Religious Identity Typologies in Irish Primary School Student Teachers

John-Paul Sheridan
University of Dublin – Trinity College
Supervisor – Dr. Aidan Seery

**Introduction**

“The shift to secularity ... consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”

(Charles Taylor A Secular Age 2007, 3)

**Aim**

- To form a thick description of religious identity of Primary School Student Teachers from the Theological Anthropology of Karl Rahner with the addition of literature on Identity Theory, Teacher Identity and Religious Identity.
- To investigate religious identity typologies in Primary School Student Teachers, based on this description.
- To examine links between their understanding of religious identity and their teaching of religious education.

**Research Methodology**

- The general research paradigm will be Interpretivism (Elucidating patterns in student teachers’ perspectives and the construction of some typologies. An exposition on the actual perspectives of a group of practitioners).
- The theoretical positioning will be phenomenological, from a philosophical and/or sociological basis. The methodology will be phenomenological analysis.
- The primary sources of data collection will be semi-structured interviews.
- The approach is a case study. The case study is bound:
  - Geographically – Urban/ Rural
  - Chronologically – September 2010 – January 2011
  - Demographically – 22 Third Year Students/8 Fourth Year Students
- The principle behind the data collection is that of a double hermeneutic (wanting to understand what they understand).

**Outcomes**

- The research will contribute to an understanding of Irish primary school student teachers from one specific angle – their religious identity.
- It will contribute to how student teachers are prepared for the teaching of religion in the classroom; how those who teach religion in colleges of education might help them to become aware of their religious identity.
- While student teachers are trained to impart the facts of religious education, how can they be trained in ways that show them that their religious identity, however they perceive it, may have an impact and a contribution to their teaching of religious education in the future primary school teaching careers.

---

**The Human Being in Rahner**

The Human Being as Person and Subject

Human Being as the Whole

Human Being as a person in relation
  - As Being in History and in the World
  - Social nature

Human Being in relation to God
  - Orientation towards Incomprehensible Mystery
  - Human Transcendence

**Identity**

- Social Identity
- Personal Identity
- Self Concept

**Role**

- Identity Salience
- Narrative

**Teacher Identity**

Emerging Identity

“learning to teach – like teaching itself – is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become.”

(Britzman, 1991, 8)

Professional Identity

“Teachers’ professional identity is not fixed nor is it imposed, rather it is negotiated through a rich and complex set of relations of practise. This richness and complexity must be nurtured and developed in conditions where there is respect, mutuality, and communication for teachers individually and the teaching profession collectively.”

(Chong & Low 2009, 70)

**Religious Identity**

Igdeological - Beliefs
Ritualistic - Practises
Experiential - Feelings
Intellectual - Knowledge
Consequential - Effects

The Psychology of Religious Knowing (1988)
Fraser Watts and Mark Williams

Self-Centred
A Matter of Choice
Personal Construction
Uncoupling of the Religious and the Spiritual
Religion as a Private Affair
Handing on the Faith – the Church’s Mission and Challenge,
William D. Dinges (2006)

I can be contacted at:
1965sher@gmail.com