniment for teachers. In many cases, Catholic teachers serve as the most immediate and

visible representatives of the Church to young people and families, especially where wider sacramental practice is limited. The provision of priest chaplains remains an important means of linking schools to the wider Church, yet in practice this support can be uneven and, at times, minimal. Teachers sometimes experience a sense of being left to ‘get on with it’ in their schools, while much of the Church’s pastoral energy is directed elsewhere. This creates a striking paradox: the Church invests heavily in pastoral care for communities where participation is declining, yet the majority of its young people encounter the Church primarily within schools rather than parishes. While bishops engage with schools at key ceremonial moments, there can at times be a sense of distance from the complex, daily challenges teachers encounter. Greater alignment between episcopal leadership, diocesan structures, and classroom realities would strengthen the Church’s support for those who carry this visible witness on its behalf.

The practical implications of these conclusions are significant. Greater investment in diocesan education departments is required if teachers are to receive consistent formation and accompaniment, rather than depending on overstretched staff or patchy provision. This need was most acute for younger teachers, whose gaps in confidence and knowledge of Catholic teaching were seen by participants as a pressing challenge for the future vitality of Catholic education (see *Catholic Teaching as Vocation*, RQ1). Pastoral planning must give greater priority to schools, recognising that for many young people this is their primary point of encounter with the Church. This calls for more sustainable chaplaincy models, including cluster arrangements or consideration of alternative chaplaincy models where priest availability is limited. Episcopal

engagement should extend beyond ceremonial occasions to include regular dialogue with teachers and leaders about their daily challenges, ensuring that leadership is informed by whole-school and classroom realities. Above all, the Church should explicitly affirm teachers as the visible face of Catholic witness for young people and families, thereby reducing the sense of being left to ‘get on with it’ and situating their vocation more securely within the Church’s mission.

### **(iii) For the State**

Policy makers should acknowledge the distinctive contribution of Catholic schools to Scotland’s educational framework in ways that are rooted in a genuine understanding of the Catholic educational mission. Respect for ethos must go beyond tolerance and instead create space for a vision of education that values holistic formation alongside measurable outcomes: current structural arrangements do not always reflect this. Unlike Gaelic education, which benefits from statutory duties on local authorities and designated planning structures, there is no national requirement for councils to appoint a denominational-education officer. As a result, liaison with the Church often depends on local circumstance, leading to uneven practice across the country. This contrast risks reinforcing the perception that Catholic schools are to be absorbed into a generic non-denominational framework rather than recognised for their distinctive ethos.

In addition, Education Scotland’s inspection frameworks apply generically across all schools, with denominational distinctiveness supported primarily by SCES resources rather than by a bespoke state framework. Such arrangements suggest that the unique contribution of Catholic schools is insufficiently understood or

valued at policy level. Greater awareness of these vulnerabilities, particularly those arising from dual accountability, would enable more balanced and inclusive educational policy that both supports and protects the sector.

In practical terms, this could involve the creation of designated denominational education officers within local authorities to ensure consistent liaison with the Church, the incorporation of denominational ethos into inspection frameworks, and clearer national recognition of the distinctive mission of Catholic schools. Such measures would help move policy from a posture of tolerance to one of active support, embedding Catholic education more securely within Scotland's pluralist educational landscape.

#### **(iv) For Catholic School Leaders**

The findings of this study carry several implications for Catholic school leadership within the constraints of the Scottish educational system. If Catholic teacher identity is vocational and relational rather than merely functional, leadership structures can intentionally cultivate opportunities for theological and professional dialogue among staff within existing professional learning frameworks. This may include facilitated reflection sessions, shared study of Church teaching relevant to education, or structured retreats that enable teachers to articulate the integration of faith and professional responsibility.

Given the lived experience of dual accountability identified in this research, school leaders occupy a critical mediating role between ecclesial expectations and state policy. While ultimate authority may reside beyond the individual school, leadership can acknowledge explicitly the tensions that arise and offer

clarity, support, and pastoral accompaniment where legislative or curricular developments raise questions of conscience or anthropological principle.

The enthusiasm with which teachers participated in this study further suggests a need for spaces of accompaniment within Catholic education that extend beyond compliance and performance metrics. Even within tightly regulated structures, school leaders, in partnership with diocesan authorities, can encourage professional development that moves beyond procedural training toward reflective engagement with Catholic educational identity.

These recommendations do not assume extensive institutional autonomy; rather, they recognise the relational and cultural influence that school leadership retains even within a highly structured system.

#### **(v) For Families and Local Communities**

Catholic schools flourish when parents and teachers work in partnership. Parents should be supported to recognise their role as the first educators of their children, and to understand education not only in terms of academic achievement but as the holistic formation of the whole person. At times, however, tensions arise when parents—shaped by post-modern individualism—approach Catholic schooling primarily through the lens of personal choice or fragmented priorities rather than communal responsibility. The post-conciliar reality of ‘buffet Catholicism,’ in which elements of faith are selectively embraced or set aside, can also complicate the shared task of sustaining a coherent ethos.

For these reasons, practical steps are required to foster a deeper and more consistent partnership. Schools and dioceses already provide formation

opportunities for parents—through sacramental preparation and family liturgies—but these are not always delivered consistently or strategically across contexts. Greater coordination and investment would enable such initiatives to move beyond isolated good practice and become an integral, systemic part of Catholic education. By reinforcing communal responsibility and counteracting fragmented or selective approaches to faith, more strategic approaches to parent formation would reduce the disproportionate pressure often placed on teachers, while securing a more integrated partnership between home, school, and Church.

#### **(vi) For Teacher Education and Research**

Initial teacher education and continuing professional learning must take seriously the complex identity of Catholic teachers as both professionals and vocational witnesses. Formation can, in practice, be confined to compliance with professional standards or to subject-specific training, while little attention is given to the negotiation of dual accountability or to the integration of faith and profession.

Teacher education providers should therefore strategically embed opportunities for vocational reflection, theological literacy, and ethical discernment alongside professional competencies. This will require deeper partnerships between universities, diocesan education departments, and schools, so that Catholic identity is explicitly understood and consistently supported from the earliest stages of teacher preparation.

In addition, ongoing research is necessary to investigate resilience, wellbeing, and vocational integrity among Catholic teachers, not only in Scotland but also in other faith-based systems. Comparative studies could illuminate both the

distinctive pressures of the Scottish Church-state model and the common resources that sustain Catholic teacher identity elsewhere. Such research would provide the evidence base needed to inform policy, strengthen formation, and ensure that Catholic education continues to serve the holistic development of the person within diverse and changing cultural contexts.

#### **(vii) International Relevance**

Although rooted in the Scottish context, the findings of this study carry wider significance. In every setting where Catholic schools exist, teachers must navigate the negotiation between ecclesial expectations and state frameworks. The Scottish case, marked by integration into the public system and shaped by dual accountability, offers one model of how Catholic teacher identity can be sustained within contested space. This provides a useful lens for international comparison, particularly in contexts where Catholic schools face pressures of secularisation, government oversight, or marginalisation. Theologically, describing Catholic teacher identity as lived theology and sacramental witness offers a conceptual framework that can traverse cultures, while practically the study underscores the importance of systemic support, formation opportunities, and clear articulation of ethos in sustaining Catholic education. Future dialogue and collaborative research between different national systems would be mutually enriching, highlighting both the common challenges and the distinctive resources that Catholic schools bring to pluralist societies

Alongside these wider implications, the study has also been transformative for me as a researcher and Adviser. I began the project with a strong sense of the importance of Catholic teacher identity, but immersing myself in the history and voices of teachers has challenged and enriched that understanding. Listening to

experiences across generations invited me to set aside my assumptions and see more clearly the complexity of faith, vocation, and professional life. The process, most especially the generosity of Participants, has sharpened my attentiveness to the lived realities of teachers and the challenges they face, reminding me that their identity is always shaped by wider contexts as well as personal conviction. This renewed perspective underlines the need for structural and communal support if Catholic teacher identity is to flourish.

To sustain the witness of Catholic teacher identity requires more than individual goodwill: it calls for strategic and structural support, individual and communal accompaniment, and clear affirmation of teachers' vocation – whether explicitly recognised as such or expressed through the daily integrity of their practice in Christ – so that their identity may continue to serve as a living expression of the Church's mission and a gift to Scotland's pluralist society.

## Appendix 1: Adverse Formative Experiences

As referenced in the first Data Analysis chapter, some Participants shared highly sensitive, and sometimes painful events or experiences during interviews. Most were offered in answer to a specific interview question that formed part of the second section of the interview guide: *In your own life, has there been any specific events that have changed your understanding of your identity?*

The questions in this section, and this question in particular, elicited responses from Participants that were deeply personal, and sometimes upsetting for them to communicate, as well as for me to hear. One participant spoke of the death of their first child, another spoke of a serious medical diagnosis of their spouse. Another Participant spoke about the difficult decisions involved in caring for an elderly parent, and another Participant spoke of experiencing childhood sexual abuse. While these responses offered valuable insight into the development of identity, they are not directly quoted in the research. That these experiences, and others, were shared within this context demonstrates an immense level of trust on the part of each Participant towards me as a researcher, but also in the ethical processes that scaffold the research. The response of the researcher to this trust must be reflected in their treatment of the data, both in terms of analysis and representation within the research. In addition to the robust conditions of ethical approval for the research, my primary responsibility is to safeguard the dignity, privacy and emotional well-being of each Participant (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018; Sikes & Piper, 2010).

The three data analysis chapters that precede this appendix are richly populated with invaluable Participant verbatim contributions gathered from the interview process. However, in the case of sensitive, personal and sometimes traumatic

Participant experiences, I have decided not to directly quote from Participant interviews. This decision has been made to preserve the dignity of Participants, and to avoid presenting and analysing the data in any way that could result in either unintended suffering or injury to readers or Participants themselves (Ellis, 2007; Liamputtong, 2007). The research, therefore, seeks to prioritise the ethical responsibilities of the researcher towards each Participant above all else.

## Appendix 2: Research Participant Summary

	Designation	YOB	Diocese	M/F	Year qualified	Subject
1	01	1976	Diocese of Paisley	M	1996	Maths
2	02	1962	Diocese of Motherwell	F	1984	PE
3	03	1996	Diocese of Motherwell	F	2015	Modern Studies
4	05	1970	Diocese of Motherwell	M	2004	Music
5	06	1973	St Andrew's and Edinburgh	M	2006	RE
6	10	1988	Diocese of Dunkeld	F	2012	RE
7	11	1954	Diocese of Paisley	M	1976	Maths and Physics
8	12	1941	Archdiocese of Glasgow	F	1965	Modern Languages
9	14	1978	Diocese of Motherwell	F	2003	English
10	16	1965	Diocese of Paisley	F	1986	Maths
11	18	1977	Diocese of Motherwell	F	1998	RE
12	29	1971	Diocese of Motherwell	F	2020	RE
13	32	1956	Archdiocese of Glasgow	F	1978	Maths
14	42	1960	Diocese of Paisley	M	1981	Maths and Physics
15	49	1972	Archdiocese of Glasgow	M	2012	English
16	50	1963	Diocese of Motherwell	F	2009	RE

### **Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet**

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you consider whether you would like to do this you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information and feel free to ask questions if there is anything that is not clear or if you need any more information.

#### **Who I am and what this study is about?**

My name is Natalie Finnigan and I am a third year part-time PhD student at the University of Glasgow. The overall aim of this study is to research Catholic teacher identity in Scotland from 1965 to the present day.

#### **What will taking part involve?**

If you decide to take part, I will interview you in an agreed location for up to an hour and a half. During this time, I will ask you questions around the following topics:

##### **Identity**

##### **Catholic Identity**

##### **Teacher identity**

##### **The Scottish context**

These are not exclusive questions, and there will be opportunity for you to add anything that you feel would be relevant to this research. All interviews will be recorded but will be anonymised at the point of interview.

#### **Why have you been invited to take part?**

You have been invited to take part because you are (or were) a teacher who qualified after 1965. Advertisements have been circulated throughout the eight Roman Catholic dioceses in Scotland and I hope to interview approximately 20 - 25 people as part of this research.

#### **Do you have to take part?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you retain the right to refuse your participation or to answer any question at all. You remain free to withdraw your consent to participate for six months after the interview with no consequence whatsoever.

#### **What are the possible risks or benefits of talking part?**

Because the nature of this research asks you to reflect on your professional identity as linked to a religious affiliation, you may feel uncomfortable about answering questions or expressing personal opinions or perspectives. At no point are you compelled to continue with the interview if you feel that you do not wish to do so. One of the possible benefits of taking part is that you will be contributing to a collective professional reflection on the identity of the Catholic teacher in Scotland - an area which is under-researched. In addition, your contribution may help shape the policy and/or the practice of the state or Church in terms of continued professional learning of Catholic teachers in Scotland.

**Will taking part be confidential and how information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?**

In keeping with General Data Protection Act, as well as the Code of Good Practice in Research, identifiable personal data will be de-identified (through the use of pseudonym) at the point of interview and be retained for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which it is being processed. As stated above, any electronic data is encrypted, password protected and stored only on University of Glasgow secure servers.

During the processing of interview data, steps will be taken to protect your anonymity. These steps include identifiers being replaced with codes (to which the researcher securely retains the key), and the use of pseudonyms in the research itself, and in any publication arising from the research.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

**What will happen to the results of the study?**

The final research product will be submitted as a requirement for achieving the Doctor of Philosophy qualification.

In line with University policy, the data produced as a result of this research will be retained for 10 years from the end of the project and securely stored using Elighten:Research Data.

As part of the dissemination strategy of the results of this research, it may be appropriate for it to be used for journal articles or conference papers, as well as within appropriate professional publications. All Participants will receive a copy of the completed thesis via OneDrive link and, if requested via email, a summary of results will also be made available.

**Who should you contact for further information?**

Please feel free to contact me directly if you have any further questions about this project or the interview process. You can reach me at [XXXXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:XXXXXXXX@student.gla.ac.uk) or on XXXXXXXXXXXX

You may also wish to contact my First Supervisor, Dr Leonard Franchi. He can be reached at [leonardo.franchi@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:leonardo.franchi@glasgow.ac.uk) or on XXXX XXXXXXXX

The Lead for Ethical Review is the contact for any concerns or complaints that you may have related to this research and you can contact the College of Social Sciences Lead for Ethical Review here : [socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

## **Appendix 4: Interview Guide**

### **1. Context**

This research is looking at a specific period of time, namely 1965 to the present. Tell me about where your teaching journey fits into this time-frame.

Tell me about the specific context(s) in which you have taught or teach (i.e. denominational/non-denominational sector, geographical region, etc.

Thinking more broadly, are there any events, changes, or anything else that comes to mind specifically within this period of time?

### **2. Identity**

When you hear the word “identity” what words or descriptions come to mind?

How do *you* understand the term “identity”?

How would you describe your own identity?

In your own life, has there been any specific events that have changed your understanding of identity?

### **3. Teacher identity**

How would you describe the personal and professional aspects of your identity as a teacher?

How does your faith background interact with your professional identity?

In your experience, how has the professional identity of teachers changed within this time period?

Are there any specific examples of these changes that you would like to share?

### **4. Catholic Identity**

In your opinion, is there a distinctive *Catholic* identity?

What makes this identity distinctive?

How do you understand the communal and personal aspects of Catholicism?

In what ways would you say that your Catholic faith is evident to others?

In what ways, if at all, does the word *vocation* feature in your understanding of Catholic identity?

How would you describe the relationship between your professional role as a teacher and your Catholic identity?

### **5. Scottish Context**

Is there anything distinctive about Catholic identity within a Scottish context?

Is there anything distinctive about teacher identity within a Scottish context?

How do you understand the relationship between the Scottish Government and Denominational (specifically Roman Catholic) schools?

What are the possible opportunities or challenges of this relationship?

## Appendix 5: Ethical Approval Letter



College of Social  
Sciences

11 April 2023

Dear Natalie Finnigan

**College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Project Title:** To what extent are issues of personal and professional identity essential for teachers in Catholic schools in Scotland to discharge effectively their responsibilities to the state and the Church Education

**Application Number:** 400220161

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 11/04/2023
- Project end date: 21/07/2025
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences: [socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk)
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: ([https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_490311\\_en.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf))
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The **Request for Amendments to an Approved Application** form should be used: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Provided on behalf of: College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
The University of Glasgow  
[socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk)

College of Social Sciences  
University of Glasgow  
Glasgow G12 8QF

## **Appendix 6: Development of Codes and Themes**

Data generated through sixteen semi-structured interviews were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019). In keeping with this approach, coding was understood not as a mechanical extraction of themes from the data, but as an active and interpretive process shaped by sustained engagement with transcripts, research questions, and the broader theoretical framework of the study.

The analytic process unfolded iteratively and reflexively across several stages:

### **1. Data familiarisation**

Each transcript was read in full multiple times prior to formal coding. During this phase, initial impressions and potential patterns were noted in the margins.

### **2. Initial (open) coding**

Line-by-line descriptive codes were generated to capture significant phrases, recurring concepts, and emphases within participants' accounts. These codes remained close to the language of the participants and were intentionally numerous at this stage.

### **3. Clustering and categorisation**

Related codes were grouped into provisional categories. For example, codes such as "faith in daily life," "witness," "authenticity," and "being real" were initially separate but began to cluster conceptually.

#### 4. **Constant comparison across interviews**

Codes were continually compared across transcripts to identify patterns of recurrence, divergence, and nuance. Isolated codes that did not recur across participants were reviewed carefully to assess their analytical weight.

#### 5. **Refinement and consolidation**

Overlapping or redundant codes were collapsed into broader analytical categories. This stage involved movement from descriptive coding toward interpretive theme construction.

#### 6. **Alignment with research questions**

The refined thematic structure was reviewed in relation to the three overarching research questions to ensure coherence and analytic relevance.

The thematic map evolved throughout this process. Several early categories were re-named, merged or re-organised before the final structure presented in Chapter 5 was established. The themes presented in the main body of the thesis therefore represent the outcome of iterative refinement rather than a single-stage coding exercise.

### **Overview of Final Coding Structure (Research Question 1)**

The table below illustrates how initial descriptive codes were refined into broader analytical categories and subsequently structured into the thematic framework presented in Chapter 5.

<b>Chapter 5 Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>	<b>Examples of Initial Descriptive Code</b>	<b>Refined Analytical Category</b>
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<b>Identity</b>	Faith/Credo	Belief language, sacramental practice, conscience	Personal Religious Identity
	Family	Upbringing, parental influence, parish culture	Formative influences
	Formation	Teacher education, diocesan formation, theological literacy	Ecclesial and professional formation
<b>Teacher Identity</b>	Person of the Teacher	Authenticity, integrity, being “real”, role modelling	Integrated self
	Changing role of the teacher	Bureaucracy, accountability, performativity, policy pressure	Professional tension
<b>Catholic Teacher Identity</b>	Personal and professional identity	Overlap of roles, coherence, internal conflict	Integration Vs fragmentation
	Interactions with young people	Witness in daily life, relational engagement, pastoral care	Relational identity
	Defence of beliefs	Articulating Church teaching, controversy, moral stance	Conscience and public witness
Catholic teaching as vocation	Calling and mission	Service, responsibility, mission, sense of purpose	Vocation as integrative
Nature of education	Formation Vs instruction	Holistic development, forming persons, exam culture	Educational anthropology

Distinct identity of Catholic schools	Ethos and foundation	Faith as foundation, witness, distinctiveness	Institutional Catholic identity
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### **Example of Iterative Theme Development**

An illustrative example of the iterative process can be seen in the development of the theme *Catholic Teaching as Vocation*. Initial descriptive codes included “calling,” “service,” “mission,” “responsibility,” “faith in action,” and “sense of purpose.” During early coding cycles, these appeared as discrete expressions of commitment. However, through comparison across transcripts, it became clear that these codes consistently clustered around a deeper integrative concept.

Rather than treating these as separate descriptors, they were consolidated into the analytical category of *vocation*, understood in this study as the integration of personal belief and professional responsibility. This movement from descriptive codes to an interpretive thematic category reflects the reflexive and constructive nature of the analytic process.

### **Reflexivity and Analytical Position**

Throughout coding, attention was given to my own positionality within Catholic education. In keeping with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, themes were not understood as emerging passively from the data but were constructed through sustained engagement with Participant accounts. Regular review of transcripts ensured that themes were grounded in recurring patterns across participants rather than isolated examples.

The final thematic structure presented in Chapter 5 therefore, represents a coherent analytic framework shaped through iterative engagement, reflexive refinement, and alignment with the study's research questions.

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