QUEERING RELIGIOUS SCHOOLING:

TEACHINGS, VALUES, RITUALS

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‘The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots.’

(Winterson, 2001, p. 119)

DECLARATION

I have read and understood the Departmental policy on plagiarism.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a queer reading of religious schooling that resists setting religion and queerness inevitably in opposition to one another. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives often rely on an identitarian account of religious schooling: the religious school exists to sustain a particular religion's identity. This impulse frequently rests on a fixed conception of religious experience, where religion is reduced to a set of propositional claims about the world that distinguish the 'unique' identity of one religious group over another. The thesis argues that this account of religion often plays out in the opposition between religion and queerness in the context of education, with religious schools being seen as necessarily at odds with queer experiences and concerns. Through the lens of three discrete theological concepts across the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions (*kerygma*, *ijtihad*, and *kavvanah*) this dissertation argues that religion is far more complex than this (involving the ambiguous interplay of material as well as propositional dimensions of religious experience) and that it is precisely this complexity that calls for a theory of religious schooling beyond the neatness of the religious/queer divide. This position is developed through a commitment to the 'weakness' of education: education's unpredictability gives rise to a view of the religious school that is less about sustaining a fixed (and hetero-/cisnormative) conception of religious identity, and more about tapping into and responding to the complexities of religious life and traditions in transformative and unforeseeable ways. This analysis is grounded in an attention to three facets of religious school life (engaging pedagogically with religious teachings; passing on religious values; and participating in religious school rituals), and translates its insights across to religious discourses and communities through an engagement with queer Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologies and life narratives. As well as interrupting

the religious/queer divide, these interventions are also significant for educational theory in challenging the underlying assumptions around religion and education upon which discussions of religious schooling are frequently built. These include the alignment of religious schooling with religious identity formation, as well as the framing of religious schooling in theological, rather than educational, terms.

INTRODUCTION

Queering religious schooling: Questions, commitments, contexts

> Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. (Winterson, 2001, p. 119)

This dissertation engages with two fundamental questions. The first: how is religious schooling typically conceptualised within Jewish, Christian, and Muslim discourses?[1] The second: how ought this understanding be reimagined in ways that interrupt, rather than sustain, the conventional opposition often set up between religion and queerness? Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the only fruit* is a novel that often comes to me when reflecting on the relationship between religion and queerness and its relevance to questions of religious schooling. The story centres on the semi-fictionalised childhood experiences of the author, who is destined for life as a Christian missionary before falling in love with Melanie, another girl at church. Winterson likens the punishments she endures as a consequence of her affections (which include having to undergo an exorcism) to a 'kind of numbness, me in ecclesiastical quarantine, them in a state of fear and anticipation' (2001, p. 171). Winterson's use of the word 'quarantine' is noteworthy: the image brings with it associations of entrapment,

[1] A justification for my focus on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schooling will be offered later in this introduction.

evoking a sense of closure, confinement, separateness. This, combined with the fact that the quarantine subtends the space between 'me' and 'them' in a manner that is both isolating and abusive, succeeds in framing the relation between queerness and religion in oppositional terms, in ways that are incommensurable and incongruent. This begs the question of whether or not there are ways of conceptualising the relation between religion and queerness that offer productive and honest alternatives to the violence Jeanette is forced to experience in the story. Indeed, is it not possible to reframe this relationship in ways that at once face the tensions between religion and queerness, while at the same time seeking to move beyond them in a manner that is ethically responsive to the material lives we live, in all their ambiguities and difference? And, if such aspirations are viable, what are the implications of all this for our understanding of religious schooling?

While complex, addressing the importance of such questions becomes necessary if we consider, as one example, the revelation in the Irish context of the use of the gay dating and sex app Grindr by Catholic seminarians. The revelations brought about a great deal of commentary, much of which, to my mind, relied on a discourse similar to that sustaining the quarantine of Jeanette's childhood abuses. Una Mullally, journalist for the *Irish Times* and well-known contributor to queer commentary and politics, wrote the following in response to the story: 'Another question the Church and society needs to ask itself, is why a gay man would enter the priesthood, when the organisation preaches against homosexuality. It certainly is something of a paradox …' (Mullally, 2016). Characterising the entry of a gay man to the Catholic priesthood as a 'paradox' rests, as I see it, on a lens that reifies gay identities and Catholic identities as necessarily antithetical to one another: in such instances, the separateness between 'me' and 'them', the essentialised dichotomy that sustains the quarantine of

Jeanette's childhood, is preserved. Of course, given the well-known position of the Catholic Church in relation to homosexuality, Mullally's comments are valuable in their commitment to challenging the heteronormativity at the heart of the Church's institutional structures. They become less helpful, though, in their inability to offer productive ways forward that move away from generalisations disconnected from the complexities, contradictions, and uncertainties of religious and queer lives, lives that often can and do include Catholic priests who engage in consensual sexual activity with other men.[2] Indeed, in increasingly polarising times, it becomes all the more necessary to imagine alternative ways of relating to one another that avoid granting legitimacy to ossifying and divisive dichotomies. In this vein, has the time not come for us to avoid bracketing off religious and queer lives as inevitably this or that? Is Jeanette's story alone not enough to convince us of this?

The orientation of this thesis arises out of sympathy with these questions. I suggest that the opposition often set up between religion and queerness is left uninterrupted when religion is reduced *exclusively* to a set of (hetero- and cisnormative) propositions about the world and human behaviour: likening religion solely to a prescribed, heteronormative code of conduct with which 'believers' comply succeeds only in synonymising religion with dogma, streamlining those internal diversities and complexities through which the possibilities for unpredictable change and transformation are often generated. As I demonstrate in the first part of the dissertation, I draw attention to this as it is often through the reduction of religion to a neat set of propositions and/or indictments that the dualism between religion and queerness is played out and preserved in how we think about religious schooling.

[2] For an insight into some of the ambiguities, dissonances, and points of contact between religious and queer lives across an array of religious traditions and perspectives, see Yvette Taylor's and Ria Snowdon's (2014) edited collection *Queering Religion, Religious Queers*.

Think, for instance, of the Muslim school that seeks to dismiss a gay teacher because homosexual sex acts are considered sinful in Islamic jurisprudence, or of the Catholic school that deliberately avoids reference to transgender identities in their anti-bullying policies on the grounds that gender (as represented in papal accounts of Genesis) is synonymous with biological sex, and therefore limited to a binary view. Hence the title of this thesis (*Queering religious schooling*): the dissertation seeks to move beyond reductionist accounts of religion (say as a hetero- and cisnormative set of dictates to follow), as it is through a sensitivity to the complexities of religious teachings, values, and rituals that it becomes possible to think about religion and its relationship to schooling differently, interrupting the temptation to inevitably pit religion against queerness. It is in this regard that the thesis reimagines religious schooling by engaging with religious resources that are as much as *material* in their priorities as they are propositional. Indeed, as Sharon Todd makes clear, life is both 'bodily and beyond the body' simultaneously, sustaining its unpredictability precisely through the sensed nature of experience in all its materiality and complexity:

> Life resides in mystery and excess: we do not know what awaits. And life is also not what we live in containment, cut off from the senses, but about being exposed to the "teeming, sweaty heat" by which we know we are alive. In this sense it is bodily and beyond the body simultaneously: it is a sensitivity that also gestures toward an unnameable openness beyond our limits. Existence, on this meaning, lies between the corporeal and a sense of limitlessness … (Todd, 2014, p. 233)

In this vein, to frame religion in terms that are cut off from the body, the emotions, and the specificities of lived experience would seem, not only limited, but wholly inaccurate. Reflecting on the religious school therefore requires a more fundamental *expansion* of what we pay attention to in thinking about religion and religious experience. Locating itself firmly within educational theory, this dissertation seeks to imagine an alternative way of thinking about religious (specifically Jewish, Christian,

and Muslim) schooling. This is done with the view to disrupting and overcoming the alignment of religious schooling with hetero- and cisnormative forms of oppression, made manifest in the assumed antithesis between religion and queerness.[3] It is here where a focus on the helpfulness of queer theologies in achieving this task becomes necessary.

I. Queer theories and theologies in postsecular times

Queer as noun, verb, and adjective

This thesis, at its heart, is one with queer commitments: it engages with queer theologies with the view to thinking about the religious school in more expansive terms, as called for above. An important question to consider from the outset is that of 'queer' itself: how am I using the term queer, and what value does it bring to a dissertation such as this? Queer theologian Susannah Cornwall points to the difficulty of utilising definitions in relation to queer, emphasising how 'the very concept of queer has built into it from the start an idea of elusiveness, uncertainty, non-fixity, and a resistance to closed definitions' (2011, p. 9). For Cornwall, 'queer' is a term that is necessarily uncontainable, evoking an important sense of unknowability that subverts the neatness of static classifications. In spite of this, there still exists for Cornwall the possibility of us drawing attention to some of the enduring features that have become associated with 'queer', and she sets about this task by indicating queer's 'treble function of noun, verb and adjective' (2011, p. 9). I borrow her threefold

[3] For an extended treatment of what heteronormativity is, and how it relates to models of inclusion and hospitality in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schooling, see Henry (2018). In this paper, I also gesture to what role queer theologies might play in rethinking religious schooling beyond heteronormative models of inclusion and hospitality.

understanding of queer in this way as I think it offers a useful route for coming to grips with what queer might mean, without losing its conceptual slipperiness.

First, queer as noun. It is difficult to determine exactly when queer began to be used as a signifier for identity. Indeed, right up to the 1960s queer was typically used as a derogatory insult directed towards those who allied themselves with non-heterosexual forms of sexual and/or gender identity and their expressions. By the 1980s and early 1990s onwards, however, queer positively entered the lexicon of lesbian, gay, and bisexual activism. Activist groups such as Queer Nation famously sported slogans like 'We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!' in their political work, for instance (Pickett, 2009, p. 157). The use of the noun queer in this way became allied with a deviant form of self-identity (typically along sexual and/or gender-based lines) that refused to comply to the conformities of heterosexual and cisgender society, which many queer activist groups saw as relying on an overly deterministic and essentialist understanding of what it meant to espouse a sexual and/or gender identity to begin with. Queer, in short, was turned on its head from homophobic slur to a positive form of identity that gained its significance in its very refusal to grant heterosexual and cisgender identities a character of an unyielding and inflexible sort. The paradox of the term as noun is perhaps self-evident: it signifies a dissident form of sexual and/or gender identity that gains its identity in embracing the more general futility of identitarian logics. It is because of this that in more recent times a further distinction has been drawn between lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex identities and queer identities: the latter is seen as far more fluid and subversive than the former, specifically in the formers' credence to more fixed or static forms of self-identification (Neary, 2017). Throughout this thesis, queer is used in this nominal fashion to signal any person who identifies in non-heterosexual and/or –cisgender

ways. However, as will soon become apparent, this is also a thesis that questions the helpfulness of allying education with identity at all, so it is with a priority to queer as verb and adjective that I continue.

Second, queer as verb. Given its roots in the sixteenth century German word *quer* meaning strange or oblique (Bevir, 2010, p. 1131), it is perhaps unsurprising that queer has also come to encapsulate a particular style of doing something, specifically in a way that characterises the action with a sense of oddness and perplexity. To utilise a queer lens is to interrogate something with a sensitivity to unearthing and/or building upon moments, practices, behaviours, and gestures that disorient how that subject of critique is typically understood, related to, and/or oriented towards (Ahmed, 2006). While appearing apparently limitless, this commitment is grounded in a very specific focus: namely, the interruption of hetero- and cisnormativity. Queering something in an interrogative fashion (as an enactment of queer as verb) involves getting under its skin and turning it on its head, making it strange, in order to expose and disrupt the tools of homophobia, biphobia, and/or transphobia that might inform the subject of critique. It is in this vein that José Estaban Munoz calls for a 'disidentificatory' politics in queer theorising, where the self is enacted 'at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit' (1999, p. 6): on this meaning, queer as verb actively destabilises hetero- and cisnormative logics that seek to reduce people to how they might be socially identified by others. This is not to suggest that I seek to dismiss the effects that the discourses of social constructivism and identity politics have on queer lives and experiences: after all, these have necessitated and galvanised queer activism in many ways. While not denying their influence and significance, I am nonetheless resistant in this thesis at granting social constructivist discourses *ultimacy* over our lives in relationship with others. Indeed,

my alignment of queer as verb with disidentification arises precisely from a desire to expose and sustain the possibilities that can arise when we tap into the irreducible complexities of life, an irreducibility that escapes social constructivism, identity politics, and their discursive and structural limits. It is in this sense that queer as verb is enacted in this dissertation.[4]

Finally, queer as adjective. To describe something as queer is to describe that which allies itself with the kinds of political and theoretical practices I have just explored. In this spirit, queer as adjective is often used within academic discourse to draw attention to the disruptiveness of the intellectual work being engaged in. For instance, there are scholars in fields as diverse as queer literary studies, queer hermeneutics, queer legal theories, queer sports studies, queer geographies, queer media studies, queer phenomenologies, and queer theologies, as well as in sub-disciplines like queer curriculum studies in the context of educational research. The types of concepts academics engage with can also be described as queer: from conceptualising autobiography as a queer curriculum practice, to the concept of a queer pedagogy itself. The conceptual commitments of this thesis follow the use of queer as adjective: indeed, the entire basis of this thesis is to rethink religious schooling queerly. Importantly though, in spite of (or, indeed, because of) its disruptive quality, queer as adjective suggests a degree of preservation around that which is being queered, even while the subject of critique is undergoing potentially radical forms of reimagining. Take for instance, the queer understanding of religious

[4] For a critique of identity in relation to educational theory, see, for instance, Carl Anders Säfström's (1999) *Identity: Questioning the Logic of Identity in Educational Theory*. Sharon Todd's (1996) thesis is helpful in terms of grounding a critique of identity politics in a specific concern for pedagogy and its attendant imaginaries. Adriana Cavarero's (2000) *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* has implications for situating a critique of identity and social constructivist discourses within wider feminist discussions, something which Paul A. Kottman's (2000) introduction to the volume also comprehensively argues.

schooling that I seek to offer. As will become apparent both below and in part two of this thesis, the understanding of religious schooling I am putting forward here is significantly different from how religious schooling has been typically theorised: indeed, many might see it as almost entirely antithetical to what religious schooling is or ought to be. And yet, the thesis nonetheless positions itself as engaging with, and reconstructing, religious schooling, rather than merely discarding or discrediting it.

In this spirit, to say that queer as adjective preserves its subject of critique does not mean that that subject remains somehow static or reified within an historical vacuum simply because of its having been there already: I do not wish to preserve religious schooling simply for the sake of it. Rather, read queerly, I see something valuable in religious schooling worth keeping, something with the ability to interrupt hetero- and cisnormativity and their attendant dichotomies. As developed later, by gesturing to the embodied, affective, and material messiness of human experience, I see my queer reading of religious schooling as worthwhile for educational theory in pointing towards the possibility of reimagining religious schooling beyond codes of conduct: on this meaning, the religious school *disidentifies* from fixed notions of religion and/or queerness in its sensitivity to the body, to the emotions, to the material nature of human life, and to the transformative volatilities and potentialities that inhere within these.

From chapter four onwards in this thesis, I offer a detailed engagement with queer theologies across the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, mapping their appropriateness for thinking about the religious school in more expansive ways. For now, however, it suffices to say that queer theologies can be understood as particular styles of thinking and feeling theology, that have as their aim the interrogation, reconstruction, and reimagination of theological tropes, images, arguments, and

traditions with the view to overcoming the damaging legacies of religiously-inspired hetero- and cisnormativity. Queer theologies, being queer, are necessarily unorthodox in the sense that they deliberately move away from traditional and/or canonical conceptions of God-talk, conceptions which have (for the queer theologian) been framed for too long in terms of a heterosexual and/or cisgender take on divine-human experience. As my engagements with queer theologies in chapters four, five, and six make clear, queer theologising is distinctive methodologically in its sensitivity to questions of materiality in religious experience and theologising. Queer theologies begin their work from a plurality of experiences, perspectives, and starting points, for to deny this plurality would be to repeat the kinds of theologies that have grounded religiously-inspired hetero- and cisnormativity to begin with. Jeremy Carette and James Bernauer's take on what it means to queer religion (in the sense of queer as verb) goes some way to illustrating the style of work queer theologies engage in:

> Religion becomes queer when it breaks up the desiring self, when it refuses to confess an identity, when it refuses to say who we are, and acknowledges a plural self with polymorphous desires. To queer religion is to queer the foundations of theology, its monotheism, its monosexuality and its monopoly of truth. (2004, p. 225)

Queer theologies, in other words, expand our understanding of what religion means, in ways that destabilise those fixed notions of identity and belonging that often sustain the oppositional relation between religion and queerness. On this meaning, queer theologies disrupt 'unified' conceptions of God and religion. It is for this reason (coupled with their institutional dominance in Western forms of religious schooling provision) that I limit this dissertation's focus to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as it is these three religions, in their *monotheism*, that have faced significant challenges

in diversifying their take on divine-human experience in queer-positive ways.[5] Read in this manner, rethinking religious schooling becomes something for which queer theologies are aptly suited.

Before moving to an exposition of the personal motivations informing this thesis, an important question to consider is the degree to which an engagement with queer theologies can be deemed appropriate. Indeed, why should any religious perspectives (queer or otherwise) inform our understanding of schooling and its provision, particular when we consider the era of secularism in which we find ourselves today? In what follows, I engage with this question by framing the thesis with sympathy to postsecularism and its implications for thinking about the religious school.

Postsecularism, inheritances, and the religious school

In understanding what postsecularism is and what it entails, I begin with an exposition of what 'secularisation' is and how it is helpful for us in understanding the kinds of discourses at play in coming to terms with the place of religion in contemporary society. Secularisation, in a very general sense, can be understood as a linear view of social 'progress' in which 'religion loses its influence and authority on people's [collective] lives along with the modernisation and rationalisation of society' (Bergdahl, 2010, p. 8). Lovisa Bergdahl roots this view's development in the thinking of nineteenth century sociologist Max Weber (1991), who believed that the onsets of industrialisation, capitalism, and the Enlightenment were concomitant with a form of

[5] For a theological take on the relationship between monotheism and what some have seen to be the Abrahamic faiths' traditional aversion to the body and queerness, see Laurel C. Schneider's (2008) *Beyond monotheism: A theology of multiplicity*.

'disenchantment' where the world was becoming fully graspable and comprehendible for the first time. Weber foresaw that this process of disenchantment would bring with it the bracketing off of religion from public life, becoming, as Bergdahl puts it, 'a private matter, irrelevant to public concerns' (2010, p. 8). In his book *Public Religions in the Modern World* José Casanova (1994) provides a thesis of secularisation much in line with Weber's trajectory, predicated on three specific moments: first, the differentiation of society; second, the decline of religion; and third, the privatisation of religion.

In terms of the last of these (which relates to contemporary times), secularisation is distinguished by the increasingly individualised nature of religion, that is, religious belief (and, to a lesser extent in the European context, religious practice) has become less a matter of public concern, and more a matter of personal choice (Casanova, 1994, p. 35). Owing to this increased individualism around religion, religious belief and association have become divested of any monolithic qualities, and have instead become, as Charles Taylor argues, one option among many others (2007, p. 2). Indeed, Taylor's (2007) interpretation of secularisation is resonant with Casanova's in this regard: in his seminal work *A Secular Age*, secularisation bears its significance neither as the total separation of the private from the public (what he calls secularity 1) nor as the inevitable decline of religious belief and practice (secularity 2). Instead he sees secularisation as a representative shift in the *conditions* of belief, whereby a diversity of responses to religious questions (including the possibility of non-belief) have become viable for the first time (secularity 3). It is with a sensitivity to this diversity that this dissertation's postsecular sympathies emerge.

David Lewin engages with the concept of postsecularism for its capacity to communicate the ongoing relevance and influence that religion has in the modern era.

He argues that the postsecular does not deny secularisation as such, but merely *complicates* it by accentuating the fact that society 'is not simply progressing from religious to secular or irreligious': for Lewin, the postsecular acknowledges 'the persistent presence of religious orderings of the world and contextualises them within a wider discussion of geopolitics and culture' (2017, p. 8). Lewin develops this postsecular complication (rather than repudiation) of secularisation by arguing that 'the secular does not oppose faith as such', but rather those kinds of relationships with religion that impose and/or presume a singular or authoritarian approach to the public's religiosity (2017, p. 19). Postsecularism cuts through those differentiated categories that characterise certain accounts of secularism, categories like public/private, personal/political, religious/secular, faith/reason, conviction/critique, and seeks to expose the ways in which the private and the public, the religious and the secular, are not as opposed as certain secularist narratives might suggest. Indeed, postsecularism makes the claim that something recognisably religious 'has always formed part of our cultural identities … [announcing] that we may never have been secular' (Lewin, 2017, p. 20) to begin with. Postsecularism, however, is not akin to the reduction of culture to a religious or theological footnote: rather, it simply aims at giving form to 'the fissures or cracks in the wall between the secular and the confessional' (Lewin, 2017, p. 30). In this way, the postsecular valorises a view of the secular that is less about resistance to religion in its entirety, and more about resistance to *theocratic manifestations of religion* that close off the diversity of ways in which people might respond to questions around religion and the sacred (Lewin, 2017, p. 19). The postsecular bears resemblance to Rowan Williams' (2012, p. 2) 'procedural' account of secularism in this regard, in which a number of religious and non-religious perspectives are engaged with in the public space in full seriousness

without the privileging of any. This thesis's engagement with (queer) resources from religious traditions is therefore done not out of an attempt to impose a specifically theological (and monological) view of religion and education upon the public, but rather out of a postsecular sensitivity to attending to what religion might have to offer public discourse on education, in ways that are deliberative, fluid, and listening.

Of course, a legitimate challenge to this is the dissertation's focus on religious (specifically Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) schooling. By leaving uninterrupted the idea that religious communities can offer schooling opportunities for children and young people, do I not perpetuate the privileging of certain religious groups over others in how education is institutionally structured and provided? Do I not, in other words, reproduce the religious hegemonies to which postsecularism is averse? If I intended to offer a view of religious schooling predicated on the presumption and reproduction of fixed notions of religious identity, I would agree. However, the queerness of this thesis brings with it an engagement with queer theological resources to *interrupt* the assumption that the religious school exists to inevitably preserve student and/or staff belonging to a particular interpretation of a religious faith. In tapping into the material, as well as propositional emphases of queer theologies, what this thesis offers is a reconceptualisation of religious schooling beyond acquiescence to predefined orthodoxies. It seeks to move away from the idea that the religious school and its activities is akin to the reproduction of fixed notions of religious identity, and towards the idea that the religious school exists (among other purposes) as a time and space for religious inheritances (teachings, values, rituals) to be engaged with *pedagogically*, rather than necessarily religiously. In this vein, this thesis is distinctive in tying the work of the religious school to education, first and foremost, rather than religion. What postsecularism teaches us is the fact that the religious

histories of our educational institutions cannot be changed: what can be changed is our relationship to such inheritances, and it is from this basis that my queering of religious schooling begins.

II. Situating this dissertation

Having offered an outline of some of the theoretical commitments, questions, and traditions with which this thesis is engaging, it now falls on me to *locate* this dissertation within personal and academic contexts: where do I situate this work in relation to myself, as well as to broader academic audiences? In the case of the former, beginning with the following quotation is useful:

> … [queer] Christology has an endemic role to play in the theological and Christological landscape of the future, a landscape in which, one day, it will be possible for all LGBTQ people to self-identify as such in a manner that allows them to love themselves, love others and allow themselves to be loved in turn. (Henry, 2014, p. 27)

I wrote this sentence over five years ago. It acted as the closing statement to an undergraduate research paper on queer Christology (that is, the study of Christ). That paper was theological, not educational, and was written in a register that supposed a degree of theological commitment on the part of both the writer and the reader. It was an attempt to bring queer commitments and theological commitments together, with the view to demonstrating the value queer perspectives on Christ could have for queer people in their journeys towards self-acceptance. I refer to this as it allows us to gain some insight into the personal story that has informed the orientation of this dissertation as a whole. While no longer identifying as Catholic (in as much as an Irish person from a Catholic background can!), at the time I wrote this undergraduate paper I did, albeit in a fractured and uncertain fashion. Indeed, throughout my adolescent

and university years I heavily involved myself in the life of my local church, serving as a Minister for the Word, writing and delivering lay homilies, working on the parish council, coordinating faith development programmes with the local primary school, participating in pilgrimages (both national and international), attending and speaking at Catholic youth conferences, and so on. This was partly inspired, of course, by a fascination (intellectual and affective) in notions of God, transcendence, and ritual, and on this level my involvement gave me great satisfaction and meaning. However, it was also deeply motivated by a desire to 'do well' for my family, particularly my mother, a single parent who had borne the brunt of what it meant to have five children outside of marriage in 1980s and 1990s Ireland. I was a quiet, studious, and relatively acquiescent teenager with a knack for public speaking: the church offered me the space to exercise that skill in a way that would reflect well, not only on myself, but on my family too.

In the midst of all this, I was also slowly beginning to experience and reflect upon my sexual attraction to other men, and what that meant. How I sat with my religious identity while also coming to terms with my identity as a gay man was at times deeply conflicting, and was a challenge that carried on right into the early years of my doctoral studies. The process involved, on the one hand, an intellectual awareness of how queer and theological commitments could indeed be brought together (my family's unequivocal support and love demonstrated this to me), coupled with a deep sense of affective unease and struggle with who I was and where I belonged: indeed, before 'coming out' to my family, busying myself in church activities partly delayed facing the fact of my attraction to other men. The sense of unease I experienced was a combination of a number of other things too. One of these was a lingering feeling of shame at experiencing sexual attraction to other men to

begin with, a sense of shame that partly had its roots in more conservative theological perspectives I had been exposed to. I also held a deep-seated anger at the immovable nature of the institutional Church in relation to queer issues, as well as disgust at the institutional abuses that my community and country had experienced at the hands of religion. All of this coincided with a dual degree of longing for, and avoidance of, a church community that I was at once intimately a part of, yet uncomfortably associated with, as well as later feelings of sadness and frustration with the queer community itself, specifically for what I (perhaps sweepingly at the time) perceived to be its intolerance towards religion and/or religious questions. Much of this was unfolding while also studying to be a second-level teacher of religious education in a third-level Catholic institution, and working, in the main, in Catholic schools. Drawing reference to aspects of my personal history is done here, not out of a navel-gazing impulse, but rather out of the conviction that it is in response to the messiness of life and its conflictions that educational theorising often arises and, indeed, is often necessitated.

A number of distinguishing characteristics to the above narrative come to mind that tap into the contexts and commitments of this work. First, the narrative demonstrates a sensitivity to the limits of identitarian thinking, and of the futures it allows for and not. As I have already alluded to across this introduction, queerness can render identities impermanent, fluid, contestable, and negotiable. Seen differently, though, identities become more static and inflexible, foreclosing possibilities for becoming otherwise, and stratifying human relationships within polarised categories that are both too neat and too easy. As it appears to me, some of the difficulties I experienced accepting myself as a gay man stemmed from identitarian logics of an either/or sort: to my mind at the time, I could either be religious or gay, but not both, for to position myself either within or between both camps was to betray the limits of

what either demanded or permitted. For similar reasons, I struggled deeply with identifying as a gay teacher of religious education working within Catholic schools and studying in a Catholic college, for I assumed that deference to the institutional Church's views on sex was an intrinsic dimension to being part of an educational institution with a Catholic heritage (if only I had read a thesis like this then!). While I failed to appreciate this five years ago, this experience has since taught me the importance of avoiding such polarising conceptions of identities in how we theorise in education, for it was that polarising logic that left the dominant position of theological dogma unchallenged, and its heteronormative effects on me (both personally and professionally in schools and college) uninterrupted. As I attempt to show in part one of this thesis, the queer reading of religious schooling I wish to offer in this thesis is one that seeks to emulate an approach to thinking about the relationship between schooling, religion, and queerness that resists seeing identities as easily positioned within permanent and immoveable categories. In fact, it will argue for a view of the religious school that, in the education that it offers, queerly *disidentifies*: we are more than how we are socially identified, and it is this that acts as the basis from which education's transformative capacities arise.

As well as this, the story offered above also points to the limitations of framing religion solely in terms of assent to, or dissent from, propositions about what God is, and/or what the world is like. Indeed, while beliefs about God certainly were a part of what informed my experiences of religion, so too were other factors like the body (sexual arousal, ritual participation), the emotions (joy, wonder, curiosity, pride, anger, shame, social and familial pressures), and materiality (statues, crosses, the burning of incense, the height of the ambo, the creak of the wooden pews). As I argue in chapter one, religion is more than a set of truth claims to which people agree or

disagree, yet it is often through a largely propositional account of religion that religiously-inspired hetero- and cisnormativity sustains itself, particularly as such discourse plays out academically. This thesis, then, speaks to the complexities of my own experiences of religion by reframing how religion is understood in its relationship to education. It makes the case that the conventional opposition often set up between religious and queer identities can be overcome in educational thinking if the ambiguities of religion are taken in full seriousness, ambiguities that are as much material, embodied, and affective as they are propositional. A more detailed exposition of what I mean by a material take on religion will be offered in chapter one: what falls on me for now is the need to situate this dissertation within wider academic discourses.

Educational theory as a mode of response

Who am I speaking to in writing this thesis? To which fields of work within education is this dissertation contributing, and how might the 'uniqueness' of this contribution be understood? I see this work as a *response* to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives on schooling, as well as studies interested in the relationship between queerness, religion, and education. I say response as the thesis is not exactly speaking *with* these voices: instead, it takes up what these voices have to say about education and the religious school, and engages with queer theologies to productively think about them differently. Crucially, this productive work is motivated not by, say, queer theology or religious studies, but by the commitments informing *theoretical* perspectives on education, so it is in this regard that I claim that the thesis is most appropriately situated within educational theory. It contributes to educational theory by demonstrating how this field's insights on education, schooling, and pedagogy

interrupt and *reframe* the kinds of discourses and assumptions informing other bodies of work. This is not to suggest, of course, that these other fields might not also be interested in what this thesis has to offer. Indeed, it is my hope that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives on education and schooling might be receptive to the theory of religious schooling offered here. Literature at the interface between queerness, religion, and education might also gain insight from what this thesis has to say, as might the fields of critical and queer pedagogies, sex education, religious education, queer theologies, religious studies, and sociology of religion. The crucial point though is that this thesis draws from resources from educational theory in grounding and orienting its perspectives.

III. Outline of chapters

The dissertation is structured as follows:

Figure 1: Thesis structure

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	Queer disidentifications: The weakness of education and religious schooling	Queering religious values: Fostering and *ijtihad*	
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As evidenced above, the thesis is divided into two parts. Contextual in orientation, the first part of the thesis sets out the degree to which identitarian accounts of religion have dominated Jewish, Christian, and Muslim discourses around religious schooling, and draws connections between these and how the relationship between queerness and religion has been propositionally (and hetero- and cisnormatively) framed within certain accounts of religion, schooling and their relation to queerness. From here, the section reflects on what it is about education (and schooling in particular) that calls for these assumptions to be reoriented to include a sensitivity to materiality where religion is concerned. In this regard, it suggests that schooling enacts a queer politics of disidentification when it cultivates the conditions for unpredictable kinds of transformation to occur, both for students and the world.

Chapter one charts Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives on religious schooling. I focus especially on how these perspectives often rely on an identitarian account of schooling: the religious school exists to sustain a particular religion's identity and survival. I make the case that this impulse rests on a fixed conception of religious identity and experience, where religion is reduced to a set of propositional

claims about the world that distinguish the 'unique' identity of one religious group over another. From here, I move to a general synopsis of the literature at the interface between religion, schooling, and queer identities, and forward the view that affinities between it and Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts of schooling present themselves in a shared tendency to *begin* with a propositional (and specifically hetero- and cisnormative) account of the relation between religion and schooling. I suggest that starting from this vantage point does little to interrupt the opposition often set up between religion and queerness, as it sustains the narrative that queerness is necessarily a 'problem site' to which the religious school can respond either by assenting to, or defying, religious teachings and their attendant identitarian limits.

The second chapter takes up the critique offered in chapter one by thinking through how education and schooling might be productively theorised beyond the dichotomy between religion and queerness. It suggests that this can be achieved by recognising how education is far less predictable and self-assured than is commonly assumed, and that it is precisely this quality to education that grants it its transformative potentiality. I argue that this transformative quality is queer in the sense that it resists likening education to the reproduction of fixed notions of identity, determined by propositional truth claims: by resisting the reproduction of fixed notions of identity, education enacts a *disidentificatory* kind of politics that opens up avenues for pursuing, not only what is, but what *could be*. By offering a reading of two aspects of school life (suspension and profanation) through recourse to the original Greek conception of the school in terms of *scholé* (or 'leisure time'), I make the case that a queer conception of education is appropriate for understanding the activities of the school in disidentificatory terms, and that this is important if we are to open up

possibilities for reframing the relation between schooling and religion in ways that are open to the untold and unpredictable.

Chapter three is methodological in exposition, and seeks to map how I intend to build upon this queer conception of schooling in ways that are both sensitive and receptive to the concerns of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. The chapter takes two steps in this regard. The first endeavours to chart the resonances between religious language (its metaphors and symbols) and educational discourses, suggesting that both share a common affinity with the poetic to which religious communities would be sympathetic. The second takes this shared poetic commitment and utilises it by developing the symbol of the Abrahamic threesome, a device of my own creation comprised of the union of the star of David, the cross, and the crescent moon. I suggest that this symbol will be capable, as a methodological device, of *translating* queer theological insights throughout the second part of the thesis across to the attentive, embodied, repetitive, and creative concerns of the school in a manner that can, through its poetic qualities, sensitively revitalise and reframe how religious schooling is thought about beyond the religious/queer divide. I make the case that the Abrahamic threesome is helpful for education in terms of thinking with theology, without thinking theologically.

In the second, constructive part of the thesis, I take up these conceptions of education and schooling and reflect on what they *do* to religious schooling in relation to three aspects of religious school life: 1) engaging pedagogically with religious teachings; 2) passing on religious values; and 3) participating in religious school rituals. I frame each analysis in education's transformative unpredictability, before rooting these insights in the concerns of queer theologies through the respective lens of each of the following more orthodox theological concepts: 1) *kerygma* (a Christian

concept); 2) *ijtihad* (a Muslim concept); and 3) *kavvanah* (a Jewish concept). In *translating* these theological engagements back across to what characterises the school, recourse to the Abrahamic threesome described above is made.

Chapter four (the first of part two) is the first of the dissertation's 'constructive' chapters. The chapter begins with an appreciation for the *liminality* of pedagogy, that is, its location inbetween 'body and spirit'. The chapter seeks to preserve this liminal emphasis on the grounds that it is through this that pedagogy enacts a *double transformation* of self and the subject matter of the world in ways that position the unpredictable at the heart of what it means for a teacher to teach 'with authority'. I make the case that this liminal view of pedagogy necessarily resists aligning an engagement with religious teachings with religious identity formation, for such pedagogies attempt to sustain religious adherence on the part of students, and in this way elide that which is liminal about pedagogy. In an effort to root these insights in a theological register with which some within Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities might be sympathetic, I engage with the Christian concept of *kerygma*, which refers to the act of proclaiming or preaching the faith. I make the case that *kerygma* can be read as lending itself to an understanding of engaging with religious teachings that is much in tune with the liminal embrace of the unpredictable at the heart of pedagogy. *Kerygma*, in other words, reframes proclamation less in terms of paternalism or acquiescence, and more in terms of a dialogical openness to the untold or unforeseen, which I demonstrate through engagement with the irreverence of queer Christian theology. The chapter then turns to queer Muslim hermeneutics and queer Jewish accounts of *hevruta* study partnerships to reflect on how a *kerygmatic* understanding of engaging with religious teachings affects how we read sacred texts in the moment of pedagogy itself. It is ultimately argued that the embodied, affective,

and material dimensions of these analyses queer religious experience in ways that dislocate the teacher's pedagogical work from practices tied to identity formation, and in this fashion disrupt the association of the religious school with the inevitable replication of religiously-inspired hetero- and cisnormativity.

Chapter five begins with an examination of what it means to foster religious values and traditions in school. In an attempt to move away from the idea that the religious school exists to inevitably reproduce a collective sense of religious identity around a shared set of religious values, the chapter begins with a focus on Bergdahl and Langmann's conception of the fostering task of education in radically conservative terms. This task is conservative in the sense of sustaining values in what is studied in school, and is radical in the sense of exposing those values to untold and unpredictable futures. I forward the view that this radical conservatism is valuable in reflecting on the work of the religious school as it relies, not on a commonality of religious values as a basis for education, but rather on the commonality created in the moment of studying religious values together, across our differences. Conscious of the fact that such insights might not sit well with some in religious communities invested in religious schooling, I turn to the Muslim concept of *ijtihad* (which refers to the pluralities and flexibilities inherent within the process of interpreting and embodying Islamic values and traditions), suggesting that an expansive reading of the concept that is sensitive to questions of embodiment, affect, and materiality has the potential to enact a radically conservative take on religious schooling beyond the conventional religion/queer dichotomy. Life narratives from three queer people across the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths are analysed to demonstrate the resonance of this approach to the lived experiences of some queer people in faith communities.

The penultimate chapter of the thesis and last chapter of part two reflects on the publicness of education, arguing that pedagogy enacts a concern for the public when it creates spaces through which an encounter with difference is cultivated and sustained, specifically through practices that are at once activist, experimental, and demonstrative. The chapter challenges the assertion that ritual participation is inevitably at odds with the work of the school by suggesting that rituals have within them the potential to be read in ways that resonate with the publicness of education. In this regard, the chapter draws from the Jewish notion of *kavvanah* (meaning 'intention' or 'embodied attentiveness'), and argues that when we reflect on rituals from the vantage point of their 'remembrance' of past stories, traditions, and experiences, the incompleteness of the past becomes apparent, and because of this spaces open up through which a public concern for freedom and diversity bears fruit. To demonstrate how this public conception of ritual can be sensitively translated across to the concerns of religious communities, I employ the lens of *kavvanah* to a reading of queer Christian theologies of worship as well as transgender Jewish *mikveh* rituals. By engaging with such theologies, I hope to suggest that not only can participation in religious rituals be seen as having an appropriate place in religious school life, but that it can also serve as a pedagogical site from which religious hetero- and cisnormativity can be disrupted and overcome. This chapter will then be followed by a final conclusion, in which I draw the varying insights of this dissertation together. I argue that queering religious school entails an embodied commitment to people living with and being taught by others through a receptiveness to our schools' embeddedness already within religious traditions, but in ways that avoid granting those traditions unyielding uniformity over themselves or others. It will be here that

the limits of the dissertation will also be addressed, as well as suggestions offered for future scholarship in educational theory.

PART ONE

The religious school in context:

Religious identity formation and the religious/queer divide

CHAPTER ONE

Charting religious schooling: Identity formation and the propositional

> Faith schools provide a safe context for students and teachers to remain 'under the umbrella' of a particular living tradition, to spend an extended period of time thinking according to its conceptual categories, evaluating experiences from its vantage point, looking out at the world from a particular angle, familiarising themselves with a particular story, internalising a set of practices, rehearsing the rules of belonging to a particular community, letting the 'tools' or 'resources' provided by a religious way of life become … extensions of themselves in their attentiveness, experiences, judgements and decisions. (Sullivan, 2006, p. 941)

Is it accurate to frame religion solely in terms of identity and propositions? To what extent are such frames granted monopoly in how religious schooling is understood? What relationship does the religion/queer divide have to such an account of religion, and what, if anything would happen to this divide in educational discourse if religion where reoriented beyond identity and doctrine? In a thesis committed to queering religious schooling, it makes sense to begin with a chapter that sets out these questions in relation to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts of schooling, for addressing these is (to my mind) at the heart of some of the impasses currently dominating debates around religion, schooling, and the inclusion of those who identify as queer. In what follows, I make the case that religious schooling is conventionally characterised by what I term an identitarian logic: the purpose of the religious school is often connected (as demonstrated in what is suggested in John Sullivan's account above) to sustaining the identity and survival of a particular religion. I call into question the helpfulness of thinking about religious schooling in this way, particularly when we consider the extent to which fixed notions of religious and queer identities play out in discourses that set religious and queer identities in opposition to one another, especially in terms

of the apparent immutability of certain propositional claims about religion and sexuality (claims that liken homosexual sex acts to sin, for instance).

In an effort to transcend the limits of such views, the chapter proceeds to surveying Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts of religious schooling that engage with questions of religious identity and diversity. I draw affinities between this literature and studies that seek to move beyond the religious/queer divide: I argue that a welcome feature of both bodies of work is an openness to understanding religious identities in school contexts beyond accounts of religion as inevitably homogenous. I also suggest, though, that insofar as these perspectives begin from the vantage point of allying the religious school with the production of identities (however diverse such identities might be), the chance of escaping the boundaries of identitarian and propositional accounts of religious schooling becomes less likely. Indeed, to my mind, synonymising the religious school with identity formation limits the religious school to *already existing* modes of religious and sexual identification, which runs the risk of sustaining the dichotomy between religion and queerness from the outset. It is in this regard that the chapter calls for a need to think about the purpose of religious schooling with reference to how materiality features in religion and religious experience: the case is made that a sensitivity to such facets of religious experience tap into schooling's *disidentificatory* potential, something which I develop in my account of education in the chapter to follow.

I. The need for rethinking religion in education

The title of this chapter gestures to its overall purpose: namely, to chart past perspectives on religion, schooling, and queerness, and to suggest possible avenues

for responding to trends to be found at this interface. The place and purpose of religion in schooling has been a contested topic for a number of decades, garnering responses across an array of sub-disciplinary contexts within educational research. Many have framed religious schooling in these discussions within an identitarian logic, with the religious school being seen as a site where religious identities are solidified and confirmed, rather than, say, rendered fluid or contestable through encounters with others. Irina Mchitarjan and Rainer Reisenzein (2014), for instance, observe that minority ethnic and religious groups are often invested in religious schools for the transmission and survival of their cultural identities: religious schools are conceptualised as sites for allowing religious identities to flourish. Hanan Alexander and Terence McLaughlin (2003), and Richard Pring (2009), have both articulated support for publicly-funded religious schools on the grounds of the crucial role they play in preserving the culture and identity of minority religions. Elmer John Thiessen makes similar points, arguing that the deliberative skills necessary for the cultivation of personal autonomy are best honed in contexts where the religious identity of the child is guarded from, rather than exposed to, challenge:

> Deliberative skills are best developed within the context of a secure and stable environment. If children are transplanted into an environment where their parents' cherished beliefs are subjected to criticism by others in the classroom, this can in fact lead to discontent and restlessness and can hinder rather than help growth in deliberative skills. (2001, pp. 237-238)

Indeed, the rights of parents to preserve religious identity through the schooling of their children has been a common trope in the discourse around justifying religious schools (McLaughlin, 1984), even while there has been the argument that parents have little right to determine the religious identities of their children through the schooling they choose for them (Callan, 1985). In a comparable manner to Thiessen (2001), some thinkers have suggested that the preservation of religious

identities and traditions through schooling, rather than being socially divisive, is in fact essential in sustaining the conditions for community cohesion in increasingly diverse societies. Andrew Wright (2003), for example, has highlighted the central role played by religious schools in the integration of Jewish and Roman Catholic communities in the United Kingdom, enabling them to feel secure in their group identity and interact with others without fear of assimilation. This is repeated by Geoffrey Short (2002), who argues that religious schools improve social cohesion because they enable students to develop confidence in their religious identities, which then allows them to interact with wider society without losing the sense of who they are and what they value. J.M. Halstead similarly lauds the religious school for offering 'emotional stability, security and confidence' (2009, p. 56) for children in their religious identities, a confidence conducive to a culture of deliberation in a society where retaining the distinctiveness of a religious tradition does not have to become akin to the denudation of social cohesion altogether (Halstead & McLaughlin, 2005, p. 2). The tendency to align religious schooling with the preservation of religious identity is a significant feature in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts of religious schooling, so it is to these that I now explicitly focus my attention.

Preserving Jewish, Christian, and Muslim identities in religious schools

Perspectives on Jewish schooling have reiterated much of the above arguments. Indeed, Jewish schooling is often conventionally viewed by community leaders as a necessary means for ensuring the community's survival (Sacks, 1994; Krasner, 2016). Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Jonathan Sacks, makes this point when he writes of how, through religious schools 'each major tradition is preserved and developed

within its own narrative and story, and it will continue to enrich the community only where that story is preserved, enriched and passed on to subsequent generations within which the individual finds his or her identity' (cited in Pring, 2007, p. 517). In her study of state-funded (voluntary-aided) Jewish schools in the United Kingdom, Julia Ipgrave draws attention to the extent to which an 'autoreferential' self-concept pervades certain Jewish schools, by which she means a self-understanding grounded in inculcating in students 'a love for God, Torah and Israel' in a way that embodies what it entails to 'be' and 'do' 'Jewish' (2016, p. 58). Helena Miller's (2014) description of the aims of Jewish studies in UK Jewish schools as involving 'a personal commitment to an involvement with Jewish practice, ethics, tradition and culture' reaffirms Ipgrave's observations in this regard.

From an international point of view, perspectives on Jewish education have noted a pointed shift in purpose over the years from integration to the growth, expression and preservation of a distinctively Jewish identity (Ellenson, 2008). While some of the leading figures of Jewish education in the first decades of American public schooling (such as Samson Benderly) opposed Jewish day schooling out of fear of it ghettoising Jewish communities, opinions have shifted quite considerably since then in certain circles.[6] Speaking from an American Modern Orthodox Jewish perspective, Moshe Krakowski argues for a curriculum in American Modern Orthodox schools that can allow Modern Orthodox students to construct 'more integrated religious identities' in the classroom (2017, p. 433). In this vein, Krakowski sees Jewish religious schooling as aiming explicitly at enculturating and socialising students: content knowledge is important in the classroom context, but becoming an identifying member

[6] For an account of the development of early twentieth century Jewish schooling in the United States, and the role of Samson Benderly within that, see Jonathan B. Krasner's (2011) volume *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*.

of Orthodox Jewish society is often the primary goal of such institutions (2008, p. 322). In his study of Ultra-Orthodox religious schools in mind, Krakowski makes a similar point:

> From its earliest stages, the school day – with its minimal secular education and its particular religious pedagogical structure – signals long-term participation in the culture of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, cultural expectations that inform school activities' meaning for students, parents, teachers, and administrators alike. (2017, pp. 439-440)

David Ellenson (2008) draws reference to the *integrationist* model of curricular design in U.S. liberal Jewish day schools, before arguing for a more *interactionist* model built on the premise that there is something to be valued in exploring 'one's own culture and religion as a source for identity and meaning' with surety and confidence.

This point resonates with Alexander's position, who argues for a form of Jewish schooling in the Israeli state that is open to those of other religious identities (2000), but in a way that is explicitly committed to the preservation of past traditions and practices (2012). Alex Pomson and Howard Deitcher (2010) chart the shift in the aims of liberal Jewish day schooling, noting a move from what they term a 'paradigm of instruction' (concerned with helping children acquire knowledge of the ideas and skills that broader society values) to a 'paradigm of enculturation' (concerned more explicitly with initiating children into a Jewish culture and identity to which they may not have been already fully committed). David Mittelberg (2011) likewise endorses a form of 'Jewish peoplehood education' for Jewish schools that emboldens a sense of belonging to a shared Jewish collective. Together, these insights point towards the observation by Tamar Rapoport, Yoni Garb and Anat Penso that religious educational frameworks can often 'act simultaneously as educational institutions and as religious socialising agencies' (1995, p. 48), a tendency that has also gained prominence in the literature around Christian education and schooling.

For Gabriel Moran, Christian schooling is at least partly invested in fostering an understanding of the 'religious life of the human race', while also 'bringing people within the influence of that life' (1994, p. 105). Central to Moran's thinking as a Catholic educator is a twofold trajectory for Christian schooling: on the one hand, Moran sees Christian education as an activity implicated in 'teaching people religion with all the breadth and depth of intellectual excitement one is capable of', while on the other hand he also sees this as an activity concerned with teaching people to identify as religious in a particular way (1997, p. 156). Orthodox Christian scholar Sophie Koulomzin makes a similar point when she claims that Christian education necessitates 'nurturing the growing human soul in its relationship to God and to fellow human beings' (1975, p. 129), something that is reaffirmed in terms of schooling when Patricia Kieran observes how education in religious schools 'is by definition confessional and it attempts to lead children to maturity of faith' (2003, p. 128). John Sullivan's conception of Christian schooling as that which is 'connected to an integral way of life and the set of practices that sustains this way of life' (2007, p. 129) is resonant in this regard.

Read in these terms, the Christian school becomes what John Westerhoff and Gwen Kennedy Neville (similarly to the views on Christian education held by Berard Marthaler, 1976, Carl Ellis Nelson, 1986, and Finola Cunnane, 2005) might refer to as a site of religious socialisation, which they understand to be 'a process consisting of lifelong formal and informal mechanisms through which persons sustain and transmit their faith (world view, value system) and lifestyle' (1974, p. 41). This process of initiation and socialisation excludes, by implication, other ways of being, behaving, and believing (in short, identifying) in the world that go against the concrete

set of activities, commitments and assumptions in which the faith community is grounded and develops (Harris & Moran, 1998, p. 30).

Justifications for Muslim schooling also tend to fall into this identitarian logic, though unlike the literature around Christian schooling detailed above, it often does so through a responsiveness to issues of racism and Islamophobia experienced by members of minority Muslim communities. Research by Mike Elsea and Kafeela Mukhtar (2000) indicates that Indian and Pakistani Muslim children frequently encounter anti-Muslim prejudice, a trend reiterated in teachers vocalising and/or acting upon stereotypical assumptions about South Asian Muslim students (Basit, 1997, Abbas, 2000). This is further propounded by research that sheds light upon Muslim girls feeling that less is expected of them in school because of their religious identities (Archer, 2002). The desire to protect their children from such difficulties has thus become a key motivation in the decision of some Muslim community leaders to establish schools, and by some Muslim parents to send their children to them (Weller, et al., 2001, Tinker, 2006, 2009). Connected to this is the minority status of the Muslim faith in many jurisdictions across the world, which has acted as an impetus for creating and utilising Muslim schools as a means for sustaining the Muslim community's survival (Haw, 1994, Modood et al., 1997). There are a number of ways in which one could appraise such an impulse. On the one hand, seeking to utilise the Muslim school as an instrument for maintaining the survival of the Muslim community's identity could be read as valuable in terms of creating the conditions needed for a more harmonious and diverse society. Like Short's (2002) earlier point on the identity work of religious schools as an acting condition for social cohesion, Hewer (2001) writes of how Muslim schools are often seen as being of benefit to wider society as it is only by feeling that one's Muslim identity is not under threat that one may begin to establish

relationships with those outside one's immediate circle. On the other hand, such motivations, as Marie Parker-Jenkins (2005) makes clear, can also be read as exacerbating, rather than alleviating, hostilities between minority and majority groups. I draw attention to this trend within the literature on religious schooling as I see the impulse to preserve religious identity as speaking directly to the propositional accounts of religion often underpinning analyses that sustain the opposition between religion and queerness in schooling contexts.

The propositional frame and the religious/queer divide in religious schools

Recent developments in the United Kingdom point towards the ongoing characterisation of religious schools as antithetical to the equal treatment of queer students and staff. Yvette Taylor and Karen Cuthbert (2018) critically ally this view with the latest focus on 'British values' as a central prerogative of schools in the United Kingdom. This emphasis has, on the surface, exposed the tensions that exist between the supposedly 'conservative' commitments of religious schools and the supposedly 'liberal' or 'progressive' commitments of the State (2018, p. 3). Indeed, the drive to inculcate British values in state-funded schools has contributed to a landscape, they argue, in which the promotion of equality on the basis of sexual and/or gender identity is seen as an intrinsic concern for the school as an institution.[7] As Robert Vanderbeck and Paul Johnson observe, the present-day investment in British values 'has resulted

[7] These developments have also been partly informed by a scholarly context where the relationship between the reproduction of heteronormativity and schooling has been well-documented for some time. See, for instance, the works of O'Carroll and Szalacha (2000), Lynch (2001), Lodge and Lynch (2004), Atkinson and De Palma (2009), De Palma and Atkinson (2009; 2010), De Palma and Jennett (2010), Francis and Msibi (2011) Larsson et al. (2011), Rivers (2011), Msibi (2012), and Ryan (2016). How the reproduction of heteronormativity plays out in sex education has also been a particularly dominant feature of the literature in recent years. See, for example, Epstein et al. (2004), Youdell (2004), De Palma and Atkinson (2006), and Ferfolja (2007).

in the inscription of a clear linkage in the framework for school inspection between the promotion of sexual orientation equality' and the work of the school (2016, p. 301). The effects this has had on how religious schools are understood is important here, not least in terms of the characterisation of religious schools as potentially anomalous to the supposed progressiveness of British identity. Louise Casey's evidence in January 2017 to the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee goes some way in illustrating this way of thinking: '… it is not okay for Catholic schools to be homophobic and anti-gay marriage … it is not how we bring children up in this country' (cited in Taylor and Cuthbert, 2018, p. 3). In a similar vein to Mary Lou Rasmussen (2010; 2012; 2016), Taylor and Cuthbert argue that this trend of understanding religious schools as 'problem sites' at odds with the State commitment to equality reveals a discourse that pairs religion with hetero- and cisnormativity, and 'the secular' with progressiveness and queer acceptance.

This framing of religious schools and queer identities as antagonistically related has come to inform the content of much research at the interface between schooling, queerness, and religion. In 2005, for instance, André P. Grace and Kristopher Wells wrote a paper in response to the decision by the principal of Monsignor John Pereyma Catholic Secondary School in Oshawa, Ontario to disallow seventeen-year-old student Marc Hall from attending the school prom with his boyfriend, Jean-Paul Dumond. The principal's reasoning behind this decision is captured in Hall's assessment of the situation in his interview with Grace and Wells: 'He said that he talked to our pastor about it as well as the school board. Basically, Mr. Powers said that I couldn't bring JP [Jean-Paul] to the prom because it was against school policy and the Catholic teachings' (2005, p. 244). Here, the assumption that the religious school exists as a problem site for queer identifying students is particularly

relevant. Indeed, Grace and Wells argue that hostility to queer identifying staff and students is intrinsically a part of what a Catholic school is:

> Catholic schooling is marked by perpetual power plays inextricably linked to cultural technologies like heterosexism and tradition and by codes of obedience demanding acculturation to Catholicised ways of being, acting and expressing oneself in the world. (2005, p. 260)

This is resonant with Tonya Callaghan's assertion that the creation of 'safe spaces' for queer students is 'difficult to achieve' in such settings owing to the 'panoptic power of Catholic doctrine', a power that 'forms the basis of curricular and policy decisions taken in [Catholic] schools' (2016, pp. 271-272). The implications of all these insights culminate for Grace and Wells in their assertion that institutional churches 'have no business in the classrooms of the nation' (2005, p. 265). This claim subtends its argument around Rasmussen's (2016) understanding of contemporary discourse in religion, schooling and sexuality as leveraging around the assignation of religion to the sphere of intolerance, and the secular state to the sphere of liberalism and progress.

The Canadian context is not alone in tapping into the experiences of students identifying as queer in religious schools in this way.[8] Indeed, Betina L. Love and Brandelyn Tosolt (2013) offer a relevant study into the experiences of such students in all-girls' Catholic high schools in the United States. Unpacking the antagonism between religious and queer identities in such contexts, Love and Tosolt make the case

[8] For accounts of the relationship between religious schooling and queer teacher experiences, see the works of Ferfolja (2005), Neary (2013; 2017), and Fahie (2016; 2017). For an account of questions relating to queer teachers in schooling more generally, see, for instance, the works of Griffin (1991; 992), Khayatt (1992), Woods and Harbeck (1992), Nias (1996), Epstein and Johnson (1996), Rofes (2000), Kehily (2002), Gowran (2004), Jackson (2007), Ferfolja (2008; 2009), Gray (2013), and Connell (2015). The recently published collection *Queer Teaching – Teaching Queer*, edited by Declan Fahie, Aideen Quilty, and Renée De Palma Ungaro (2019) is also a helpful resource in this regard. Silin (1999), Russell (2010), and Connell (2015) provide a positive appraisal of queer teacher's 'coming out' in school for combatting heteronormativity and its reproduction, while Khayatt (1999), Rasmussen (2004; 2010), Browne (2011), and Mayo (2014) focus on the limits of this in terms of narrowing the possibilities of queer teacher subjecthood. For a helpful overview of the relationship of these questions to teacher education, see the works of Britzman and Gilbert (2004) and Szalacha (2004).

that there exists 'an overwhelming and stifling climate of heteronormativity in all-girls' Catholic schools' (2013, p. 202). What they draw attention to is, in this vein, similar to what Irish academics Gerry McNamara and James O'Higgins-Norman explore when they question the possibility of Catholic schools being anything other than sites of inequality for queer students: '… schooling in the Republic of Ireland remains for the most part denominational and, more specifically, Catholic. This raises questions about the possibility of equality for all students in a school that has a default faith tradition which holds particular views on specific issues such as sexual orientation' (2010, p. 536).[9] This is repeated by Susan Bailey (2017), who doubts whether anti-homophobic and –transphobic bullying policies can ever be enacted in Catholic school contexts in Ireland owing to what she sees to be their inevitable investment in the 'moral socialisation' of children in Catholic ways.[10] She writes of how tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying in Catholic schools 'will *inevitably* be hindered by the largely denominational nature of Ireland's education system and, therefore, policies which do not adhere to the Catholic ethos will, quite

[9] As is apparent, the sources I have engaged with up to this point mainly focus on the antagonism between religious schooling and queer identities as they relate to Catholicism, a dominant denomination within Christianity often characterised as hetero- and cisnormative, at least institutionally. This focus is due to the lack of scholarly material available directly addressing queer questions and experiences in other forms of religious schools, such as Jewish or Muslim institutions. Given the fact, however, that mainstream Judaism and Islam also express dogmatic ambiguity with, and even opposition to, non-heterosexual forms of sexual and/or gender identity and their expressions, I think it is reasonable to suppose that the general discourse that dichotomises religion and queerness would be applicable to these schools also. Indeed, the fact that a recent Ofsted report on a failed Jewish school cited the lack of treatment of sexuality and gender in its curriculum as reasons for failure suggests this, especially as this lack of treatment was deemed worthy of failure owing to its incommensurability with 'fundamental British values' (see Taylor and Cuthbert, 2018, p. 3). Relatedly, the recent reaction of Muslim parents in Birmingham against the teaching of queer positive programmes in their children's schools further draws attention to the extent to which the religious/queer divide persists in certain Muslim discourses around schooling. Sima Kotecha's (2019) news report on the story for the British Broadcasting Corporation is worth reading in this regard.

[10] The literature at the interface between homophobic bullying and Irish schooling includes scholars like O'Higgins-Norman et al. (2006), Minton et al. (2008), O'Higgins-Norman (2009), and Minton (2013). Taylor and Peter (2011) also provide insights on this theme from a Canadian perspective.

possibly, be appropriated by Catholicism and neutralized within its parameters' (2017, p. 33, emphasis added).[11]

There are two important (and connected) features of these insights worth considering. First, notice how the antagonistic representation of religion and queerness depends on the assumption that the religious school exists to sustain a homogenous conception of religious identity: in this way, affinities exist between these arguments and the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives on religious schooling surveyed in the previous section. Consider Bailey's alignment of Catholic schooling with Catholic socialisation, or of Grace and Wells' claim that the Catholic school is necessarily invested in 'codes of obedience' that demand specifically 'Catholicised' responses on the part of staff and students: those who conceptualise the religious school as a problem site for queer staff and students often leave uninterrupted the idea that the religious school equates with the preservation of a very particular (and homogenous) understanding of religious identity. Indeed, Taylor and Cuthbert articulate a strong aversion to this approach. Drawing on Heather Shipley's (2014) work, they criticise attempts to position religious schools as inevitably problematic for queer people when compared to, say, non-religious schools on the grounds that such a move lets the secular 'off the hook' by leaving the heteronormativity that crosses varying religious and cultural identities uninterrupted. They develop this view when they write:

> Positioning faith schools as 'problem sites' with regards to LGBT equality enacts harms of its own: it makes invisible queer youth who are also religious,

[11] For an important critique of what is seen to be an inordinate focus on an individualised understanding of bullying, vulnerability, and 'at-risk' suicidality in how queer experiences are studied in educational and mental health research, see the works of Richardson (2004), Youdell (2004), Rasmussen (2006), Monk (2011), Walton (2011), Cover (2012), Airton (2013), Payne and Smith (2013), Allen et al. (2014), Formby (2015), Loutzenheiser (2015), Bryan (2017), and Bryan and Mayock (2017). Taylor and Snowdon (2014) also mount a critique of how queer and religious youth are often presented in 'at-risk' terms.

> overlooks the fact that religion can be a source of support against bullying and ultimately reifies the mutual exclusion of religion and sexuality. (Taylor & Cuthbert, 2018, p. 12)

The disruption of the religious/queer divide therefore relies on a more ambiguous account of religious schooling, one that transcends reliance on neat and generalised identitarian categories (be they religious, queer, and/or both).

Callaghan's focus on 'doctrine' and Grace and Well's attention to 'codes of obedience' in understanding Catholic school life brings me to the second significant assumption underpinning those narratives that sustain the opposition between religion and queerness: namely, that religious identities and experiences are reducible to a propositional account of religion, that is, to a set of truth claims, beliefs or doctrines about the world and/or God. While I think it is important to recognise the significance that propositions have in how we understand religion, I question those assumptions that present religion *exclusively* in such terms. Indeed, as Lewin writes:

> … for many religious practitioners, beliefs will be unreflectively adopted or simply part of a background context, and therefore less important than is often assumed … Many religious practices, in India and China for example … may have ethical, experiential and material significance for the practitioners; but ask the practitioner about why they perform the rituals they do, and the answer might be suffused with symbolism, or more likely just unclear or irrelevant. (2017, p. 41)

This is not to suggest that a sharp boundary exists between religion and propositional belief: Lewin simply seeks to stress that religion cannot be reduced to propositions, and that the pluralities of religious experience encompass so much more than these. As philosopher of religion Mara Keller observes, the equation of religion with a set of doctrines about the world is 'extremely limiting if one is trying to make sense of religiousness in the contemporary world' (2002, p. 7). Indeed, feminist critics such as Grace Jantzen (1998) and Luce Irigaray (2004) have suggested that the preoccupation with beliefs and truth conditions might only reflect a masculine framing of religion

that performatively denies materiality, affect, and the body in how religious experiences are interpreted and navigated. It is in light of all this that Lewin argues for the necessity of broadening our understanding of religion in order to overcome the focus on belief that has dominated debates in education over the past number of years. He writes:

> Expanding our concept of religion to include elements beyond doctrine and proposition will, I think, open new paths of inquiry within the religion and education debate … Those acquainted with religious traditions will be familiar with something of [their] hermeneutical depth, which does provoke the question of why more nuanced conceptions of religion have been largely absent from debates within educational philosophy. (2017, p. 54)[12]

It is in these terms that I see identitarian accounts of religious schooling and propositional framings of religion as intimately connected and co-dependent: in both cases, religion is divested of its internal diversities and paradoxes, homogenised (and reduced) to an institutional code of conduct incapable of transformation or change. I argue against such a framing of religion in understanding religious schooling as it is as a partial consequence of such monolithic representations of religion that the neat dichotomy between religion and queerness sustains itself to begin with. Indeed, much of the concerns of Bailey and McNamara and O'Higgins-Norman arise precisely from the unquestioned assumption that the Catholic school will seek to preserve homophobic practices due to the homophobic nature of Catholic doctrine. In order to productively respond to the dualism often set up between religion and queerness, then, what is needed is a reconstruction of religious schooling that moves away from the idea that the religious school exists to preserve a narrow and homogenous conception

[12] For an important critique of the valorisation of 'worldviews' in UK developments in religious education, see the recent contribution by Patricia Hannam and Gert Biesta (2019). They argue for a more 'existential' take on religion on the grounds that conceiving religion existentially (rather than simply in terms of worldviews or practices) broadens the possibilities of what religious education can transformatively teach students.

of religious identity and experience reducible to a set of hetero- and cisnormative propositions about human behaviour. It is in this regard that I turn to a material account of religion, one that resists a monological characterisation of religious identity and experience in solely propositional terms.

Ambiguous reorientations: Materialising religion for the religious school

> Is it fruitful to understand the intense devotion involved in the cult of the saints or Mary among Catholics, with its elaborate home altars, replete with icons brought from the homeland, and its pilgrimages to sacred sites, as nothing more than the enactment of a cultural text? (Vásquez, 2011, p. 2)

Reorienting religion to encompass the material as well as the propositional is an endeavour worthy of several monographs in itself, so it is not my intention in this thesis to offer an extended and comprehensive treatment of what materialising religion might entail. For the purposes of introduction, however, turning to Karen Barad's work is a helpful starting point. She reflects on the nature of theoretical scholarship, and argues that to 'theorise is not to leave the material world behind and enter the domain of pure ideas where the lofty space of the mind makes objective reflection possible. Theorising … is a material practice' (Barad, 2007, p. 55). Reflecting on religion and religious experience in material terms emerges from a sensitivity to Barad's point: that thinking about the world and our place within it is an activity imbricated in the messiness of the world that we share, in the things, bodies, and emotions that are sensed and encountered in our entangled lives with (human and non-human) others. Indeed, as S. Brent Plate observes 'religious traditions … originate and survive through bodily engagement with the material elements of the world' (2015, p. 3). Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie make a similar case when they argue that the terms 'religion' and 'materiality' can be largely understood through a network of

other interrelated concepts, such as ‘body’, ‘sensation’, ‘thing’, and ‘touch’ (2017, p. 4). They echo, in this regard, David Morgan’s alignment of material religion with ‘ritual, daily practice, imagery, objects, spaces, and bodies’ (2010, p. xiii), as well as ‘sensations, things’ and ‘performance’ (2010, p. 8). In this vein, Elizabeth Arweck and William Keenan argue that ‘the idea of religion itself is largely unintelligible outside its incarnation in material expressions’ (2006, pp. 2-3), a claim taken up by Matthew Engelke to its fullest when he writes of how ‘all religion is material religion’ (2012, p. 209).

The significance of a material take on religion has been articulated in the literature largely in terms of what it *responds* to and, more particularly, *resists*. Indeed, as Hutchings and McKenzie note, discussions ‘of material religion have tended to … [clarify] the focus of “materiality” by framing it in opposition to something else’ (2017, p. 6). This speaks to Dick Houtman’s and Birgit Meyer’s point that ‘matter and materiality are – and only make sense as – relational terms that thrive on contrast’ (2012, p. 5). Specifically, what the ‘materialist turn’ in religion resists, or contrasts against, is the dominance of the propositional in accounts of religion and religious experience. As Jeremy Stolow (2013) argues, the study of material religion has served as a powerful vehicle for exploring a range of ways that ‘religion’ extends beyond the seemingly abstract world of symbols and propositional claims about knowledge and belief. In this way, a material perspective on religion attends to the historicity of religion, insisting that the ‘temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine’ need to be recovered and discussed, and their implications for religion and society thought through and sustained (Lincoln, 1996, p. 225).

It is in reflecting on the implications of materialising religion that returning to the purpose and priorities of this thesis becomes necessary. What are the benefits of reorienting religion materially in a dissertation such as this? How is a material take on religion valuable for queering the religious school beyond the religious/queer divide? To my mind, an attention to materiality allows for us to focus on the *creative* or *generative* dimensions of religion, on the fact that it is through the 'constant movement, contestation, and hybridity' (Vásquez, 2011, p. 1) of material life that possibilities for different kinds of relationship with religion and society open up, relationships with the potential to transcend, without ignoring, institutional orthodoxies and doctrines.

Think, for instance, of the work of queer Christian theologian Robert E. Goss (2002), who likens bareback anal sex between men to a form of Eucharistic communion with God: it is *through* the sexual intimacies of bodies in contact that Goss builds up a theology in which homosexual acts are not only accepted, but openly celebrated as a form of divine-human experience. Think also of Yvette Taylor, Emily Falconer, and Ria Snowdon's (2014) study of music in a queer Christian congregation, where the embodied and affective dimensions of music practices elicited complex attitudes to sounds and styles of religious music beyond 'traditional' and 'progressive' distinctions. Here, the irreducibility of materiality, the potentiality that inheres within the 'givenness' of experience in all its messiness and malleability, points to the fact that there 'will always be a surplus to religion … that even our most coherent and astute epistemologies will not capture' (Vásquez, 2011, p. 6). Because of this, religion becomes, as Manuel Vásquez observes, something that is 'lived by human beings, not by angels', and in this way can both respond to, and embrace, new and ever-shifting questions, concerns, heterodoxies, and experiences (2011, p. 5). On this meaning,

attempts to limit religion to a set of hetero- and cisnormative codes of human behaviour fall short, for such efforts succeed only denying the intrinsic vitalities of religion, vitalities with the potential to reframe religion beyond the identitarian constraints of the religion/queer divide.

This is not to suggest, of course, that a propositional account of religion is totally abandoned in an emphasis on the material. Indeed, beliefs and doctrines play a crucial role in material religion, for 'beliefs are learned, experienced and adapted *through* embodied engagement in rituals, relationships and practices' (Hutchings & McKenzie, 2017, p. 6). By turning to the material, I do not seek to deny the significance of propositions in religious life, but rather aim at sustaining those emphases that let those beliefs and doctrines be confirmed and taken up, reimagined and/or rejected in the face of the specificities of experience. Queering the religious school, then, involves taking the diversities of religion seriously (acknowledging the fact that religion, in its materiality, is far more than a set of hetero- and cisnormative dictates) and allowing this to inform how religion is both understood and engaged with by staff and students in the school and classroom. In this way, the limits of identitarian thinking are overcome, for religion, in its materiality, becomes something that surpasses extant religious structures and their attendant orthodoxies.

As necessary as this kind of intervention might be, it would be disingenuous to suggest that perspectives on religious schooling across Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts have been completely silent on questions of religious diversities and their relationships to schooling and identity. Indeed, many of these voices have articulated a considered appreciation for the internal diversities of religious identities and experiences, and have made efforts to bring this thinking to bear in conceptualising inclusion and religious school life. In what follows, I offer an

overview of these perspectives, before suggesting that the need nonetheless remains for a more ambiguous theory of religious schooling that goes beyond tying the school to the production of religious identities. This view is grounded in the fact that, even while these accounts recognise the heterogeneity of religion, these diversities continue to be framed largely in propositional and identitarian terms.

II. Religious diversities and the religious school

Diversifying religious identities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schooling

Unlike some of the more preservationist accounts of Jewish schooling detailed earlier, Walter I. Ackerman's perspectives on the emergent years of Jewish education in the United States is indicative of an attention to the internal diversities of religious identities and experiences, especially when he writes: 'Jewish education in the United States is rooted in the continued attempts of previous generations of Jews to develop forms of Jewish schooling compatible with *changing* conceptions of Judaism, *new styles* of Jewish life, and the demands of living in America' (1969, p. 1, emphases added). Gabriel Horezczyk and Hagit Hacohen Wolf (2011, pp. 183-202) also examine the basic assumption that Jewish education is widely perceived as one of the major means for strengthening a uniform view of Jewish identity. They argue alternatively for a multifarious approach to the mapping of Jewish identities in schooling, one receptive to the dissonances and varieties that can emerge within and between religious communities. Stuart Charmé and Tali Zelkowics (2011, pp. 163-182) also approach Jewish identity formation in schooling contexts from multifaceted and multiple process formulations, making the case for a shift in thinking around Jewish identities from fixed and uniform to fluid and multiple.

This perspective on Jewish schooling is reiterated by Hanan Alexander in the Israeli context, particularly in his assertion that 'Israeli schooling requires a vision of goodness broad enough to encompass competing conceptions of Jewish life espoused by the majority as well as non-Jewish orientations affirmed by various minorities' (2000, p. 491). Here, Alexander expresses a view of Jewish schooling that resists what he refers to as the 'parochial politics' of more conservative manifestations of Judaism, a resistance built upon the conviction that 'every point of view is limited and every framework fallible' (2000, p. 504). This philosophy for Jewish schooling reaches its arguably most radical heights in Jonathan Woocher's (2012) work, where he calls for an openness to a form of Jewish education and schooling that is 'free from the constraints of time and place', and is characterised by qualities of a 'pluralistic', 'transdenominational' and even 'postdenominational' kind. These insights together point towards ways in which the literature around Jewish schooling has responded to questions of diversity, concerns also taken up by scholars interested in diversity, Christian identity, and their relationship to schooling.

Sean Whittle, for instance, has written at length on the purpose of Catholic education in Catholic schools as imbricated in questions of mystery: using Karl Rahner as a theological guide, he writes of how the purpose of Catholic schooling does not equate with deference to the institutional Church, but is instead invested in the offering of an educational experience that brings students to the 'threshold' (2016, p. 157) of that which is mysterious, unknown and unfamiliar. This is important for Whittle as it is in the face of such mystery that uniform conceptions of identity in Catholic schools collapse and multiply. In a similar vein, an attentiveness to diversity is revealed in Robert Davis's assessment of the Catholic school, an attentiveness characterised by 'a concern for justice which opens the curriculum to the voices of the marginalised and

oppressed wherever they are to be found' (1999, p. 229). This concern, for Davis, is an intrinsic dimension to the Catholic school's work, work which is 'liberal and dialogic in the fullest senses' by virtue of its engagement with the Gospel as a source of inspiration and focus (1999, p. 229). Yes, the Catholic school is informed by the specificity of its own traditions and experiences for Davis, but these traditions and experiences take on a character that is resistant to absolutist conceptions of Catholic doctrine and identity: for Davis, the Catholic school is necessarily open to the possibilities for reinvention that encountering difference brings.

Graham McDonough also offers a theory of the Catholic school that refutes the assertion that religious schooling invariably leads to segregated and inward-looking institutions incapable of cohering with other religious or cultural groups. McDonough describes the Catholic school as a diverse ecclesial space where dissent from religious and institutional dogma is an intrinsic possibility of school life. He responds to the charge that encouraging a pedagogical model of dissent would corrupt the identity of the Catholic school by arguing that this view reifies 'Catholic identity as a narrowly unproblematised' construction that, in its narrowness, 'supresses the needs of those who participate in [Catholicism] in order to emphasise an image of Catholicism's unsullied unity and permanence' (McDonough, 2015, pp. 255-256). For McDonough, Catholic schooling is predicated on a view of Catholic intellectual and ecclesial social identity that is comprised of 'the coordinated intersection of multiple Catholic identities', identities contestable enough to allow for an encounter not only with non-Catholics, but with non-Christians too (2016, p. 172). In this regard, Patricia Kieran writes of how Catholic institutions, including schools, 'should not be immune or unresponsive to the religiously different but are called to witness to their faith in Jesus Christ in the vibrant context of religious difference' (2008, p. 15). Indeed, she

argues that the Church 'upholds its mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ' in schooling provision precisely when 'it does so in a manner which recognises human freedom and the rights of all to follow their conscience' (Kieran, 2008, p. 16). This is important for Kieran in framing any understanding of the Catholic school in terms of 'a lively centre of proclamation, apprenticeship and dialogue between people of different social and religious backgrounds' (2008, p. 16).

Kieran's insights on Catholic schooling are also mirrored in Trevor Cooling's (2010) work. Writing from the Anglican tradition, Cooling argues for the importance of 'doing God' in education, i.e. providing opportunities for educational encounters with religion and with the transcendent that eschew what he sees to be spurious appeals to 'objectivity' and 'neutrality'. For Cooling, education is never a neutral endeavour, but is always inflected by the commitments (be they religious or otherwise) that we bring to education by virtue of our identities and histories. He proposes a pragmatic approach to Christian education in this regard, embodied in the following imperatives:

> … faith schools have to work at developing a distinctive faith ethos that makes all pupils and staff feel welcome and full members of the school community. It also means welcoming other points of view as opportunities for learning and enrichment, and developing strategies to ensure these are represented and heard. (Cooling, 2010, p. 65)

Cooling here proposes a vision for Christian schools that is attentive to other religious identities, an attentiveness built on the premise that what is distinctively Christian is a turn towards those who are different to oneself. He appeals to an image of the Christian school as akin to a 'tent of meeting', a nomadic tent in which 'people of different faiths meet together to consider issues of common concern, to share insights from their own scriptures, to explore the differences between them and to look for ways of cooperating together' (Cooling, 2010, p. 66)

Such insights have also found affinities within scholarship on Muslim education and schooling. Channelling Muhammad Faour and Marwan Muashers' (2011) frustrations with a lack of education for democratic citizenship in the Arab and Muslim world, Yusef Waghid and Naraan Davids call for a reimagining of Muslim education, one framed along a 'pluralist imaginary of citizenship' (2014, p. 343). In this vein, they articulate the need for a pedagogy within Muslim schools 'that contests exclusionary and hierarchical social relations' and embraces a diversity of Muslim identities (Waghid & Davids, 2014, p. 343). They refer to this pedagogy as a 'pedagogy of encounter', characterised by an openness 'not only in terms of listening to others, but also in terms of an openness of identity and being, since we are always living and acting inter-subjectively with others and our environment' (Waghid & Davids, 2014, p. 350). Waghid and Davids collaborate again in offering a perspective on the 'imaginative madrassah' that espouses a multicultural vision for education grounded in an attentiveness (*khabr*) 'towards the other – an attentiveness that can counteract the looming dangers of dogmatism, denial of the other, and injustices' (Waghid & Davids, 2014, p. 125), and motivated by a desire to create conditions for 'human coexistence' across varying identitarian differences (2014, p. 126). This perspective is resonant with Zahraa McDonald's (2014) Deobandi-inspired reading of Islamic education within Muslim institutions, which she claims can be conceptualised as spaces in harmony with the development of postsecular forms of citizenship.[13] Through their emphasis on reading, writing, and the discussion of matters of common interest, McDonald sees Muslim schools as nascently demonstrative of a relationship with the public sphere that is deliberative, dialogical, and engaged. Waghid and Paul

[13] Deobandi is a revivalist movement within Sunni Islam, with presence in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the United Kingdom, and South Africa.

Smeyers, driven by a commitment to the view that 'the ownership of goodness is not the reserved property of any single group of persons, whether Muslim or non-Muslim' (2014, p. 551), offer what Waghid (2011) has also elsewhere referred to as a 'maximalist' reading of Islamic education in Muslim schools, whereby socialisation (*tarbiyyah*), learning (*ta'lim*), and goodness (*ta'dib*), are nurtured in a cosmopolitan environment of acceptance and hospitality to those of varying religious and social identities.

Studies at the interface between schooling, religion, and queerness demonstrate a similar commitment to resisting homogenous conceptions of religious schooling, for instance in terms of the preservation of hetero- and cisnormative doctrines and their attendant identitarian limits. In what follows, I survey some of these arguments, before reflecting on the degree to which the alignment of the religious school with identitarian and propositional conceptions of religion nonetheless persists within these accounts.

Embracing ambiguity, disrupting the religious/queer divide

Michael Merry (2005) offers a view of Muslim schooling capable of a liberal engagement with issues around homosexuality. He sets up his argument as a challenge to the work on homosexuality and Islamic education by J.M. Halstead and Katarzyna Lewicka (1998), which Merry believes is limited in its reliance on a logic that assumes the inevitable opposition between 'Islam, *as a religion*, against homosexuality' (2005, p. 23). For Merry, this logic sanctions an 'extremely static view' of Muslim identity that fails to acknowledge 'highly differentiated manifestations of Islam throughout the world'. Merry is resistant to views that 'foist a monolithic reading of homosexuality

onto Islam' (2005, p. 25) as such a tendency is both inaccurate and inimical to the possibility of liberal dialogue in Muslim schools. Merry's view of Muslim schooling, then, is one that has echoes with Stephen Macedo's point that what is crucial from a liberal standpoint 'is that no one educational authority should totally dominate; that children acquire a measure of distance on all claims to truth in order to think critically' (2000, p. 238). In this way, Merry proposes a vision of Muslim schooling grounded in a 'critical distance' capable of bringing the fluid religious identities of Muslim schooling in harmony with an encounter with those of gays and lesbians.

In a similar manner to Merry, Clarence Joldersma argues that Christian identities are far less uniform than is often suggested, and that it is possible to utilise resources from the Christian tradition to make the case for Christian schools adopting 'a welcoming embrace of LGBT students' (2016, p. 33), an embrace that moves away from a language of 'them' to a language of 'us' (2016, p. 44). Drawing on Nicholas Wolterstorff's (2004) reading of the Hebrew Bible (in particular the image of God as a redeemer for the oppressed and marginalised) Joldersma argues that a Christian school is characteristically Christian when it creates safe and secure spaces for queer students, spaces where students' sexual and spiritual journeys can develop in 'intertwined and fluid' ways (2016, p. 43). Reiterating his 2014 paper on the emergence of Gay-Straight Alliances in Canadian Catholic schools, Graham McDonough (in a similar move to Joldersma) also claims that there is scope within the resources of the Christian tradition to justify Catholic schools taking affirmative stances where queer staff and students are concerned. Drawing on the 'People of God' ecclesiology characteristic of the papal exhortations of the Second Vatican Council, McDonough envisions the Catholic school as a 'public ecclesial space' diverse enough

to grant queer identities constitutive weight in understanding the identity of the Catholic school (2016, p. 174).

While valuable in terms of disrupting the immediate association of the religious school with, say, deference to hetero- and cisnormative theologies and dogmas, the writers nonetheless share certain affinities with those detailed previously, especially in their tendency to position the religious school within wholly identitarian and propositional frames. The identitarian thinking underpinning their arguments comes to the fore in the unchallenged assumption that the religious school is somehow invested in the production of religious identities, however diversely affirmative of queerness those identities might be. Indeed, Merry, Joldersma, and McDonough echo the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives on diversity above in their shared assumption that the religious school is somehow connected to developing the religious identities of students, and that it simply needs to do so in a way that is receptive to the spaciousness that already exists within certain understandings of religious identity. This is not to suggest, of course, that the *incidental* preservation of religious identity through schooling is problematic for society in and of itself (indeed, in certain contexts it might happen). I simply question the alignment of the religious school's purpose with the *intentional* preservation of religious identity (however diversely conceived) for such an impulse, to my mind, risks losing sight of what is distinctively *educational* about the school, while also setting certain identitarian limits upon the school's work.[14] In expanding on this last point, let us imagine the religious school were to orient its activities towards the production of queer-positive forms of religious identities. While

[14] In its resistance to religious identity formation, the view of religious schooling offered here, and throughout this thesis, is clearly at odds with what many believe to be the *raison d'être* of the religious school. A fuller treatment of the relationship between education and identity will be offered in the following chapter.

the religious/queer divide would be ostensibly overcome in understanding the religious school in these terms, what would happen to the opposition set up between religious and atheist identities, or to the oft-cited divide between more traditional and progressive religious identities? By aligning the work of religious schools to preserving and forming certain (queer-positive) identities, do we not invariably perpetuate those identitarian logics that inform the religious/queer divide to begin with? In disrupting the dichotomy between religion and queerness, then, would it not be more helpful, in short, to disentangle religious schooling from identity altogether?

In thinking about how we might go about this task, drawing attention to the propositional framing of religion underpinning more diverse conceptions of religious identities and schooling is helpful. Like those who pit religious and queer identities against one another in the context of religious schooling, much of the literature conceptualising religious schooling in queer-positive ways relies on a view of religion that is largely dependent on the propositional. Think of Merry, for instance, who grounds his multifaceted view of Muslim identities in terms of the possibility of reading Muslim claims to truth in more contestable ways, or of Joldersma, who roots his queer-positive view of Christian schooling in a biblical account of God as redemptive and loving. An appeal to religious propositions about the world and religious experience is a strategy also taken up by McDonough, whose argument for an understanding of the Catholic school as a 'diverse ecclesial space' open to queer identities largely rests on a more liberal interpretation of claims made in papal exhortations. While recognising the myriad ways in which propositional claims can be interpreted is necessary for appreciating a more expansive account of religious identity and experience and how that frames religious schooling, I call into question the tendency to diversify religion *solely* in these terms, particularly as the inherent

pluralism of religion cannot be captured entirely through what religious people debate about or believe in.

Indeed, if we are to resist the opposition often set up between religion and queerness, a turn to alternative ways of understanding religion and religious experience (say, in terms of materiality) would appear warranted, particularly as the propositional framing of religion is so often tied up with more unyielding and dualistic conceptions of religious identities along propositional lines. At the risk of repeating myself, though, this is not to suggest that I seek to abandon the propositional framing of religion altogether. After all, what religious people believe to be true has an essential role to play in thinking about queer-positive traditions, theologies and their relationship to schooling. Rather, I focus on alternative ways of understanding religion and religious experience to move religious schooling towards more complex kinds of engagement with questions of diversity and queerness, complexities more in keeping with what the religious/queer divide invariably denies. In this way, 'queering' religious schooling entails a focus on the unwieldiness of religious experience that logics of identity (and their often attendant connection to hetero- and cisnormative doctrines) alone cannot communicate.

In summary then, in this chapter, I offered an overview of studies engaging with questions of religious schooling, diversity, and queerness. I argued that conceptions of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schooling are largely reliant on identitarian understandings of the religious school, where the religious school is likened to the preservation of fixed notions of religious identity. I traced resonances between this focus on identity, and studies of the relationship between religious schooling and queer identities. I forwarded the view that both bodies of work are united in the uninterrupted alignment of the religious school with the production of

religious identity, and that it is through the manifestation of this alignment in terms of religious propositions or truth claims that the divide between religion and queerness sustains itself. From here, I surveyed the work of those who resist the monolithic framing of religious identity as it relates to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schooling. I suggested that it (as well the work synthesising religious and queer identities more generally) is valuable in shedding light on the complexities and diversities of religion, even while the association of religious schooling with identity and propositions remains largely intact within these accounts. In resisting the religious/queer divide, I concluded by gesturing to the need for a more complex account of religious schooling, one sensitive (not only to propositions) but also to the place of materiality in religion and religious experience, in ways that go (in a *disidentificatory* style) beyond the limits of identitarian thinking. In proceeding with this, though, an important question that arises is the educational reasoning behind such a thesis: how am I understanding education in this work, and what is the relationship of this to questions of the school, and of identity and queerness in religious schooling? Yes, religions and religious experiences are far more ambiguous than many of the above accounts of religious schooling might suggest, but what is it about education that calls for such a sensitivity to begin with? It is this question that animates the chapter to come.

CHAPTER TWO

Queer disidentifications:
The weakness of education and religious schooling

> In a time when education and upbringing are of high priority to governments and international organisations in Europe we, that is, teachers, parents, politicians and educational researchers alike, have become used to talking about children and their education in mainly instrumental ways, that is, as the solution to the many economic, cultural and political problems that many liberal democracies are facing today. (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2018a, p. 310)

Education, and schooling in particular, has increasingly become vested with the charge of instrumentally responding to the needs and expectations of society. As Lovisa Bergdahl and Elisabet Langmann observe, this often includes a demand for responding to the economic, cultural, and political issues and needs facing contemporary democracies. In addition to these factors, though, the previous chapter also draws attention to how *religious* demands, specifically demands related to religious diversity and the survival of religious communities and identities, have entered the remit of schools, particularly that of religious schools. Indeed, as chapter one attests, the preservation and/or diversification of religious identities has become a taken-for-granted feature of religious schooling: for many, imagining the religious school without recourse to religious identity would seem odd at best.

In this chapter, though, I question the degree to which allying the religious school with the instrumental production of religious identities is helpful, specifically in terms of overcoming the religious/queer divide. In substantiating this claim, I ground my analysis in what I mean when I speak of education. Drawing on Gert Biesta's (2013a) work, I suggest that education is to be understood less in terms of the 'strong' or 'secure' production of fixed notions of religious identity, and more in terms

of a fundamental 'weakness' characterised by an embrace of the transformative and unpredictable. I make the case for a 'weak' view of education on the grounds that it is through dialogue that we enter into modes of relationship with others that are different to what existing social structures, discourses, and identities might currently permit or predict. From here, I suggest that schooling, if it is to be understood in tandem with a concern for such a view of education, can be read as an enactment of queer politics, through which students, in relationship with others, are exposed to ideas, people, texts, and experiences that allow them to *disidentify* from the current order of things. Taking this aim for disidentification seriously, the chapter then questions the degree to which the school's work can ever be entirely separated from the expectations (including religious expectations) of society, concluding that such expectations (and their related identitarian investments) can be invited into the classroom insofar as this done in a way that is open to unpredictable forms of interruption and transformation. Before expanding on what this might look like or entail for the religious school, it is necessary to survey its attendant conception of education as 'weak', so it is to this that I first focus my efforts.

I. The weakness of education: An enactment of queer politics

The title of this subsection aligns 'queerness' with education: it assumes an association between 'education', and activities and practices that can be described as 'queer'. In what follows, I elaborate on what I mean when I speak of education as an enactment of queer politics, and reflect on the significance of this in thinking about the religious school beyond the religious/queer divide.

To my mind, understanding what 'education' means requires a focus, less on abstract conceptual definitions of education in a detached sense, and more on the *nature* of those encounters, practices, and experiences that are often described as 'educational' to begin with. In other words, understanding education starts by paying attention to the *characteristics* or *qualities* of educational moments, lived out in the specificities of experience. It is from this vantage point that Sharon Todd (2014) begins. She argues that education is largely experiential, in the sense of depending upon what it means to experience living with, and relating to, others in our world. Taking this relational quality to human experience seriously, she writes of how it is 'through our encounters with others (human and non-human alike)' that 'we shift the borders' of our self-understanding, and that it is precisely through this transformational dimension of our relationships that education gains its significance (Todd, 2014, p. 232). On this meaning, education happens when the conditions for the possibility of change or transformation are created and sustained, conditions that are experienced in and through a relationship with another person, group of people, text, idea, or practice. But what do these relational and transformational qualities to educational experiences *do* to how we understand the nature of the relationship between, say, education and the production of religious identities? Does education entail a relationship with religious identities predicated on the inevitable preservation of such identities, or does its transformational qualities allow for a less deterministic kind of relationship to emerge? Following Gert Biesta's (2013a) work, I argue below that Todd's relational emphasis calls for a sensitivity to the 'weakness' of education, a characteristic of education that the alignment of the religious school with identity work invariably denies.

Biesta's work on the 'risk' of education is helpful in coming to terms with what he means by education's 'weakness'. Like Todd, he begins by stressing the relational character of education, writing of how 'education is not an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings … students are to be seen not as objects to be moulded and disciplined, but as subjects of action and responsibility' (2013a, p. 1). For Biesta, education's weakness relies on our relationship with the 'freedom and independence' of others (2013a, p.2). This freedom is built on the assumption that 'human beings have their own ways of being and thinking, their own reasons and motivations that may well be very different from ours' (2013a, p. 3). Put differently, education happens when we enter into relationship with those who escape the totalities of our own concerns, priorities, and/or experiences. The 'risk' of education comes to the fore in the impossibility of predicting how exactly one's encounter with difference will affect or transform a person and/or the world: indeed, if education was totally predictable, it would lose its basis in the freedom of others with whom we relate.

It is in these terms that Biesta aligns the work of education with 'overcoming' the 'original egocentrism' of the child, for it is through entering into relationship with those who are different to me that my understanding of the world (and my projections for its future) can be *interrupted*, and in this way, transformed. It is in light of this riskiness that Biesta criticises attempts at reducing education to a measurable set of outcomes to be achieved. He argues that the desire to make education 'strong, secure, predictable, and risk-free' is an attempt on the part of policy-makers to understand education in terms of the sole intentions of the teacher and/or state, thereby denying the fact that education 'always deals with living "material", that is, with human subjects, not with inanimate objects' (2013a, p. 2). The risk of education, in other

words, is expressed in education's 'weakness', in the fact that *dialogue* with others is not something that can be easily contained or predetermined, but is instead something that is necessarily unwieldy if it is to honour the freedom of others to begin with.[15] Indeed, Biesta suggests that education 'only works through weak connections of communication and interpretation, of interruption and response' (2013a, p. 4). Education is interested less in sustaining the surety 'of what we already know and of what already exists', and more in creating the conditions through which we can engage with, and thus come into, a world that challenges the centrality of our own place within it (2013a, p. 4).[16] Putting education's weakness into consideration, then, what are we to make of the alignment of the religious school with the production of religious identities? Is education's weakness eroded when the school is intentionally allied to identity and its formation? Developing Biesta's perspectives on education's weakness to account for questions of identity would be helpful at this point. I make the case that education's weakness demands an approach to thinking about religious schooling that separates it from the production of religious identities.

Education's creativity: Rethinking religious schooling beyond identity

In beginning to understand the relationship between education and identity, I point towards Biesta's conception of the weakness of education as tied to notions of creativity. For Biesta, the encounter between self and other that education stages can be understood as an act of creation, that is, an act 'of bringing something new into the

[15] The 'risk' of education is in its 'weakness', for Biesta. I am attracted to the metaphor of weakness in this thesis as it is in terms of weakness that Biesta (2013a) likens his argument to John Caputo's 'weak' interpretation of God in the Book of Genesis.

[16] Säfström and Månsson (2004) offer a critique of the alignment of education with socialisation that speaks to this view of education.

world, something that did not exist before' (2013a, p. 11). Education is 'creative' in the sense that the generation of something previously unimagined or unforeseen is intrinsic to what it entails. Indeed, he writes of how education 'is genuinely interested in the ways in which new beginnings and new beginners can come into the world' (Biesta, 2013a, p. 4). This is not to suggest, though, that what arises as a result of education is to be seen merely as an extension of its 'creator' (for instance, the teacher or policy maker): indeed, Biesta's reading of creativity is opposed precisely to this view of what it means to create something, for his embrace of the 'weakness' of education brings with it an aversion to narrow forms of instrumentalism. Rather, when Biesta speaks of education as creative, he is referring to its relationship to questions of human subjectivity, that is, to what it means to be a human subject in relationship with others in the world.

Biesta posits a view of human subjectivity that is much in harmony with Todd's perspectives on education above insofar as his similarly rests on a conception of human subjecthood that gains its significance in the unpredictable nature of the relations we have with others. He writes of how:

> ... human subjectivity should not be understood in natural terms, that is, as part of our essence, but rather in existential terms, that is as a 'quality' of our relationships with what or who is other. Subjectivity is, in other words, not something we can have or possess, but something that can be realised, from time to time, in always new, open, and unpredictable situations of encounter. (Biesta, 2013a, p. 12)

Read in this way, human subjectivity becomes less a matter of determining how my uniqueness is distinct from that of others, and more about how my relations with others contribute to my sense of uniqueness from the beginning. Anna Strhan articulates this well when she argues for an understanding of education rooted in an ethical, heteronomous view of subjectivity, one that 'is constituted in receptivity and passivity.

It is only as turned outwards towards the Other that I am' (2012, p. 31). When Strhan speaks of receptivity and passivity as inherent to human subjectivity, she echoes Todd's contention that 'the subject learns through a specific orientation to the Other' (2008, p. 171): education is only possible because of my exposure to the appeal of the human face (Strhan, 2012, p. 201). Engaging in educational encounters rests on a fundamentally ethical conception of human subjectivity due to the fact that such encounters involve a necessary disruption of the 'I' through the approach of the other, the stranger who brings with them experiences beyond the sphere of my own comprehension. To describe education as an act of creation, then, is to recognise its imbrication within the 'emergence of human subjectivity' (Biesta, 2013a, p. 18), an emergence that is necessarily inflected with the unknown and unpredictable if it is to be educational at all.

Biesta's emphasis on the creation of new beginnings and new beginners is helpful in addressing the question of identity in relation to education. Biesta distances education's weakness from notions of identity and individuality on the grounds that each of these tend to veer towards the reproduction of what we already know and of what already exists. Indeed, he writes:

> I am, however, avoiding certain other words and concepts, most notably the notion of identity – which for me has more to do with the ways in which we identify with existing orders and traditions than with ways of acting and being that are 'outside' this – and also the notion of individuality – which tends to depict the human subject too much in isolation from other human beings. (Biesta, 2013a, p. 18)

By distancing himself from notions of identity and individuality, Biesta frames education's weakness in terms of a concern for transforming 'what is desired into what is desirable' (2013a, p. 4): through engagement with who or what is other, the weakness of education opens up alternative possibilities to what the status quo might

currently permit or determine. By transcending the limits of identification, education renders the impossible possible: through dialogue, education grants us access to different kinds of relationships that would otherwise escape the limits of how people understand themselves in connection with *extant* social structures and discourses. It is on these educational grounds that I also distance myself from identitarian thinking. What I seek to offer in this thesis is a view of religious schooling that goes beyond the production of identity, for it is in doing so that the limits of religious identities (and their attendant exclusions) can be exposed and interrupted. In a dissertation committed to undermining the religious/queer divide, such an exercise makes sense, as it is by attending to what the divide between religious and queer identities denies and disallows that possibilities beyond it can be created and sustained.

Disidentification and the queer politics of schooling

Is it possible to think about the work of the school beyond notions of identity? How, in other words, can framing the work of the religious school in terms of the weakness of education be understood as queer? My response to these questions is largely indebted to Claudia Ruitenberg (2010), who draws from Jacques Rancière's work in expounding on what it might mean for a school to be engaged in queer politics.

She grounds her argument in Rancière's reading of politics, which is distinct from more general understandings of politics as linked, say, to the workings and goals of political parties and/or institutions. Central to Rancière's understanding of politics is his emphasis on 'the distribution of the sensible', that is, those 'self-evident facts' that constitute who or what can legitimately exist as perceptible and intelligible within the fabric of the social order (2004, p. 12). For Rancière, shifting the distribution of

the sensible is at the heart of political action, for politics entails opening up spaces where the supposed naturalness of what can be legitimately sensed and perceived in this world is called into question, disrupting in the process the inegalitarianism often created by such logics. In this way, shifting the distribution of the sensible rests on the view that, through such practices, 'any order or distribution of bodies into functions corresponding to their "nature" and places … is undermined, thrown back on its own contingency' (Rancière, 1999, p.101). Political work, in short, is committed to exposing and undermining the taken-for-grantedness through which the equality of certain political subjects can be otherwise denied. For Ruitenberg, queer politics can be read as political in this Rancièrian sense 'when it exposes the contingency of sex, gender, and sexual categories and designations, and challenges the social norm that the proper place of queerness is the private sphere' (2010, p. 623). This echoes my understanding of queer as verb: queer politics enacts its queerness by actively exposing, interrogating, and reimagining those assumptions that confer hetero- and cisnormative conceptions of sex and gender political, economic, cultural, social, and religious dominance.

In framing how a queer conception of politics can actively go about shifting the distribution of the sensible, Ruitenberg (much like Biesta) draws a necessary distinction between identification and subjectivity. For Ruitenberg, the latter has political effects, for 'politics is a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of subjectification' rather than of identities and of modes of identification. As Ruitenberg succinctly observes, the 'crucial distinction between identity and subjectivity, as Rancière uses the terms, is that subjectivity questions the apparent naturalness of the rank and order implied in identities' (2010, p. 622). Subjectification is inherently disruptive of the fixed limits imposed by the matrices of identity, as it is in our

relationships with others that the limits of the existing order of things collapse, and alternative possibilities (beyond what is currently perceptible or intelligible) emerge. Crucially, she writes of how this work opens up a subject space 'where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted' (Rancière, 1999, p. 36). Queer politics shifts the distribution of the sensible when it enacts forms of human togetherness that *disidentify from* the limits of extant (hetero- and cisnormative) social structures and discourses, and it is this that characterises the work of the school, for Ruitenberg. On this meaning, Ruitenberg argues that in order for the school to live out a 'sharply political' praxis, it needs to sustain, rather than conflate or downplay, the gap between identity and subjectivity, for it is precisely through this gap that the queering of hetero- and cisnormative modes of identity can be enacted.

What Ruitenberg adds to my valorisation of education's weakness is an attention to the *sensed* nature of experience. Redistributing what can be legitimately sensed within the current state of things brings with it a recourse to the body and to materiality that Biesta's work does not address in the same way. Leveraging this thesis around the weakness of education calls for a focus upon those facets of subjectivity that might allow for queer forms of disidentification to be sustained. It is in this regard that attending to the sensible (and its redistribution in and through our physical encounters with others) holds much promise, for such a focus offers avenues for tapping into the 'underside' of extant modes of identification, to the queer possibilities that arise when we transcend how identity determines how the world is related to and mediated. In this way, in synthesising Biesta's and Ruitenberg's insights together, the school becomes a space that creates the conditions for unpredictable encounters between others to take place. These encounters are engaged with in their embodied materiality with the view to redistributing what is *there*, but in ways that are sensitive

to what is *not* there too, to that which is unsensed but all the more possible and necessary because of that.

If we were to apply this argument to the religious school, then, the religious/queer divide would quickly collapse. The religious school would be seen less as a space for perpetuating identification with existing social and religious structures (be they hetero- and cisnormative or otherwise), and more as a space where people can enter into dialogue with one another and the world with the view to opening up possibilities beyond the sensible, beyond what is currently identifiable. On this meaning, the religious/queer divide would lose it conceptual dominance if the religious school provided a space for engaging with the materiality of religion, with the body and affect, as well as with the alternative possibilities that can arise when these features of subjective experience are taken seriously. Here, the hetero- and cisnormative basis upon which the religious/queer divide is built would be turned on its head and disidentified from, if you like, in and through its receptiveness to other kinds of knowledges beyond what already existing forms of religious and queer identities might allow for or attend to.

Of course, a key question that now comes to mind is one related to the school itself: what understanding of the school can sustain such expectations? Indeed, is it justifiable to place these kinds of expectations (religious, queer, or political) upon the school, or does the school exist for a purpose separable to these? In the section to come, I will argue that it is, indeed, possible to conceptualise the school with these (and other) expectations in mind, while still preserving something of the distinctiveness of the school and its purpose. In developing this argument, I turn in what follows to the original Greek understanding of the school in terms of *scholè*.

II. Scholè and the 'tactfulness' of the school

How are we to understand the purpose of the school? Is this purpose distinctive in its own right, or is it also necessarily informed by social, cultural, political, economic, and religious demands? Such questions act as the crux of this section, though appear unnecessary for those who would prefer to abandon the concept of the school altogether. Indeed, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, a growing body of work within education began to question the very existence of the school. Perhaps the most notable of these was Ivan Illich (1995), who argued for the 'deschooling' of society on the grounds that the institutional nature of the school was antithetical to the educational prerogatives for which it so often claimed to exist. Insights across varying sociological, psychological, and historical perspectives on education have contributed to a landscape in which the merits of such a view of the school would appear to be substantiated.

Sociological perspectives on education have focused their efforts on the extent to which schools have become imbricated in reproducing social inequities and injustices. From micro- to macro-levels of analysis, those who have sought to study education through a sociological lens have identified the role schools have played (and continue to play) in perpetuating social exclusions on the basis of class (Reay, 2017), race (Kitching, 2014), gender (Ringrose, 2013), sexual orientation (Neary, 2017), disability (Arnot, 2012), and so on. These sociological perspectives on education would justify problematising any attempt at valorising the school, especially as the institutional apparatus from which and through which the school operates is often seen within these analyses as a key contributor to those very issues of concern to the

sociologist. In a likewise fashion, insights from the psychology of education would appear averse to a positive reading of the school. Literature from the 1990s has shed light especially on the 'mismatch' that often occurs between the manner in which schools organise themselves, and the specific emotional and cognitive challenges and dispositions children and adolescents potentially face and move towards as they mature (Eccles, et al., 1993). Similarly, more recent psychological studies have shed light upon the extent to which school culture negatively affects student well-being, with the school's contributive influence upon peer-related bullying (Saarento, et al., 2014) and the increased association of schools with 'high-stakes' standardised testing practices (McDonald, 2001) both acting as particularly formative influences in this regard. Historical perspectives on education have not offered unanimously supportive representations of the school either. Studies across national (Coolahan, 1981) and international (Tamura, 2008) contexts have pointed towards the role schools have often played throughout history in exacerbating varying social inequities and injustices, frequently at the behest of power structures allied to dominant ideological regimes, be they politically or religiously framed. These views do not bode well for the school, and together engender an understandable impatience with (and even antipathy for) the school as an institution, an impatience expressing itself in the urge to dismiss the school's legitimacy altogether on the grounds of its failure to serve any worthwhile social good.

Contrary to these perspectives, though, this thesis commits itself to the school as an institution. I argue in the sub-section below that the criticisms often levelled against the school demand for a radical reimagining of the school, one that allows for

the inherent value of the school as an institution to be preserved.[17] For Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons, reimagining the school begins by returning to the roots of the school in the Greek word *scholè*, meaning 'free time', specifically a form of free time 'afforded to people who had no claim to it according to the archaic order prevailing at the time' (2013, p. 9). In what follows I unpack more fully what Masschelein and Simons mean by this, before moving to a critical discussion of its relationship to two distinct qualities to the school that they elaborate upon, namely suspension and profanation.

The scholastic: Suspension and profanation

Masschelein and Simons make reference to the word *scholè* to draw attention to the original conception of the school in the city states of ancient Greece. For the authors, the scholastic quality to the school is determined by its provision of a space where time becomes 'free', 'non-productive' and 'undefined' (2013, p. 29): in other words, time becomes divested of its instrumental weight, relieving the school of the pressures for productivity otherwise exerted upon students by the social, political, and religious order. Read in this way, the school acts as a material and spatial site for a radical form of egalitarianism, expressed in the opportunity for all students to study and to practice in a 'time-made-free', a time that resists deference to the 'busy-time' of the household or city/state (2013, p. 29). Masschelein and Simons refer to the scholastic quality of the school (in the sense implied by the commitments of *scholè*) as a 'democratisation

[17] It is important to note at this point that the work of Masschelein and Simons is not the only contemporary voice offering a philosophical defence of the school. Indeed, Julian Stern's (2018) recently published *A Philosophy of Schooling: Care and Curiosity in Community* is a robust treatment of the question of why we ought to keep schools. Stern's thesis, however, does not problematise the expectations placed upon the school from society, so it is for this reason that I engage with Masschelein and Simons in this analysis.

of *free time*' (2013, p. 28) in that the school offers the time, space, and matter for students to study the world because of the inherent value such activities have, a value that resists being the preserve of those of high social status alone (2013, p. 29). In light of this egalitarian purpose, the school becomes an institution with unique temporal, spatial, and material features that make it different from other social institutions or 'learning environments', which are typically tied to repeating, rather than disrupting, the busy-ness of time and its demands through practices of socialisation or initiation, for instance (2013, p. 30). I draw attention to this distinction, not to disparage practices that initiate or socialise, but simply to emphasise the difference between these prerogatives, and the prerogatives called upon by the scholastic. The school is neither a business nor a clinic nor a church nor a training centre, and therefore is characterised by a relationship to society and its expectations that are different when compared to each of these other institutions. While Masschelein and Simons draw attention to a number of varying features to the scholastic, for the purposes of this chapter, two will suffice: suspension and profanation.

First, suspension. By suspension, Masschelein and Simons are referring to that aspect to school life that subverts the 'tendency to pin pupils to their social and cultural backgrounds' (2013, p. 33). It can be read as a form of 'letting go' (2013, p. 31) if you like, in which students are, for a while, 'lifted' (2013, p. 33) from their contexts and offered the chance to attend to the world as it is, without recourse to the 'weight' (2013, p. 35) of the demands of the family and/or the city/state. They write: 'The school and the teacher allow young people to reflect upon themselves, detached from the context (background, intelligence, talents, etc.) that connects them to a particular place (a special learning pathway, a class for remedial students, etc.)' (2013, p. 34). The concept of suspension is motivated by the democratising impulse

characteristic of the scholastic: by temporarily shedding off the personal and social baggage carried by them in their lives, students are presented with the opportunity to 'rise above themselves' (2013, p. 141), to become someone different to what others expect of them. In this way, the act of suspension characteristic of the scholastic can be seen as drawing students into the 'here-and-now' of the 'present tense' (2013, p. 33): suspension rejects any practice that hampers the student's chance at becoming someone new in relation to the world, either by labouring the student under 'the potential burden of their past' or by projecting them along 'the potential pressure of a mapped-out' future already lost or intended (2013, p. 36). Instead, suspension is invested in allowing the student to attend to the world as it presents itself to them, an attention that relies only on the student being there as a student, and nothing more.

A simple incident from my time as a student teacher goes some way to concretising what Masschelein and Simons have in mind when they speak of suspension. The school I was teaching in was a school I myself attended as a child. It was located within a community struggling with the harsh realities of poverty, socio-economic deprivation, and injustice. To my mind, many of the students there harboured feelings of deep alienation in relation to schooling, feelings that were propounded further by the system of streaming that characterised the school's grouping arrangements. I was teaching an English lesson to a class of first-year students within the 'lower' stream. A boy, who had only started second-level school a week previously, expressed his surprise at the amount of 'effort' I had invested in preparing our lessons. When I asked the student to offer a reason for his surprise, the student explained that they were 'the dumb class' and that, as a result, teachers normally put little work into resourcing their lessons, believing them to be of lower priority to those of the students from the 'higher' streams. While there are a whole

host of educational questions raised by this anecdote (not least in terms of the relationship between the boy's experiences and the potentially classist assumptions informing the value judgements of his teachers' practices), for our purposes it is significant in drawing attention to the degree to which the scholastic, as Masschelein and Simons understand it, failed to be embodied here. While I cannot claim that my teaching colleagues saw the students of the 'lower' stream in such derogatory terms, my student's comments nonetheless demonstrated the pervasive influence the school's streaming system (and the forms of identitarian politics it elicited) had had in informing the student's understanding of himself in relation to school work. For my student, a direct relationship existed between his being identified as a part of the 'lower stream' and the nature of the school experience he was being offered: breaking free from the contextual shackles of the 'lower stream' was unfathomable for my student, as the logics that justified it where bound up in the structures of the school itself. Had the school I taught in rearranged itself in a way that lived out the imperatives of suspension, perhaps a culture could have been developed in which my student's low expectations for himself and his classmates may not have arisen, for his previous 'talent' (or otherwise) for English (and the static forms of identity often attributed to such talent) would have been suspended once he entered the school gates. For Masschelein and Simons, the classroom is a time and space in which the subject matter being studied is attended to by the student in a moment of scholastic free time, irrespective of who they were in the past or who they may become into the future.

Second, profanation. Profanation is much like suspension in its sensitivity to the importance of democratising the time that the school carves out for students. For Masschelein and Simons, profanation is made possible if the school detaches itself from the typically productive ways in which the social and economic order expects us

to relate to the world. The particular emphasis that profanation brings to understanding the suspended quality of the school and its activities is the nature of the relationship between the student and that which is being studied. The subject matter being attended to by the student is made profane by the scholastic quality to the school in the sense that it loses the sacredness of its 'regular use', thereby rendering it 'both accessible to all and subject to (re)appropriating meaning' (2013, p. 38). By this, Masschelein and Simons mean that what is being studied loses the trappings of privilege and convention, and becomes publically available to everyone. The text that had acted as the subject of the English lesson in my discussion of suspension above was not the sacrosanct preserve of an elite body of the rich or powerful. Instead, the text was rendered profane in relation to my students, suspended from the socio-economic constraints of context and made available to them as knowledge for its own sake (2013, p. 38). Masschelein and Simons use the word profane specifically to draw attention to how 'non-religious' the act of profanation is: that which is rendered profane is not straightjacketed by the 'sacredness' of former (social or political) use, but is instead studied and/or practiced for the sake of being studied and/or practiced (in potentially 'novel', and hence profane, ways, 2013, p. 38). The authors refer to this profane form of study and practice as 'turning something into subject matter' (2013, p. 41), bringing something from the world 'into play' (2013, p. 40) in a way that puts it 'on the table' (2013, p. 39) as something *common* to all. Together, suspension and profanation as qualities of the scholastic make the school an egalitarian place in the business of making public that which would otherwise be the preserve of the private few.

I see suspension and profanation as valuable concepts for thinking about the nature of the religious school when we consider this dissertation's commitment to a weak conception of education, one removed from the alignment of the religious school

with the 'strong' production of religious identities. If we are to extend the implications of *scholè* to the religious school, then the religious school would come to exist as a space where the religious identities of students (however diverse) would be suspended. The religious traditions of the world (one dimension of the subject matter of the religious school, if you like) would be studied, not as a tool for preserving a religious community's identity and survival, but rather as a space and time where such traditions would be rendered common to all, and in this way open to being unpredictably transformed or imagined differently. On this meaning, the religious school would enact a queer politics of disidentification in the sense that, by suspending the religious expectations of the home and city/state (and the related identities tied to these expectations), spaces could be opened up through which alternative relationships with religion could emerge, including those that move beyond the conventional opposition between religion and queerness and its related identitarian limits.

These merits notwithstanding, though, understanding the scholastic school in terms of suspension and profanation is not without its difficulties, specifically in terms of the question of society and its relationship to education. Indeed, within Masschelein and Simons' account, having a school affiliated to a particular religion would be untenable, for this kind of relationship would erode the democratisation of *scholè* from the outset. As the introduction to this thesis makes clear though, religion continues to shape our contemporary, postsecular times: we cannot erase history, for we are always already embedded within religious and cultural traditions and their related (educational) legacies. In light of this, then, is it realistic, or even possible or desirable, for the school to bracket off the expectations of society altogether? Indeed, schools with religious histories exist: is it too simple to suggest that these histories (and their attendant expectations) be simply abandoned at the school gates? In what follows, I

make the case that, while suspension and profanation are valuable in many ways, what is needed for understanding the school is a sense of 'tactfulness' that takes the demands of suspension and profanation seriously, while also committing itself to a 'weak' conception of pedagogical judgement in how the world and its expectations are 'taken up' by teachers and students. In this way, the chapter concludes by suggesting that the 'tactfulness' of the school can best navigate the expectations of society when it offers a time and space to encounter the world and its traditions in ways that are both receptive to personal story, but also interruptive of its identitarian limits.

Responding to expectations: The 'tactfulness' of the school

Todd offers a compelling critique of an essay of Masschelein's that resonates strongly with my critique of his work with Simons. The essay in question grapples with philosophy of education, and how it ought to carry out its endeavours. It forwards the view that philosophy of education is in the first instance an 'ascetic' practice, a self-educative 'work on the self' (Masschelein, 2011, p. 356) centred around an attention to the present, to 'the gap between past and future' (Masschelein, 2011, p. 357). For Masschelein, such attention involves experiencing oneself 'as a beginner … suspending historical time, suspending biographical time, suspending social time', being, in other words, 'present in the present' without the deterministic constraints of past or future (2011, p. 357). The affinities between this and the views on the scholastic argued for by Masschelein and Simons in their defence of the school are quite explicit here, particularly in their understanding of the educational encounter as necessitating an experience of the here-and-now, one that decouples the productivities of the home

and city/state from what is profanely present to us. I am also sensitive to certain affinities with Biesta's weak conception of education here, particularly in Masschelein's emphasis on the 'beginning' of something new through study and practice.

While Todd welcomes Masschelein's argument insofar as 'it offers a new compass point for orienting ourselves and our work as one that is always drawn to the present' (2011, p. 364), she nonetheless calls into question the manner in which Masschelein casts 'the present' as 'an unproblematic and unambiguous appearance that is to be "experienced" – immediately and without mediation – as though our stories or narratives are unimportant to who we are' (2011, p. 364). For Todd, the understanding of suspension that Masschelein calls for seems to imply 'leaving our stories behind', reducing education to an 'engagement with the present that seems to have no context' (2011, p. 364). Indeed, as Todd explains, such a view is limited in that it attempts to deny the specificities of context that are constitutive of the present from the outset: the gap between past and future is not to be understood as a 'present in a purified space, but the space of mediation, the space inhabited by flesh-and-blood persons, who, each in their own way, expose themselves to actual, other flesh-and-blood persons who are also attempting to make a life in the gap' (2011, p. 365). To attend to the present is to be there in the present as it is, in all its messiness and disjunction.

Following Todd, I would claim that an attention to the present that informs the nature and purpose of the scholastic is less a matter of bracketing off those factors that inform the contexts we live in, and is more a way of relating to the materiality of the present *differently*. Such a way of relating grapples with the *thereness* of what presents itself to us, a *thereness* that allows us and the world to take on an unexpected

quality in the uncontainability of the moment, potentially shifting and becoming otherwise in an infinite number of ways. In this manner, *scholè* is preserved insofar as the productivity of the home and the state are suspended in the *thereness* of the present, escaping the strictures of a 'social essence' (Todd, 2011, p. 366), but is done so in a way that does not seek to deny that the home and state nonetheless shape how that present is mediated or taken up by us in our lives. So while I seek to retain the notions of suspension and profanation insofar as they allow us to gain insights on the scholastic that are unbound by the temporalities of society, family, and the inequities often tied to these, I nonetheless seek to reframe these ideas in ways that resist casting off context (and its attendant expectations) as somehow immaterial to the educational work of schools. It is here where understanding the school in 'inbetween' terms is useful.

In two papers, Lovisa Bergdahl and Elisabet Langmann (2017; 2018a) articulate a considered critique of Masschelein and Simons that is in sympathy to this view. They mount their analysis by shedding light upon the tendency within Western intellectual history of privileging the public over the private, a privileging that rests on a false dichotomy that valorises 'public deliberation and reason' and marginalises those dimensions to human experience more commonly seen as residing within the private realm, 'such as the bodily, the material and the emotional' (Bergdahl and Langmann, 2017, p. 470). Bergdahl and Langmann see such a dichotomy as a specifically gendered construction, in which the masculine space of the public is granted priority over the femininity of the private, a designation that has historically been used as a patriarchal tool for rendering the female voice silent within public discourse (2017, p. 471). Linking this to Masschelein and Simons' view on suspension within the scholastic, Bergdahl and Langmann argue that the authors' resistance to context in their conceptualisation of suspension 'becomes gender blind and

deterritorialised, taking to be neutral what in fact is an earthbound, embodied and context-dependent task' (2017, p. 472). The life of schools is always coloured by the contexts and situations in which we find ourselves: the distinction between the privacy of context and the public nature of the school is a false one for Bergdahl and Langmann, in that the advocating of suspension as a scholastic technique 'is always of a *social* character': our students' relationships with the world and their social, political, cultural, economic, and religious contexts will always inform the work of the school (2017, p. 472). Indeed, as Bergdahl and Langmann write elsewhere, the scholastic experience 'is as much about being in relation and exposed to something as being able to begin and create something' (2018a, p. 319). In light of this, then, the suspension, say, of a student's social status can be taken seriously by the scholastic insofar as the school renders content open to study to all, irrespective of identity, but the impulse that calls for this egalitarian form of free time is also one that cannot ignore context and personal story, but instead needs to grapple with and respond to it in ways that are educationally transformative.

If the personal and the contextual cannot escape the work of the school, how then are we to understand the scholastic in relation to society and its expectations? What images can we use to understand the life of the school and its purpose that simultaneously engage with context, while also refusing to be determined by it? How can we picture the school in a manner that is receptive to who students are, and what society might expect, but is also at the same time committed to putting at risk the very sense of 'who' that student is? How can we preserve *scholè* without falling into a total decontextualisation of the school itself? I suggest that this becomes possible if we image the school as a site of 'tactfulness', where the demands of *scholè* and the demands of society and personal context can be navigated by the teacher with the view

to cultivating the conditions for a weak kind of educational experience to emerge, one built on dialogue with others without predetermination. Bergdahl and Langmann image teaching in the scholastic school in ways that are receptive to this idea when they write:

> The task of the teacher in this place is thus to decide when to invite things in from the world and when to shut them out (a question of tact and timing), just as she needs to decide what to shut out and what to invite in (a question of content) … [This is] a thoughtful and careful invitation to make present things in the world that call for passion and attention. (2018a, p. 323)

Straddling the demands of *scholè* and the demands of society therefore becomes a matter of pedagogical judgement here: the teacher makes choices about which expectations (including the expectations of religious communities) they ought to take on board in their classroom, and which ones they ought to reject.

Making these judgements, to my mind, ought to be predicated in a commitment to the weakness of education, to the fact that entering into dialoguing with others (be they people, ideas, texts, experiences) ought to be a potentially transformative experience that reconfigures our relationships to ourselves, each other, and the sensed nature of the world in ways that are both unpredictable and uncontainable. On this meaning, the religious school would exist as a space for students to encounter the religious traditions of the past, giving themselves (and the world) the chance to be personally transformed by the lessons such traditions might offer. In this sense, religious traditions would be rendered profane within the religious school, 'put on the table' for study to all, irrespective of their own personal religious or cultural identities. The queer politics of all this comes to the fore in the tactfulness of the teacher in school: the teacher, sensitive to the specificities of who their students are and where they are coming from, would create the space for students to encounter religion in ways that are both receptive to personal context and story, but also (perhaps

more importantly) *interruptive* of the identitarian limits often imposed by such narratives (including those that set in opposition religion and queerness).

In this chapter, then, I set about the task of unpacking the educational reasons for conceptualising religious schooling beyond the preservation of religious identities and the conventional antithesis between religion and queerness. In this regard, I argued that education is a fundamentally weak endeavour that enacts a queer politics of disidentification through its relationship to transformative conceptions of human subjectivity: on this meaning, education resists the intentional reproduction of already existing social structures, discourses, and identity markers through the unpredictability that arises from a dialogical encounter with others. In this sense, it shifts the distribution of the sensible, by exposing and sustaining alternative kinds of (material and embodied) relationships to the world beyond what is currently the case (perceptibly and intelligibly).

From here, I argued for a view of the school that could enact such queer political weakness by allowing for the expectations of society to be tempered: in this regard, I turned to Masschelein and Simons' reading of the school in terms of *scholè*, arguing that their interpretation of suspension and profanation was valuable in separating the school from a 'strong' manifestation of society's expectations (and their attendant identitarian investments). Drawing from Todd and Bergdahl and Langmann, though, I also made the case that separating the school entirely from society is impossible, for the work of the school is always already informed by the social, political, cultural, economic, and religious contexts in which students find themselves. In light of this, what I suggested alternatively was an image of the school as a site of 'tactfulness', where the teacher, using pedagogical judgement, could decide what expectations to 'bring into' the classroom, and which ones to 'leave out'. The teacher

in the religious school, read in this way, would choose which religious traditions and expectations ought to be attended to by students, and which ones ought not to be, but (crucially) with the view to creating the conditions for the possible transformation of these traditions to occur. Of course, this is not to suggest that the teacher in the religious school ought to bear the weight of these decisions alone, nor that the religious school ought to embody a uniform or monolithic kind of 'tactfulness' to which each individual teacher is expected to comply in the same way. Rather, I suggest that teachers make these kinds of tactful judgements in dialogue with colleagues, students, and wider policies and discourses, and that the work of the religious school as an institution is best understood in terms of the significance of the *collectivity* of these relationships. For me, the weakness of education offered in this chapter provides the space for this kind of flexible tactfulness to be exercised, as it is in education's unpredictability that a spaciousness in pedagogical decision-making can be cultivated and sustained.

In part two of this thesis, I rethink religious schooling beyond the religious/queer divide by reframing religion as not only propositional, but as material too. Synthesising this with the understanding of the school outlined in this chapter, three aspects of religious school life will ground the second part's productive work (namely, engaging pedagogically with religious teachings, fostering religious values, and participating in religious rituals). How, though, are we to go about this task? Indeed, when we consider the landscape outlined in chapter one, is it even possible for religious communities to think about a weak, queer conception of schooling beyond the religious queer/divide? What strategies can be enacted to begin translating these insights across to the concerns of the religious communities invested in religious

schools? In the chapter to come, I set about laying the methodological ground work for this endeavour.

CHAPTER THREE

Religion and education in translation: Sustaining 'points of contact'

> The language of revelation, so central to Catholic education, is more akin to poetry than to prose because it is in the poetic mode that language finds its highest possibilities and promises most. (Lane, 2015, p. 70)

Dermot Lane's assessment of the importance of 'the language of revelation' in Catholic education calls for a serious consideration of the place and purpose of religious language in reflecting on educational questions. Is it appropriate, for instance, to speak about education by appealing to the metaphors and images of religion without at the same time divinising it? Indeed, does Lane's location of 'the language of revelation' at the centre of education divest education of its educational qualities, reducing its significance to what can be said (or not) about God? Or, alternatively, does his emphasis on the poetic quality of religious discourse create the space for a more open-ended relationship between religion and education to come to the fore? This chapter attempts to work with and through these questions, with the view to laying the methodological groundwork for the second, productive part of the thesis. The motivation for doing so lies in the second part's engagement with religious language and symbol to queer religious schooling. What this chapter seeks to reflect on, then, are the affinities between educational and religious discourses, what an engagement between these different registers might look like, and how this might be staged in ways that avoid appropriating one discourse for the other.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of the value of metaphor in thinking about education. Drawing on the work of James Conroy (2004), I make the

case for an endorsement of metaphor in educational discourse on the grounds that it eschews the instrumental language of performance that has come to dominate certain educational quarters in recent years. I bring this commitment to metaphor to bear in reflecting on the specific value of religious language and symbolism in theorising around education. With Paul Tillich (1955) and Anna Strhan (2011) as my primary interlocutors, I underline the affinities between the vitalities of metaphor and the discourses of religion by emphasising the poetic qualities to religious language and symbol. These poetic qualities, I will claim, resist appeals to ultimacy or incontrovertibility by the fact that the function of religious discourse is more performative and signifying, than representational as such. With this poetic understanding of religious discourse in mind, I offer the view that an encounter with religious language and symbolism brings with it a concern for weakness appropriate for education. Contrasting strongly against what is often perceived to be the unyielding 'strength' of religious dogma, this weak conception of religious language is exhibited in the discursive and symbolic open-endedness it permits. Its disavowal of ultimacy creates spaces for religious language and symbol to shift and experiment in ways akin to the unpredictability of what is enabled and sustained through education.

The latter end of the chapter takes this poetic affinity between these registers and uses it as a basis for the claim that religious and educational discourses can draw from one another without appropriation. I suggest that this non-appropriative conception of the relationship between religious and educational discourses can be most helpfully enacted in terms of *translation*, and explore how the symbol of 'the Abrahamic threesome' can be used to accentuate and sustain the 'points of contact' that might arise through this kind of engagement. I focus in particular on four points of contact between religious and educational discourses that the Abrahamic threesome

communicates in carrying out its translating function, namely: embodiment, attention, repetition, and creativity. I focus on these points of contact over others with the view to preserving this dissertation's emphasis on the material significances of religion. The chapter concludes with discussing the material dimensions of queer theologies, before finally introducing the overarching structures that inform how the arguments in each of the chapters of the second part will be developed.

I. Poetry and weakness: Religious and educational discourses

In coming to understand the value of metaphor for both reflecting on and articulating what education involves, I refer to James Conroy's treatment of metaphor in his book *Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Imagination, Education and Democracy.* For Conroy, metaphor plays a crucial role in resisting discourses around education that have become allied to neoliberal and consumerist ideologies, ideologies in which the language of performativity and quality assurance have been foundational. Conroy argues that the poetic, of which metaphor exists as a fundamental component, is an appropriate way of speaking about education owing to the fact that metaphors allow for descriptions that embrace the ambiguous and unexpected. He writes of how 'poetry as metaphor offers itself to us by bringing into existence new cultural descriptions that are not, as has been commonly held, mere substitutions for other terms or descriptions' (Conroy, 2004, p. 150). Metaphors, understood in this manner, resist being read in ways that merely reproduce what has come before. Metaphors do not re-present the world, but instead perform and signify in ways that can offer 'new information about the world wherein non-equitable terms are juxtaposed in combinations that offer new ways of seeing, understanding and interpreting' (Conroy, 2004, p. 150). Conroy argues that the use of metaphor is significant for education in its 'dislocation and relocation

of words and phrases' in such a manner that our 'normal understanding of how they work' is suspended (2004, p. 150). Metaphor, in short, allows for a register to be engaged with that exhibits a concern for education's weakness in its orientation towards the new and unforeseen, in its commitment to 'new cultural descriptions' that can transform how we perceive and relate to others in the world. Calling to mind our earlier engagements with Ruitenberg (2010) and Biesta (2013), metaphors can be seen as appropriately in tune with the commitments of education in their shifting of the distribution of the sensible. Metaphors have a capacity to stage an encounter with others through which the limits of extant social identities, structures, and ways of experiencing and sensing the material world can be interrupted, and the unpredictable transformatively cultivated and borne out.

It is for the above reasons, among others, that scholars in education have held a proclivity towards the use of metaphor in their theorising. As Sharon Todd explains 'educational discourses of all philosophical persuasions have used metaphorical language … For instance, John Dewey speaks of growth, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg of stages, Nel Noddings of flourishing, and Martha Nussbaum of cultivation' (2015, p. 58). For Todd, metaphors are valuable for educational discourse in their ability to 'approximate and focus our attention on certain 'things' rather than others, and in fact bring into being certain relationships that would not have been possible before' (2015, p. 59). Metaphors are useful in shedding light on particular emphases in education over others, and in pointing towards the possible ways in which such emphases relate to one another in diverse combinations. However, as will become apparent below, in the context of this thesis an important issue to be reflected upon is the explicitly *religious* quality to the metaphors I am engaging with. Surely the use of metaphors of a religious kind runs the risk of straight-jacketing the power of the

metaphor itself, domesticating its vibrancy and unwieldiness through a register that grants priority (to use Conroy's words) to the known over the unknown, the closed over the disclosed, the old over the new, and the hackneyed over the fresh? Indeed, is the deployment of religious metaphors counter-intuitive for the poetic act, rendering educational discourse answerable to the 'strength' of religious dogma and its deterministic effects? Anna Strhan's understanding of religious language as poetry is helpful in allowing me respond to such concerns, in ways (as I read her) that support the use of religious language as both metaphorically vibrant and intrinsically appropriate for educational discourse.

Bringing the poetic to bear on religious language

Throughout the second part of this thesis, I appeal extensively to religious discourse: from queer constructions of theological hermeneutics and rituals, to concepts like *kerygma*, *ijtihad*, and *kavvanah*. As I read her, Strhan's reflections below allow for an understanding of religious discourse to emerge that frames such constructions and concepts in weaker terms to what might be commonly assumed: religious language is not identical to dogma, and can thus be understood in ways that are fluid and open to diverse insights and experiences.

In conceptualising the poetic essence of religious language, Strhan (2011) begins by developing her understanding of poetry. Following Martin Heidegger, Strhan sees the poetic as a 'raid on the inarticulate', by which she means a 'pure' language that gains its purity by being neither 'an expression nor an activity' of human discourse (2011, p. 926). Rather than existing as, say, a reproduction of the poet's intentions and/or experiences, poetry as pure language is that which is 'never

exhausted, never closed': the poetic word possesses a 'hiddenness' that opens up boundless degrees of interpretation and insight by virtue of its poetic quality (Strhan, 2011, p. 927). Of central concern for Strhan in understanding the poetic is the manner in which poetic language resists adhering to 'the misguided assumption that word and thing fit together in a definite relation that we can grasp' (2011, p. 928). For Strhan, the 'veiled' relation that exists between Saying (the act of utterance) and Being (the essence of what is uttered) is typified in poetry, a relation characterised by a mysteriousness exposed in 'the strangeness of language' itself (2011, p. 928). Crucially, it is in this very strangeness, this opacity, that an 'opening' or clearing to 'the wholly Other' (Strhan, 2011, p. 926) is revealed to the listener. In reaching the limits of language the essence of language itself is revealed, in all its uncontainability. This poetic move towards the wholly Other (this revelation of sorts) is what acts for Strhan as the basis for understanding religious language as an essentially poetic language, to which I now turn more explicitly.

Strhan opens her analysis of religious language by pointing towards the position the mysteriousness of the relation between Saying and Being holds within this language. Strhan is interested in exposing the degree to which religious language is poetically 'pure', in the sense of being sensitive to the elusiveness of language itself, a sensitivity that opens up 'a space for wonder' capable of bringing 'to presence what cannot be brought to presence, the excess that remains beyond the limits' of what is listened to in its Saying (2011, p. 931). Interestingly, Strhan initiates this part of her discussion by drawing attention to the resistance such an understanding of religious language often faces in religious and theological scholarship, arguing that the 'intimacy between hiddenness and revelation' (2011, p. 932) is one at odds with

positivist discourses that seek to render language transparent, wholly representative, and thus easily defensible against others. She writes:

> The most likely reason, I believe, for the neglect of Heidegger's views on language in the study of religious language has been because of the desire in theology to say something concrete about the relation between words and the Holy, to pin down the nature of religious language. Implicit has often been the desire to defend theological discourse against claims of meaninglessness stemming from the discourses of logical positivism. (Strhan, 2011, p. 930)

The tendency in more dogmatic religious and theological quarters to erode the open-endedness of religious language becomes a self-refuting exercise by supplanting the unsayable (with which much religious experience grapples) with a definitiveness that closes off its inexhaustibility, thereby making it 'dull' and 'used-up' (Strhan, 2011, p. 930). Strhan, in an attempt to rescue religious language from the limits of logical positivism, appeals to the views of Levinas, particularly when he allies religious language with the poetic imagination:

> What the multiple expressions of religious language have in common is the claim to be inexhaustible in reference to the world from which the signification of words, propositions and discourses is woven. How do we open to language the borders of the given reality in which we live? … In the poetic imagination, the unheard can be heard, called out to and expressed … metaphor can lead beyond the experiences which seem to have created it. (quoted in Strhan, 2011, p. 930)

Here, the language of religion (its metaphors, symbols, and tropes) sports a boundlessness that performs its own deconstruction, evading an immediacy that would otherwise silo the divine to which it gestures to a very particular type of conceptual thinking. In this way, the language of religion becomes a 'pure language in that it eludes us, while bringing to presence that which is Other as such' (Strhan, 2011, p. 933).

Returning to the methodological motivations of this chapter as a whole, then, do these insights on religious language offer us avenues for thinking through the

appropriateness of drawing from religious registers in educational research, in ways that avoid sacrificing education to the uniformities of dogma? I believe so, particularly when I reflect on what I see to be the nascent weakness at work in moments of encounter with religious language. Such engagement is weak in the sense that religious language offers those who listen the chance to step outside the strictures of their own experiences and encounter something wholly different to themselves, that which is strange and opaque. From my own perspective, central to the 'calling' (Strhan, 2011, p. 931) of religious language is a kind of interruption not dissimilar to the queer, disidentificatory politics of the school. The absence of immediacy inherent to poetry pulls the listener of religious language beyond the experiences created by that language, inviting them into relationship with the fault lines where all that is comprehendible and identifiable loses its representable transparency and familiarity. My appeal to religious language in educational discourse is motivated, then, by an attraction to its intrinsic weakness, its poetic humility if you will, through which possibilities beyond what is currently the case can begin to open up.

So much for religious language, then, but what of religious symbols? In addition to this thesis's foray into such concepts as *kerygma*, *ijtihad*, and *kavvanah*, I also playfully engage (as we will see) with symbols like the cross, the star of David, and the crescent moon. Do religious symbols exhibit a similarly poetic sensibility to that of language, or are they more fixed in how they are to be understood? An example of a more poetic take on the significances of religious symbol can be found in the work of Paul Tillich, who begins his reflections by noting how every symbol 'opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate' (1955, p. 191). On this meaning, the function of the symbol is to expose us to the 'hiddenness' of experience: it points us to the fact that what presents itself to us in the world is not all that there is

or, indeed, could ever be. About specifically *religious* symbols, Tillich makes a similar point, arguing that religious symbols 'do exactly the same thing as all symbols do – namely, they open up a level of reality, which otherwise is not opened at all, which is hidden' (1955, p. 192). In articulating what this 'hiddenness' is, Tillich turns to the 'Holy': for Tillich, religious symbols expose us to the transcendent, rendering it incarnate, and in this way allowing us to overcome 'the remoteness of the divine' in our lives (1955, p. 195).

In developing this further, I turn to Tillich's distinction between signs (in the form of letters on a page, or traffic signs, for instance) and symbols. He writes of how signs are similar to symbols in the sense that both 'point beyond themselves to something else', but are different in that, unlike signs, symbols 'although they are not the same as that which they symbolise' nonetheless 'participate in its meaning and power' (Tillich, 1955, pp. 189-190). He continues: '… religious symbols are symbols of the Holy. As such they participate in the holiness of the Holy according to our basic definition of a symbol. But participation is not identity; they are not themselves the Holy' (Tillich, 1955, p. 192). I refer to the fact that religious symbols participate in, *but are not identical to*, the divine as it is in this lack of identity with the Holy that the scope for a weaker, more expansive, and poetic understanding of religious symbols arises. To my mind, the distinction that exists between, for example, the cross as a Christian symbol, and the 'holiness' of the resurrection that it participates in through a person or community's encounter with it is not insignificant. Indeed, it is precisely through this 'gap' that the truth of the resurrection becomes intelligible for Christians across contexts and sensitivities today, without at the same time losing its eternal holiness. Put differently, the 'gap' between the cross and the resurrection preserves the ineffability of the transcendent, while at the same time allowing for the cross to *be*

a cross, a material intersection of a vertical and horizontal line that is interpreted through, and situated within, the specificities of time, place, and their attendant legacies and traditions. Hence, in my view religious symbols, without losing their divine significance, can be nonetheless reread and reimagined, added to or simplified in a plurality of ways, depending on the interpretations and contexts that inform the divine-human encounter set up by the symbol. Indeed, denying this material plurality in understanding the religious symbol (say on the grounds of preserving one particular account of a symbol's significance over another) would appear to rest on an assumed identity between the symbol and the Holy that Tillich would reject. This has the effect of streamlining the multiplicities of the transcendent in terms of re-presentation and in this way subverts the symbol's performative function, that is its role in communicating the *ineffability* of the divine.

Against such representative strategies, queer theologian Linn Marie Tonstad argues that the task of the theologian is precisely to 'shift' (2018, p. 84) those theological logics that have been conventionally used to justify social, cultural, economic, and political ills. Such shifting is in harmony with intellectual work that subverts attempts at 'solidifying' theological categories, concepts, and symbols, reducing doctrine to dogma, and icon to idol (Tonstad, 2018, p.78). Echoing Strhan's perspectives on religious language above, Tonstad makes the case that these 'shifting' strategies are rooted in an appreciation of how all religious traditions (and their related discourses, practices, and symbol structures) are products of human finitude, and are therefore incapable of appealing to notions of 'ultimacy or finality' in how they speak about or image the divine (Tonstad, 2016, p. 217). Thus, a weaker idea of the religious symbol is both conceivable and theologically sensitive: it creates new possibilities for

understanding, experiencing, *and preserving* the otherness of the Holy precisely through the embeddedness of symbol within the diversities of traditions and contexts.

I argue for a weak conception of religious language and symbol with the aim of disentangling these from singular and/or dogmatic approaches: a poetic view of religious discourse that is inventively, even playfully, receptive to difference is what I advocate for here. This is done to suggest that both religious and educational discourses are united in a shared openness to the unpredictable, to transformation, and in this way can converse with each without either discourse being appropriated or exploited for the benefit of the other. Read in this fashion, education's weakness allows me to engage with religion's language and symbolism for education without effacing the transcendent significance of these for believers, while religion's weakness allows me to engage with education and schooling through the lens of religion without reducing education to a mere theological instrument.

In this way, the second part of the thesis aims, through recourse to queer theologies and life narratives, at thinking *with* religion and theology, its discourses and symbols, without at the same time thinking religiously or theologically per se. Staging this kind of engagement in a manner that protects the respective weakness of each is a delicate balancing act, that requires the relationship to be framed in ways that establish and sustain 'points of contact' or affinities between both discourses, while also honouring their differences. This is significant as it is through this that what is deemed legitimately sensible by religion can be shifted: preserving each discourse's respective weakness opens up the possibility for new kinds of orientations with the material world and religion to emerge. It is in this regard that framing the relation between religious and educational discourses in terms of *translation* is helpful for this dissertation.

Translation: Where religion and education can meet without merging

From the outset it is important to stress that translating insights from queer theologies across to the concerns of schooling entails abandoning any crude sense of translation as a matter simply of linguistic or conceptual exchange. Translating religious discourse over to educational discourse does not entail the latter adopting the identity of the former. Indeed, Stanley Cavell draws our attention to the 'projective' nature of language (1979, p. 180), to its inherent volatility when entered into with others. It is for this reason that Naoko Saito offers a view of translation as involving 'an attunement to what happens in the encounter between different languages … and this inevitability involves ordinarily the experience of a gap – of the incommensurable, of the untranslatable' (2018, p. 203). In recognising the element of incommensurability intrinsic to translation, we become implicated in the difficult experience of 'knowing that we do not know' (Alfonso & LaRocca, 2015, p. 15). Translation occasions a kind of transfiguration from one form of life to another, a moment of transformation that can be neither predicted nor prescribed (Standish & Saito, 2017). It is in light of this that translation erodes any hope at a representationalist view of the world. Translation is less a matter of finding identical equivalences between words or images (it is not about representation, in other words), and more a matter of performatively reorienting our ways of thinking in the face of the mysteriousness of language itself.

In this way, translation echoes my attraction to religious language as a discourse for thinking through questions of an educational sort. Religious language as a resource, and translation as a strategy, together offer education the chance to engage in a process with theology that is both spacious and contestable enough that

possibilities beyond the currently known or given can emerge.[18] Translating the insights of queer theologies to the concerns of schooling is to locate this thesis at the point at which 'paths of thought intersect' between the two registers, to use Saito's phrasing (2018, p. 203). It is to create a space where the metaphors, symbols, and tropes of the language of religion can speak to the commitments of education without the latter discourse being rendered reducible to the former (or, indeed, vice versa). It is because of this that I referred above to the weakness of religious language: encounters with religious language open up new ways of becoming in the world that have an ineffable indeterminacy irreducible to one form of discourse alone. Translation, in other words, allows the discourses of theology and education to come together in a manner that allows their 'intersecting' concerns to meet, without at the same time merging. While this 'meeting' will possibly (and probably inevitably) offer opportunities for new insights in both theology and education to bear fruit, it is only with respect to the latter that I proceed, owing largely to the disciplinary boundaries of this dissertation.

With this in mind, then, the question that now arises is one rooted in a consideration of how translation is *experienced* or *mediated*: translation takes places through a form of *relationship* of some kind. Translation never occurs in isolation, but is instead staged through a common concern for something (a text, an idea, an image, or an experience) and/or someone who *mediates* the intersecting concerns of those engaging with one another. The journalist who translates a newspaper article from French to English, for instance, builds an opportunity for both registers to come

[18] For an argument in favour of translation in terms of navigating questions of religious difference, education, and the limits of narration, see Bergdahl (2009). In this paper, Bergdahl argues for the appropriateness of translation in engaging with such questions on the grounds of translation's condition within an ethical process of 'risk, asymmetry, and uncertainty' (2009, p. 31).

together through the mediations of what is common to both (in this case, the incident being reported in the newspaper). The nuances and subtleties unique to the French language would inevitably be lost (at least a little) through this process, but the translation nonetheless occurs, in and through the French- and English-speaking readers' relationship to the core incident being shared. In translating queer theological insights across to education, then, a device is needed capable of mediating between both registers, bringing them together in ways that tap into and sustain the points of contact, the intersecting concerns, between each. It is here where the symbol of the Abrahamic threesome comes to the fore as a useful device.

II. The Abrahamic threesome: Queer theologies and schooling in translation

In translating the concerns of queer theologies across to schooling, I intend to use the symbol of the Abrahamic threesome as a tool for exposing and developing the points of contact between both discourses. The Abrahamic threesome is a device of my own creation, and looks like this:

Figure 2: The Abrahamic threesome

It is comprised of three elements: the cross (with a conventionally Christian heritage), the star of David (with a conventionally Jewish heritage), and the crescent (with a conventionally Muslim heritage). Each symbol is selected in an effort to expose four points of contact that I believe Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologies and schooling have in common, namely: embodiment (valorised through the cross); attention (valorised through the star of David); and repetition and creativity (valorised through the crescent). The Abrahamic threesome will be utilised as a way of grounding my analyses of queer theologies in a sensitivity to what more traditional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities might hold dear about these symbols, but in a way that also speaks to what my alignment of schooling with a weak form of queer politics also cherishes. In this fashion, the Abrahamic threesome is a device that is as much strategic as it is symbolic. It appeals to orthodox symbolism in an effort to bring more traditional religious voices 'with me' in this thesis (indeed, my appeal to *kerygma*, *ijtihad*, and *kavvanah* later on, as well as my erstwhile reference to Tillich, is motivated by similar impulses), for it is through engaging with past traditions and practices (within which we are already embedded) that the possibility of change can be enabled.

Furthermore, my arrangement of these different elements together is an attempt to communicate how these four points of contact mutually depend upon and inform one another. Embodiment, attention, repetition, and creativity are not totally disparate elements of each discourse, but are rather necessarily interconnected so as to emphasise their non-ultimacy, that is, the fact that these have neither a fixed nor discrete monopoly over the affinities between religion and education. Indeed, having the three symbols collectively constitute something entirely new and different to what they would otherwise achieve on their own is done to deliberately acknowledge the

fact that points of contact exist between queer theologies and education that can go beyond these four elements. As this chapter attests, religious symbols are not exhaustive, but ever-shifting and signifying poetic devices open to myriad other commonalities and dissonances across disciplines. In this vein, I choose to focus on these four elements alone because of their distinctive capacity to communicate each register's shared concern for *material* experience, without precluding the fact that other intersecting concerns might also exist between these discourses.

Developing the reasoning behind the nomenclature of this device more fully, I have termed the arrangement of the cross, star of David, and crescent as a 'threesome' for two reasons. First, I have done so to gesture to the fact that the translation I seek to offer aims at building upon, rather than denying, the implications it might have on how religion and queerness are conceptualised in schooling. Indeed, by bringing the religious and the (non-normatively and materially) sexual together, the Abrahamic threesome performatively embraces how the religious/queer divide can be interrupted through the engagement it stages between both discourses. Second, I have called this a threesome to draw attention to the fact that our religious and queer lives are so complex, so diverse, that when they are engaged with (both in terms of their material and embodied specificities, as well as through the intersecting concerns of religion and education) there will always be the possibility of something (or someone!) unexpected knocking on the door, much like the third party who arrives late to the *ménage à trois*! Furthermore, the fact that threesomes are typically forbidden within traditional Abrahamic forms of sexual ethics adds to the seemingly transgressive possibilities that this dissertation's translations might boldly allow for and enact.

Relatedly, in the 'Abrahamic' quality to the threesome's structure, I take liberties, not only with the conventional symbolic limits often set up between the cross,

the star of David, and the crescent, but also with the identitarian limits often demarcated between the faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam themselves. By having the symbols of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths merge together, I seek to suggest that by translating queer theologies across to education, this thesis has the capacity to engender a spirit of open-ended encounter between religion and education, in much the same way as practices of interfaith dialogue are so often predicated. Being a thesis committed to a weak and queerly disidentificatory conception of education, it is with the view to cultivating and supporting dialogue *beyond* the limits of identitarian difference that I image the Abrahamic threesome in these interfaith terms.

Materialising the Abrahamic threesome: Establishing 'points of contact'

In what follows, I intend to map how the Abrahamic threesome articulates a mutual concern for embodiment, attention, creativity, and repetition between religious and educational discourses. I firstly explore how these affinities are shared between my queer, political understanding of the school offered in chapter two, and more traditional readings of the cross, star of David, and crescent. From here, I turn to queer theologies specifically, arguing that these material emphases (in their *materiality*) also find an appropriate home there. It is largely in these terms, coupled with queer theologies' transcendent investments, that I suggest that queer theologies are the most suitable form of religious discourse to draw from in reimagining Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schooling beyond the religious/queer divide.

To begin with the cross. The cross in the Christian imaginary, with its intersecting horizontal and vertical axes, brings with it associations of bodily intensity and feeling fused inextricably with evocations of bodily release and other-worldliness.

In the spirit of Luther and his theology of the cross (Kolb, 2003), my reading of the cross's embodied evocations stems from the story of Christ physically tortured on the cross at Golgotha. The cross teaches us of our (horizontal) limits as embodied creatures, reminding us of our fragilities and vulnerabilities as finite and material beings, combined with the importance of recognising the active presence of the divine within the here-and-now of lived experience (what Luther might refer to as *Deus revelatus*). Simultaneously, though, the evocations of release I draw reference to gain their significance from the bodily resurrection that acts as the climax of the Easter story. The symbol of the cross orients our focus on the verticality of embodied life in its refusal to accept that what is in front of us in this world is all that could ever be. The verticality of the cross understands bodily life as a transitory thing, forever open to new and unexpected avenues of becoming, a transience, from a Christian perspective, that pales in the light of the transcendent revelation of God, a revelation beyond all human imagining (what Luther calls *Deus absconditus*).

Together the horizontal and vertical axes point in union towards an important dimension of what the school also attempts to achieve. Think back to my discussion of suspension in chapter two, and my emphasis on the importance of the teacher tactfully judging when to invite the world and its expectations into the classroom, and when to leave them out. This emphasis recognised the impossibility of totally bracketing off personal story and context from what is done in school, but at the same time also acknowledged the importance of avoiding granting the expectations of society (and their related identitarian investments) permission to determine what is studied in school and how, for this would succeed only in reproducing what has come before, and in this way robbing education of its transformative potential. To my mind, this tactfulness enacts a sensitivity to the simultaneous sense of embodiment and

disembodiment communicated in the cross through its receptiveness to who students are (materially), coupled with a refusal to pigeon-hole students' futures solely in these terms. In this way, the school shares with the cross a concern for disidentification in its commitment to putting something on the table for study with the view to being both receptive to, and *interruptive of*, the specificities of our students' embodied lives.

Next, the star of David (also called the *Magen Dawid*), a well-known symbol of the Jewish faith. One of the most famous engagements with the star of David can be found in the work of Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig (1971), particularly his publication *The Star of Redemption.* Rosenzweig utilises the image of the star of David to shed light on the relations between God, humanity, and the world, and the implications of these for our understanding of redemption. The top-most apex of the upward-facing triangle of the star is ascribed the assignation of 'God', with the vertices to the bottom left and right of the triangle relating to 'the world' and to 'human beings' respectively. Super-imposed on top of this is a downward-facing triangle labelled 'creation', 'revelation', and 'redemption'; the point of this configuration is to illustrate how the revelation of God is made manifest in the lives of human beings as they relate to one another in the created order of the world, lives made better in their immediacy to those of others. Indeed, as Kenneth Reinhard explains:

> For Rosenzweig, love of neighbour is not merely the first step on the path to redemption, the good deed that might help make the world a better place in some hypothetical future, but its realisation *now*, the immanent production of its transcendental conditions. The nearness of the neighbour materialises the imminence of redemption, releasing the here and now from the fetters of teleology in the infinitesimal calculus of proximity. (2005, p. 21)

The star of David gestures to the fact that redemption is not the culmination of a nebulously unattainable future, but is instead that which arises within the here-and-now of our relations with others. As Strhan (2012, p. 41) observes, it is the proximity

of the neighbour, their embodied closeness, that demands loving action and response. In this way, the star of David can be seen as calling for a kind of attention to the world, to what is here with us in the present moment.

It is in this regard I argue that the star of David pays credence to a fundamental experience that my reading of the school also values for students. The point of contact between religion and education that the threesome taps into here is the concern for a time and space for people to bear witness to the world and its riches, with the view to relating to that world differently, transforming it anew. This transformative understanding of attention as a form of relationship with who or what is other is valorised in the way that Masschelein and Simons call for an 'attention' to what is put on the table of the classroom for study and contemplation. This 'attention' allows for that which is being studied to transform in its scholastic freedom from the expectations and identities of the home and/or state. They write of how an attention to what is being studied in school involves 'constantly going outside of oneself or transcending oneself – going beyond one's own life-world by means of practice and study' (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, pp. 45-46). Taking the implications of this further, if the school is to enact a weak, queer politics of disidentification, then paying attention to what the world has to offer becomes something to which both the school and the star of David hold dear, as it is through such attention that the limits of how we identify and are identified are interrupted, and possibilities for personal and social transformation beyond the distribution of the sensible cultivated.

Lastly, a twin emphasis on repetition and creativity can be read as a characteristic feature of both the understanding of the school offered in this thesis, as well as of the rich symbolism of the crescent moon of Islam, also referred to as the *hilal*. There are numerous reasons for the crescent moon's inclusion in the Abrahamic

threesome, including its connections to the lunar calendar that structures the Muslim year. As John L. Esposito (2003) indicates, the sighting of the crescent moon is important in Islam for mandating when certain religious duties and practices ought to take place. This is grounded in the Qur'anic interpretation of the new moon as creating 'fixed seasons for humankind and for pilgrimage' (surah 2, verse 189). I see this as suggestive of an understanding of temporality as *repetitive* insofar as the lunar calendar annually invites Muslims to participate in observances such as Ramadan. Simultaneously, though, I also see the crescent moon as shedding light upon an understanding of temporal experience that is as much *creative* as it is repetitive. I suggest this for two reasons: first, because the new moon is not in the same state at the same time globally, thereby altering the dates of key observances each year; and second, because the occurrence of such observances is marked by the uniqueness of the material contexts in which Muslims find themselves, a uniqueness informed by circumstances of time and place that are as diverse as the members of Muslim communities themselves. Furthermore, the crescent moon takes on a creative quality in the threesome when we consider its roots within the founding story of Islam, where the expansion of the religion was dependent on merchants traversing their wares across desert trade routes by night (Clark Northrup, 2003, p. 539). This latter association of the *hilal* with an understanding of community brings creativity to the forefront of my mind when we consider that it was through the work around which it centres itself that the Muslim community *emerged.* This is significant as it allows for the crescent to communicate the fact that communities are inherently creative entities: relationships are not statically self-replicating, but instead develop unpredictably in response to the circumstances of people living material lives with others.

This interpretation of the crescent moon as gesturing to simultaneous notions of repetition and creativity are affinitive with the weakness of the school when we recall the profanation grounding the scholastic. For Masschelein and Simons, the democratic character of *scholè* comes to the fore in rendering profane those forms of knowledge that would otherwise have been granted the preserve of the privileged few. On this meaning, the 'things' being studied in school become 'detached' from regularity, no longer 'sacred or occupied by a specific meaning', and in this manner 'are made free and available for public use' so as to 'begin something new' (Masschelein and Simons, 2013, pp. 38-41). While I have already addressed the limits of claiming that what is being studied can be detached from its social context, what Masschelein and Simons suggest about what *happens* to what is studied in school is nonetheless significant: by granting access to knowledge to all, the school divests such knowledge from the inequities often identified with it, and because of this opens up opportunities for alternative futures to arise, futures with roots in something from the world put on the table for study. The rootedness in the world of what is already being studied is important, I feel, in its *repetitive* dimensions: the subject matter of the school does not arise from a vacuum, but is instead handed down by the teacher, *repeated* in the act of being shared as a matter of common interest in the classroom. Repetition and creativity, two central aspects of what the *hilal* communicates, come together in the subject matter supporting the teacher's efforts at drawing 'young people into the present', beyond identity (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 36).

Having developed how the Abrahamic threesome can be used as a device for indicating the shared points of contact between religious and educational discourses, it now becomes necessary for me to develop why I turn specifically to queer theologies over other kinds of discourses around religion in carrying out this translating work.

Indeed, why couldn't I have drawn from sociological accounts of religion, or from philosophies of religion? Why theology? And, specifically, why *queer* theologies? My reasoning for this is twofold. First, queer theologies are, however heterodox, still *theological* and in this way are necessarily tied to understanding 'the Holy'. I am interested in tapping into a discourse that is invested in the divine (and its attendant structures and its histories) for it is through a sensitivity to this kind of 'God-talk' that this thesis can strategically stage a more fruitful engagement between religious and educational registers, one around which those of a religious disposition might also rally. In contrast to, say, sociological accounts of material religion, which are largely 'agnostic' in their relationship to God or the supernatural (Vásquez, 2011, p. 5), queer theologies relate *more intimately* with the transcendent by *participating* in the study of that 'hiddenness' to which religious discourses gesture. Furthermore, it does so in a way that is normatively and *explicitly* committed to interrupting the conventional antagonism between religion and queerness. Queer theologies, being queer, do not accept that hetero- and cisnormative theologies are the only discourses available to us in coming to understand religion and God. In a thesis aimed at challenging this divide as it plays out in religious schooling, then, my appeal to queer theologies seems particularly pertinent.

However, by turning to queer theologies, do I not lose that sense of materiality to religion that I have been arguing for up till now? Indeed, does an engagement with a discourse that is largely built on theological *propositions* about God (however queer-positive) not run the risk of side-stepping the materiality of religion this thesis has been attempting to prioritise, particularly if these propositions relate to something necessarily *other-worldly*? To my mind, this is not so: queer theologies across the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions tend towards an

understanding of the infinite that is, to varying degrees, in relationship with the material lives we live. As we will see across the second part of this dissertation, all three traditions varyingly draw attention to the ineffable sense of limitlessness that comes with the 'teeming, sweaty heat' of the lives that we live: queer theologies emerge *in response* to the grittiness of queer and religious experiences. Indeed, as queer, transgender Jewish theologian and rabbi Elliot Kukla observes: 'God creates a diversity of bodies and an abundance of desires that is far too complex for human beings to understand. [This theology] conveys an understanding that all people are created … by the hand of heaven, and that every divine creation is entitled to be seen, loved, and desired' (Kukla, 2014, p. 148). On this meaning, queer theologies disrupt theological conservatism and affirm queer religious lives by orienting around an understanding of the transcendent that sees transcendence as residing in the immanent, without at the same identifying with the immanent. Transcendence is preserved in this reading, even as the material specificity of embodied life continues to be assured (Cornwall, 2011, p. 67).

These twin registers of transcendence and immanence are important ones for the queer theologian as they capture an understanding of the infinite or of the divine (Yahweh/God/Allah) that seeps through and vitalises the materiality of living things in ways that allow that which is finite to be seen as forever open to the possibility of becoming more than that. Such a view is distinctively queer in a theological sense as it destabilises monolithic, immoveable, and omnipotent views of God that are averse to, and divorced from, the unpredictable and contextual fleshiness of experience. This concern for the material is enacted perhaps most obviously in the religious symbolism that Marcella Althaus-Reid draws from in outlining her understanding of the work of queer theologians. She equates the work of the queer theologian to 'searching for

God's nipples and soft lips and trying to bite them in oblique ways in order to achieve some oblique transcendence in their lives' (2003, p. 49). Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood repeat this when they write of how queer theologians 'plunge into flesh in its unrefined fullness in order to embrace and be embraced by the divine. Bodies tell very complex and challenging stories and these now become the stuff of the salvific tale' (2007, p. 310). For queer theologians, in summary, God is to be found within the here-and-now, though is also simultaneously and necessarily other than the here-and-now, for it is in God's otherness that that which is here (that which is immanent) gains the possibility of becoming otherwise (of disidentifying, if you like).

Having established the appropriateness of queer theologies for this dissertation, it now falls on me to outline *how* this engagement will unfold. What structure will the second part of the dissertation follow in staging the translation between religion and education, in queering, in other words, the religious school?

III. Framing what is to come

The second part to this thesis aims at rethinking religious schooling by queering three dimensions of religious school life: 1) the *religious teachings* that are pedagogically engaged with in the religious school; 2) the *religious values* that are fostered through the religious school; and 3) the *religious rituals* that students in religious schools often participate in. Each chapter will exhibit a parallel structure in relation to the others in building its argument, as follows:

Figure 3: Chapter structure

The progression of each chapter

Element of the religious school	***How these will be 'weakened'***	***'Weak' theological concepts***	***Queering these theological concepts***	***Returning to the school through translation***
4. Teachings	Liminality	*Kerygma*	Erickson, Althaus-Reid, Gleibman, Shannahan	
5. Values	Fostering	*Ijtihad*	Queer life narratives	
6. Rituals	Publicness	*Kavvanah*	Garrigan, Crasnow, Kukla	

Each chapter focuses on three elements (namely, religious teachings, values, and rituals) that are often conceptualised in 'strong', deterministic, and identitarian terms. I begin by engaging with a concept engaged with in educational theory (pedagogical liminality, fostering, publicness) that has the ability to 'weaken' how these elements are understood. From here, I identify an orthodox theological concept within the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions (*kerygma*, *ijtihad*, and *kavvanah* respectively) that has the potential of being read in these 'weaker' ways. This is done to suggest that the *weaker kind of relationship* that education might render possible for people in terms of religion is coherent within the internal logics of more orthodox interpretations of each of these traditions. As noted earlier, this attention to more

orthodox discourses is done so as to open up the possibility of those of a more traditional bent 'coming along with me' as I develop my arguments. At the same time, though, in an effort not to lose sight of this dissertation's explicitly queer and material take on religious discourses, each chapter then moves to reflecting on the *queer significances of this interpretative work* by engaging with queer theological perspectives within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The chapter concludes by translating these queer theological insights back across to the embodied, attentive, repetitive, and creative dimensions of the school's queer political endeavours through the device of the Abrahamic threesome. In this way, each chapter ends where it begins: with a focus on education.

This structure notwithstanding, two exceptions exist within it worth noting. The first is in chapter five: rather than queer theologies, I choose instead to engage with queer Jewish, Christian, and Muslim *life narratives* in reflecting on the pertinence of *ijtihad* for queering the values engaged with in religious schooling. While scope exists within queer theologies to address the question of religious values, I analyse queer life narratives instead in order to honour fostering's emphasis (as we will see) on our embeddedness already within living traditions. The values religious people engage with are not like manna from heaven, bearing down upon us from on high, but are instead living and breathing practices and experiences embodied and reimagined within the specificities of the stories we live and share together. The narratives chosen, however, feature those for whom God and the transcendent is of central importance in life, so the need to stage a relationship between religion and education that allows for, rather than impedes, an encounter between both is sustained. The second exception is chapter six, where I focus on queer Jewish and Christian accounts of ritual, but not on queer Muslim perspectives. This is because there are no such accounts of ritual within

queer Muslim theological scholarship, though it is my hope that what the chapter offers for religious schooling might nonetheless speak to Muslim communities in some way through the *hilal* of the Abrahamic threesome.

As a parting word, while other dimensions of school life could also have been queered in this thesis (religious school leadership, for instance, or the relationship between parents and religious schooling) my choice of queering religious schooling through the lens of these three particular facets of religious school life is done to deliberately shed light on those aspects of school that directly involve the material presence of students and teachers working together. My interests in teachings, values, and rituals is rooted in a desire to bring 'the chalkface' of the classroom centre stage, so to speak. I explicitly seek to queer religious schooling in ways that have as their starting point the particularity of the day-to-day activities between students and teachers. As I outlined in chapter one, religious schooling has become too readily aligned within the literature to 'strong' conceptions of education that put the interests of propositional orthodoxies and their attendant identitarian investments ahead of those for whom the school exists: its students. This is not to suggest that other characteristics of school life (such as school leadership or parental involvement) are incapable of being conceptualised with these priorities in mind: indeed, I would be eager to think through how the queer significances of *kerygma*, *ijtihad*, and *kavvanah* might reshape how we imagine these things. However, such other facets do not feature in the flesh-and-blood immediacy of the relationship between student and *teacher* (at least not as directly), so it is for this reason (coupled with the limits of the dissertation) that they are not included in the second part to this thesis. Bearing in mind the above, then, I turn now to the first chapter of part two, which has as its focus a queer understanding of pedagogy in religious schooling.

PART TWO

Queering religious schooling:

Responding to the call from the past

CHAPTER FOUR

Queering religious teachings: Liminal pedagogy and kerygma

> Come, I shall show you the world. The way into a world, my world, and yours. (Van Manen, 1991, p. 38)

The pedagogical work of school is often connected to the teacher's responsibility for leading the child into the world. In much of the literature reviewed thus far, the religious school is also read as committed to leading children into the world, in particular the religious world with which the school is identified, specifically in terms of its teachings, that is its doctrines and sacred texts.[19] Interpreted in this manner, engaging pedagogically with such teachings often becomes associated in the religious school with 'strong' practices of religious identity formation, understood in propositional terms. In the teacher-student relationship, the teacher becomes vested with the charge of bringing students into the faith by passing on what a religion believes in or teaches about the world and the divine.[20] Given this dissertation's commitment to the weakness of education (enacted through a queer political conception of the school) such a view of pedagogy becomes incongruous, not least in terms of reducing pedagogy to an instrument for fulfilling the demands of the teacher, the family, and/or religion. Furthermore, it labours heavily under a propositional

[19] I frame 'teachings' in terms of 'doctrines' and 'sacred texts' in this chapter because, while both certainly inform the other in terms of what is 'taught' by religious traditions, there is nonetheless an important difference between them worth preserving, not least in terms of opening up the possibility of either becoming something different to what they are in terms of the other.

[20] Interpretive and conversational approaches to the teaching of religion go some way in dissociating religious education from deterministic accounts of pedagogy (Cullen, 2013, pp. 107-154). Strhan's (2010) assessment of critical realist and phenomenological accounts of religious education also gestures to the need for an alternative conception of religious education beyond religious identity formation, understood in propositional terms.

account of religion that risks losing sight of the complexities of religious teachings as material and embodied realities. How, then, are we to engage with the teachings of religions in the religious school? Can religious teachings be conceived of differently, in ways that embrace pedagogy's transformative and embodied capacities, and in this manner respond to the limits raised above?

With the view to achieving these ends, this chapter offers an understanding of pedagogy that is *liminal*, i.e. the relationship between teacher and student is one that is both embodied and disembodied simultaneously.[21] I argue for this liminal reading of pedagogy on the grounds that it preserves the transformative dimensions of the pedagogical relationship. These dimensions are built on the open futures that arise when students are offered the chance, through the authority of their teachers, to engage with the teachings of religion in untold and unpredictable ways, an unpredictability that arises from the flesh-and-blood realities that shape and inform those teachings that are put on the table for study. In an effort to translate these liminal pedagogical insights across to religion, I focus on the concept of *kerygma*, which in the Christian tradition relates to the idea of 'preaching' or 'proclamation', particularly the preaching of the Gospel. I engage with Pope Francis's (2013) interpretation of *kerygma* to demonstrate the pertinence of the view that 'to teach', in Christian terms, is to frame the relationship between teacher and student in ways that are attuned to the potentialities inherent to the embodied nature of what is 'taught' or proclaimed by religion. I develop this further through an engagement with queer theological discourses across the Christian (Erickson, Althaus-Reid), Jewish (Gleibman), and Muslim (Shannahan) traditions. Following this latter analysis, the Abrahamic threesome is utilised to translate these

[21] James Conroy's (2004) work is valuable in understanding the place of liminality in theorising around education. For this chapter, I turn to Todd rather than Conroy for her more explicitly *embodied* conception of liminality.

queer religious insights with a sensitivity to the embodied, attentive, repetitive and creative dimensions of the school. The chapter concludes with the argument that a queering of religious schooling entails a view of pedagogy in the religious school that is invested in offering students the chance to engage with the teachings of religion, but in ways that allow for the possibility of those teachings to change and transform in indeterminable ways. Pedagogical liminality imagines the relationship between student and teacher in the religious school as fundamentally pedagogical, and because of this is removed from attempts to inevitably reduce the school's pedagogical practices to the preservation of religious teachings (and their attendant identities). It is with this argument in mind that this chapter's understanding of 'pedagogy' itself becomes important.

I. Understanding pedagogy in the religious school

The term 'pedagogue' derives from the Greek and refers to 'the watchful slave or guardian' of ancient Greece, whose 'responsibility it was to lead (*agogos*) the young boy (*paides*) to school' (Van Manen, 1991, p. 37). For Van Manen, this understanding of the pedagogue as 'leading' the child to school ties pedagogy to the everyday instances of living with children, instances that gain their pedagogical significance in the responsiveness of the adult to the child as they invite them into a world that is at once both strange and unknown. In other words, with students and teachers in mind, pedagogy can be seen as fundamentally relational, relying on the possibility of the student *becoming* somebody other to who they were through an encounter with a world beyond their own knowledge and experience.[22] The student's relationship with the

[22] It is important to note that pedagogy is not limited to the relationship between teachers and students in classrooms. Indeed, as Todd (2014) makes clear, all relationships (between human and non-human

teacher is crucial in this regard, for without the responsiveness of the teacher the student is left simply to their own devices and is thus denied the invitation into the world that is often needed for them to become otherwise.[23] At its heart, then, pedagogy is concerned with both cultivating and responding to the kinds of conditions and encounters that allow for us to alter and transform our current selves and circumstances. In this way, pedagogy can be seen as indicative of the educational relationship *par excellence*, for it is in the becoming otherwise of subjectivity that we are offered the chance to shift the boundaries of what can be sensed and experienced in this world. The understanding of pedagogy offered here resists the charge of being read as 'strong', overly-deterministic or instrumentalist in the fact that change and becoming 'is not always dependent upon the intentionality behind the circumstances' (Todd, 2014, pp. 232-233).

As any teacher will concur, what happens in our classrooms will always transcend whatever plans the teacher had for their lesson. While conventional perspectives on religious schooling might frame pedagogy in terms of a self-fulfilling set of intentions that the teacher is obliged to work towards for the betterment of religion and/or state, the conception of pedagogy offered in this chapter is characterised by an open-endedness that embraces, rather than denies, the unexpected consequences of our relations with each other. On this meaning, what I argue for in this chapter is for a pedagogical engagement with the teachings of religion (its doctrines and texts) in the religious school that attends to the possibility of these (and

alike) can be read as pedagogical insofar as they entail a change or alteration in the subject. For Todd, what renders the teacher-student relationship pedagogically distinctive is its explicit and intentional concern for transformation in some form.

[23] In this vein, I am reminded of the etymological roots of education in *educare* (meaning 'to lead into') and *educere* (meaning 'to lead out of') (Groome, 1999). Pedagogy, as I present it in this chapter, enacts this leading into and out of simultaneously, primarily through the work of the teacher in responding to their students.

our students) transforming in the face of the unpredictability of our embodied lives. This transformative open-endedness, arising as it does from a *bodily* form of pedagogical encounter between teacher and student, begins from a refusal to limit students' futures along identitarian lines, for modes of (religious) identification collapse in the face of the irreducibility of bodily life. The understanding of pedagogy argued for in engaging with religious teachings in this chapter, then, rests on a view of human becoming as a complex process that exceeds being co-opted by a future already determined. Understanding what it is about pedagogy that occasions this complexity becomes clearer if we consider what Todd (2014) refers to as its 'liminal' qualities, so it is to this that I now focus my efforts.

Embodying the weakness of education: The liminality of pedagogy

For Todd, 'liminality' captures something of the indeterminacy of pedagogy, an indeterminacy lived out in its location 'in-between' body and spirit. Put differently, the pedagogical aspect of human experience entails an understanding of becoming that is both embodied and transcendent simultaneously. In concretising this idea, allow me to interpret an experience I had in my own schooling. I was six years old, and had been asked by my teacher to have my mother sign a worksheet we had completed in class the day before. On the morning the sheet was due, my mother was in work and therefore unable to give her signature to the page. Anxious, and with no other adults in the house at the time, I took out my school journal from my bag, studied my mother's writing from a previous note she had signed, took out a pencil (a give-away, perhaps!), and proceeded to forge her signature on the form. To my six-year-old mind, this was a guaranteed success: I had carefully crafted my capital 'B' to mimic the way

she exaggerated the curve on the base, and had tailed the ‘y’ in the same spikey fashion as the ‘y’s in my journal. Needless to say, my teacher spotted the forgery instantly. Rather than reprimand me though (as I had expected) my teacher instead decided to kneel down next to me at my desk to compare the forgery with one of the authentic signatures. We compared each letter, their shape and size, their angle on the page, and even practiced repeating the forgery to notice how each varying signature required me to position my fingers slightly differently on the pencil, and to carry myself in an alternative posture in my seat each time. To this day, I do not know what my teacher’s intentions were in this exercise. Maybe he wanted to impress upon me the wrongs of forgery. Maybe he aimed for me to appreciate the intricacy and craft of writing. Maybe he desired for me to simply produce a better forgery next time (though I hope not!). But irrespective of his intentions, I see that moment with him as deeply pedagogical, for it was in response to this experience that I appreciated for the first time the unrepeatable uniqueness of each person’s writing. Crucially, it was in the proximity of my teacher to me, his physical closeness as he had me examine my hand and my deportment in the chair, that allowed me to move beyond myself and learn a lesson, however simple that lesson might have been. The liminality of this moment comes to the fore in the aesthetic sensations that accompanied this experience (the beating of my panic-stricken heart, the closeness of my teacher, the feel of the pencil in my hand) combined with the related change in my own views and perspectives.

Todd emphasises how a liminal understanding of the pedagogical relationship is one that is sensitive to the ‘concrete, contextual nature of existing’ (2014, pp. 238-239). She writes of how ‘our becoming is in a sensible, material relation with an other which simultaneously enables us to exceed ourselves, to engage with the mystery of the unknowability of the other’ (2014, p. 241). Pedagogical

relationships take place in 'one's contact with an other in the here and now' of lived experience, a nearness 'through which the future opens up' to destinations unrealised and unimagined (2014, p. 242). The indeterminacy of the pedagogical relation is lived out in the unknowability of who or what might arise from the physical moment of encounter between teacher and student: leading students into the world and out of themselves is an unwieldy and unpredictable exercise that resists 'co-optation in an already defined future' (2014, p. 242). It is because of this that Todd makes the case for a view of pedagogy that is attuned to

> … the sensibilities incurred in the everyday contact teachers and students have with one another and how those sensibilities can then open up the question of becoming to a personal future that remains outside the dictates of politicians and other stakeholders in education. (2014, p. 242)

The liminality of pedagogy, conceived of in this way, brings certain demands on our understanding of the teacher-student relationship, not least in terms of how we come to see the authority of the teacher in their work, coupled with teachers' and students' relationships with the subject matter being studied in classrooms.[24] In what follows, I develop these points by grounding them in an attention to the religious school and how religious teachings are taught in such contexts.

Pedagogy and teacher authority

Embracing the indeterminate liminality of the pedagogical relation calls on us to recalibrate how we think about the authority of the teacher in moments of pedagogy.

[24] Of course, it would be too simple to suggest that pedagogy can be understood merely in terms of teacher authority and subject matter. I frame my analysis with these two particular dimensions of pedagogy in mind as it is in terms of the (faith formative) intentions of the teacher in relation to the (religious) subject matter being studied that religious schooling often understands its 'distinctiveness'. A survey of the literature overviewed in chapter one is indicative of this. Offering a queer understanding of pedagogy for religious schooling along the lines of authority and subject matter is therefore done to deliberately disrupt how pedagogy is conventionally conceived of in such contexts.

Indeed, the open future that inheres within the material processes of human becoming would appear to directly challenge those approaches to teaching that valorise the inevitable realisation of the teacher's personal intentions and priorities in their work. This is not to suggest of course that a teacher's personal intentions and priorities do not matter: indeed, how a teacher plans their lessons and relates to students is of great importance in the work of schools. What counts pedagogically, though, is how those intentions and priorities are framed and negotiated in the face of the unknowability of students' futures.[25]

In coming to terms with the implications of a liminal view of pedagogy on the authority of the teacher, returning to Van Manen is helpful, especially when he writes of how the role of the pedagogue involves 'a kind of "leading" that often walks *behind* the one who is led' (1991, p. 37). Typically, 'leading' evokes an image of being ahead of the person who follows you: pedagogically, though, the teacher leads, but from behind, in a way that does not seek to set out in advance what exact path the student takes as they are led out of themselves and into the world.[26] It is in a spirit akin to this that Aislinn O'Donnell calls for the need to 'sustain within our institutions the opportunity for unpredictable encounters … [for] it is an important element in the pedagogical relation and experience' (2013, p. 275). Teaching with authority, on this

[25] A tension exists between this embrace of the unpredictable, and how temporality is often framed within religious and theological discourses. Think, for instance, of more traditional conceptions of eschatology and the after-life, or of the notion of predestination in certain traditions of the Christian faith. An example of a queer theologian who disrupts such a view of temporality is Tonstad (2016), who develops an 'apocalyptic' view of eschatology characterised by an embrace of the unknown and unpredictable as central to divine-human experience.

[26] Such a view of teacher authority is different to how 'authority' might be evoked in, say, Freirean critiques of 'banking' approaches to education. For Paulo Freire (1989), 'banking' approaches reduce teaching to an 'authoritarian' kind of narration where students are treated as objects, rather than as subjects with the capacity to transform the world. Later in this chapter, I can be seen as similarly arguing for a view of the pedagogical relationship that recognises the student as subject, rather than object. This is achieved in the argument that a pedagogical engagement with the teachings of religion needs to be attuned to the possibility of those teachings transforming in unpredictable ways, much like the student themselves.

meaning, becomes less a matter of ironing out the ambivalences and uncertainties of human becoming, and more a matter of subtly sensing when unpredictable moments are arising in the here-and-now of present experience, and working with students 'to find ways to endure and pursue the consequences of [these moments] in a manner that supports transformation' (O'Donnell, 2013, p. 278). She continues:

> The authority of the educator comes into play as he or she works to create an alive, welcoming atmosphere, attuning him- or herself to sense those unforeseeable and unpredictable moments [*kairos*] that may constitute a pedagogical encounter for an individual student, while supporting the student in pursuing the implications of such a pedagogical event. (O'Donnell, 2013, p. 282)

Returning to my teacher, I think I can assume with confidence that he had not expected me to arrive to his classroom with a forged signature of my mother's! His authority as a teacher came into play, not by exercising power with the view to punishing me, but in his presumable attunement to the possibilities this unexpected moment could give rise to for me. Perhaps he had intended to teach me a lesson about the wrongs of forging the signatures of others. Perhaps he hadn't. In many respects these intentions are secondary: what mattered pedagogically was that my teacher tapped into ways of building upon the unexpectedness of the moment so that I, as his student, could learn something and, in this way, enter the world embracing a personal future intimately connected to, yet transcendent from, my current reality.

Pedagogy and subject matter

What is noteworthy about the approach of Masschelein and Simons to pedagogy is their grounding of it in the commitments of *scholè*: they ally the role of the pedagogue with making 'free or indeterminate time available to and possible for young people' (2013, p. 83). As I read them, Masschelein and Simons can be seen here as echoing

the views on pedagogy offered by Todd, particularly in her resistance to those efforts by some of education's stakeholders to close off the indeterminacy of pedagogical encounters. They stress the importance of understanding pedagogy in ways that are distinct from the productivities of the home and/or city/state: the 'scholastic time' of pedagogy is less about socialising students into 'the values of their family, culture or society' and is more about 'opening up the world and bringing the (words, things and practices that make up the) world to life' (2013, p. 84). Masschelein and Simons' analysis of the worldliness of pedagogy can be interpreted as escaping the charges of reproduction when they write of how pedagogy entails a view of the school's work that gives authority to the world 'not only by talking about the world, but also and especially by *dialoguing with* (encountering, engaging) it' (2013, p. 84). In short, the task of pedagogy is to ensure that the world speaks to young people, for it is through encountering a world that speaks to them that 'young people can experience themselves as a new generation in relation to the world, and as a generation capable of *making a new beginning*' (2013, p. 84). This latter emphasis on dialoguing with the world in order to 'make a new beginning' is central, for it allows the world that acts as the subject matter of the classroom (and the religious teachings that form part of that world) to escape the strictures of time and its productivities, opening up possibilities for a common and unknowable future that students can enter into transformed. Pedagogy thus cannot escape from the world, religion, and its teaching: it can, however, create the conditions for students to relate to those teachings differently.

It is because of this that I argue that the liminality of pedagogy in the religious school elicits the possibility of a *double transformation* of sorts: both of students and of the world, including its religions and their teachings. When I sat down for the first

time as an undergraduate student to study the Hebrew bible, the lecturer who taught me acted as pedagogue in offering me the chance to dialogue with a seminal text of religious and intellectual world history. This dialogue had a profound effect on me personally, not least in terms of how I understood Jewish teachings about God and transcendence. Simultaneously, though, the stories I studied from the Hebrew bible could themselves be seen as being transformed in this encounter, taking on new life in the sensed experiences and relationships embodied in the university library and lecture theatre. Pedagogy, in this vein, allows for the double transformation of self *and* world by putting religious teachings on the table for study as subject matter, and freeing them (and the student) up to the possibility of becoming otherwise. How, though, does such a reading of pedagogy allow for religious teachings to be engaged with in ways that disrupt the divide between religion and queerness? It is in this regard that the resonances of this chapter's argument with the work of queer pedagogy becomes helpful.

Religious teachings beyond the religion/queer divide

The open future that inhabits the liminality of the pedagogical relation calls for an approach to understanding pedagogy that I believe queer pedagogy successfully offers. In their paper entitled 'Queer pedagogy: Practice makes im/perfect', Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell seek 'to describe the goals, organising principles, content, and outcomes' of queer pedagogy, which they define as 'a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of "normalcy" in schooled subjects' (1993, p. 285). Central to this intervention, as I read it, is a view of pedagogy that seeks to destabilise the monolithic

ways in which essentialist identitarian narratives foreclose possibilities for becoming in the day-to-day embodied engagements between students and teachers. In moving towards a working construct of what a queer pedagogy might be in the context of a lesbian studies course, Bryson and de Castell suggest that it might be seen as 'a teaching against-the-grain or, in this particular case, an amalgam of "performative acts" … *enfleshing* a radical form of what we envisioned to be potentially liberatory enactments of "gender treachery"' (1993, p. 288, emphasis added). Their emphasis on how queer pedagogies 'enflesh' radical forms of 'gender treachery' is significant, I feel, in shedding light on how it is through an openness to the indeterminacy inherent to embodied conceptions of pedagogy that possibilities for students emerge with the potential to transgress the strictures of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and their limits. 'Teaching-against-the-grain', read in this manner, becomes a form of educational praxis where the disruption of the taken-for-grantedness of worldly sexual and gender constructs (amongst other normativities) is given the opportunity to be enacted. *How*, though, are such strategies enacted? It is here where Deborah Britzman's reading of queer pedagogies is useful.

For Britzman (1995), queer pedagogies are distinctive in their sensitivity to encountering and enabling resistances to 'legitimate' forms of knowledge, through which the unthinkable becomes thinkable, so to speak. She argues that queer theory when brought into conversation with pedagogy:

> … insists … that the relationship between knowledge and ignorance is neither oppositional nor binary. Rather they mutually implicate each other, structuring and enforcing particular forms of knowledge and forms of ignorance. In this way ignorance is analysed as an effect of knowledge, indeed, as its limit, and not as an originary or innocent state. (1995, p. 154)

In other words, Britzman understands pedagogy as interested in both what individuals cannot bear to know, as well as in what hegemonic discourses of normalcy ignore or

resist knowing. Queer theory, she suggests, 'can think of resistance as not outside the subject of knowledge or the knowledge of subjects, but rather as constitutive of knowledge and its subject' (p. 154). This is resonant with Suzanne Luhmann's alignment of queer pedagogy with forms of inquiry that interrogate 'the conditions [for understanding, or refusing, knowledge] that make learning possible or prevent learning' (1998, p. 148). Pedagogy, on this meaning, engages with those (at times uncomfortable and ugly) forms of knowledge and ignorance that are otherwise suppressed, forgotten, or denied, for it is in doing so that alternative (and potentially disruptive) possibilities for understanding ourselves and others bear fruit.

Britzman's refusal to dichotomise the relation between ignorance and knowledge in the pedagogical encounter is significant here for it allows me to form an understanding of queer pedagogy's relation to the subject matter of the world that has the potential to transgress the religious/queer divide. I argue that in attending to the world in a fashion that 'push[es] against the psychological resistance to particular disruptive knowledges' (Ammons, 2010, p. 138), queer pedagogies open a space for us to think about, and dialogue with, religion and its teachings in ways that are sensitive to what I call the 'underside' of religiously-inspired hetero- and cisnormativity, to the flesh-and-blood lives that shape and are shaped by the teachings of religion, as well as forgotten and denied. A liminal account of pedagogy thus speaks to the commitments of queer pedagogies in its sensitivity to the fleshiness of pedagogical experience, to the embodied forms of knowledge that hetero- and cisnormative interpretations of religious teachings often seek to forget or deny.[27] By enabling an approach to subject matter that is responsive to those knowledges that can

[27] For an account of hetero- and cisnormative religion's aversion to embodied experience, see Marcella Althaus-Reid's and Lisa Isherwood's (2007) perspectives on the relationship between queer theory and theology.

disrupt 'the tyranny of normalcy' (Ammons, 2010, p. 138), queer pedagogies offer the hope for a transformation of self and world rooted in an embodied responsiveness of the student (and teacher) to what is both known and ignored by religious teachings. They allow for this in their assumption that those knowledges and subjects that have been otherwise rendered unthinkable and unintelligible by the hegemonies of (hetero)normative religious discourse are, in fact, thinkable and intelligible *to begin with*, in and through the fact of our material and indisputable *thereness* as human beings. Engaging with the teachings of religion need not, therefore, be rendered reducible to the reproduction of hetero- and cisnormativity doctrines in the religious school. Indeed, the liminality of the pedagogical encounter calls for a kind of engagement with these teachings that allows for both themselves and students to become otherwise, recognising the non-ultimacy of religious teachings, and, in this way, transcending the inevitability of the religious/queer divide.

In summary, then, I began this chapter with a brief exposition of what I mean when I speak of pedagogy. I focused especially on the liminality of the pedagogical relationship, arguing that it is by understanding pedagogical relationships in terms of their simultaneously embodied and transcendent qualities that futures can be opened up that pay due regard to the transformative prerogatives of pedagogy's work. From here, I moved to the implications of such a view on questions of teacher authority and subject matter. I argued that the authority of the teacher is affirmed pedagogically when the teacher demonstrates sensitivity and responsiveness to the unexpected in the students' encounter with subject matter, an unexpectedness with the potential to engender transformation and change, both in students and in the world. I brought these insights to bear on the religious school in thinking through what it would mean to queer a pedagogical engagement with religious teachings beyond the religious/queer

divide. I made the case that queer pedagogy's concern for 'hidden' kinds of knowledge opens up the space for this kind of engagement, particularly through liminality's concern for the embodied nature of human living, a facet of experience often denied or maligned within hetero- and cisnormative interpretations of religious teachings. At this point, though, the question that remains is one of translation. Are there theological concepts at our disposal that can allow for us to sustain points of contact between engaging pedagogically with the 'hidden knowledges' of religious teachings and the concerns of religious discourses, in particular queer theological discourses? It is with this in mind that I turn to an exposition of the Christian concept of *kerygma*, and its relevance to the emphasis on embodiment in queer theologies.

II. Thinking with *kerygma*: Embodiment and theological irreverence

Kerygma (literally translating as 'proclamation' or 'preaching') has its roots in the earliest centuries of Christian history. It derives from the Greek *kérugma* and is used in foundational texts of the New Testament.[28] In the Gospel of Matthew, for instance, the word is employed to describe the activities of John the Baptist who heralds the coming of the Messiah in the figure of Jesus Christ: 'In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, *proclaiming* "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"' (Matthew, 3:1-2). *Kerygma* also features in the Gospel of Luke in Jesus's first self-declaration of his mission while worshipping in the synagogue at Nazareth: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to *proclaim* release to the captives and recovery

[28] The New Testament is distinct from the Hebrew Bible, which both Judaism and Christianity share. I write 'Hebrew Bible' rather than 'Old Testament' given the latter's association with antisemitism and theological supercessionism.

of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to *proclaim* the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke, 4: 18-19). Within discussions of theological and religious education, *kerygma* has often become tied to the teachings of religion (Devitt, 1992): to teach the Gospel is *kerygmatic* in the sense that it entails proclaiming the content of what many Christians consider to be the Good News. While *kerygma* might have been historically applied to contexts where Christian teaching was likened to 'strong' accounts of Christian education (where the preservation of fixed notions of Christian identity and behaviour was assured), I believe it is possible to consider a more expansive understanding of the term, one that connects *kerygma* to a weaker and more liminally pedagogical view of what it means to engage with the teachings of religion.

This more liberal and liminal reading of *kerygma* can be developed if we reflect on Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann's thoughts on the teaching of the Gospel: 'Christian preaching is *kerygma*, that is, a proclamation addressed not to the theoretical reason, but to the hearer as self' (1958, p. 36). Here, proclamation is predicated on its *situatedness*: to proclaim is to speak, not into the ether, but to a material, flesh-and-blood person or group of people who physically *hear* (through sensed experience) the teaching being shared. In this way, *kerygma* gains its significance, not in the supposed fixedness of the teaching, isolated from material realities, but in the *relational* quality to the encounter between teacher and student, preacher and people. St. Paul's use of *kerygma* in his letter to the Romans indicates the necessity of embodied relationship as the basis of proclaiming Jesus's message: 'And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim to him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"' (Romans, 10: 14-15). Notice how, like Bultmann, the teachings of those who proclaim Jesus's message are framed by Paul in terms of the

'hearing' those who bring the proclamation: here, *kerygma* relies on a teacher, a teacher, moreover, in embodied relationship with students who can listen to what they have to say.

Of course, having a teacher and student in embodied relationship does not safeguard *kerygma* from the threat of authoritarianism or indoctrination. Indeed, is *kerygma* not akin to strong accounts of pedagogy, where teaching is reduced to a monologue that presents doctrine in easily-replicable and uniform terms? In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis resists such a view of *kerygma*, particularly when he writes: 'It would not be right to see [*kerygma*'s] call to growth exclusively in terms of doctrinal formation' (2013, p. 127). In this vein, teaching the Gospel is less a matter of solely reproducing Christian identity through the tenets of the Christian faith (as some more traditional Christian educators might wish) and more about 'responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart' (Bergoglio, 2013, p. 130). While questions around the coherence of Pope Francis's position in light of wider Church statements around evangelisation and Christian witness are matters more for theology than education, for me *kerygma*, read in these terms, is nonetheless promising in gesturing to the potential for conceiving *kerygma* liminally, in ways that are open to the untold and unpredictable. This is suggested in the pontiff's understanding of *kerygma* that is as much affective as it is propositional: the teachings of the faith are shared in our relationships with others, relationships coloured and shaped by our contexts, stories, desires, and hopes for the future. To me, this is significant in tying a *kerygmatic* approach to religious teachings to notions of *freedom*. I quote *Evangelii gaudium* at length in developing this point:

> The centrality of the *kerygma* calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but

> appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical. (Bergoglio, 2013, pp. 130-131)

Here, *kerygma* is characterised by a 'liveliness' that side-steps monological accounts of the Christian Gospel. Teaching the Christian message is exposed to the possibilities inherent to human freedom and relationships in and through *kerygma*'s aversion to imposition and narrowly formulated doctrinal codes. Crucially, all this lends itself to a view of *kerygmatic* teaching that is, to my mind, weak: 'All this demands … certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgemental' (Bergoglio, 2013, p. 131). Through its receptiveness to the immediacies of our embodied relations with others, and the imbrication of these within the affective and material specificities of our lives, Pope Francis's view of *kerygma* is one that opens the teachings of religion up to possibilities beyond what the teacher or religion alone can determine or predict.

Returning to the religious/queer divide, though, can we conceive of Pope Francis's interpretation of *kerygma* in ways that open up possibilities for transcending this conventional antagonism as well as the more general (hetero- and cisnormative) limits of 'what is taught' or proclaimed? Indeed, when we consider the liminality of pedagogy, is it possible for *kerygma* to encapsulate a vision of being taught that opens up the possibility of challenging and subverting the traditional teachings of religious authorities, just as much as it might expand them? It is in this regard that I turn to queer theologies, in particular those accounts that reframe theology in more embodied, irreverent, and heterodox terms.

Irreverent theology: Embodying teachings beyond acquiescence

Within queer Christian theologies there has been an ongoing appreciation for the need to theologise in ways that extend and subvert the limits of what religious doctrines and texts typically teach us. This appreciation, to my mind, allows for an expanded understanding of a *kerygmatic* approach to religious teachings to emerge that rests on a view of teacher authority removed from acquiescence and inequity. The need for this becomes apparent when we consider Grace Jantzen perspectives on how we ought to understand the contours of queer theology in relation to traditional Christianity:

> For many who have had the straight rule of Christendom applied in hurtful and destructive ways, the answer is to slam the book shut altogether and have nothing more to do with this story. For some people that is surely a healthy response, not just 'understandable' in a condescending way, but a very good conclusion to the particular script they have been required to read. (2001, pp. 276-277)

Queer theologies, at least in terms of how they are framed here, are informed by an honest attempt to face, rather than deny, the injustices created and enacted through religion and its teachings. Queer theologies often arise from a need to imagine religion differently, and because of this are sensitive to theological methods, paradigms, and more 'fleshy' forms of knowledge that challenge, as well as reframe, the authority of what we are 'taught' by religions.

Jacob J. Erickson's (2018) 'irreverent' queer theology gestures to this impulse. Erickson characterises queer (Christian) theology as a 'poetry and practice of irreverent criticism' (2018, p. 60), luring forth 'responsibilities of wonder and ethical care where we thought they might not bloom' (2018, p. 74). On this meaning, theological endeavour takes on a 'carnivalesque' quality, 'constantly changing shape and drag' as it exposes and sustains the 'manifold instabilities' that inhere, inexhaustibly, within even 'the most stable or ordinary theological constructions' (2018, p. 74). Theological irreverence 'glances back and subtly rolls its eyes' at God,

embracing an ‘indecency’ that will appear, to some at least, as utterly ‘scandalous’ (2018, p. 62). He concedes that an irreverent theology necessarily upends much of what some people of faith might hold dear or sacred about God and religious teachings: ‘Disrespect is hardly my intention, though I most certainly flirt with such danger’ (2018, p. 61). In spite of this (or, indeed, because of it) Erickson proceeds anyway, for it is through such irreverence that the ‘devastation’ caused by static, omnipotent, and anthropocentric conceptions of God can be overcome (2018, pp. 61-62). If we bring this to our concern for teachings in the religious school, the dialogue staged by *kerygma* reaches its most dissident heights: what the teacher has to offer students is divested of its immutability and exposed to the challenge that comes through an encounter with difference. Crucially, this potential dissidence is mediated for Erickson through a sensitivity to the potentialities that inhere within the embodied nature of religious experiences. Erickson takes this up through the view that it is in an engagement with the material multiplicities of our embodied and material lives, to the ‘intra-carnational’ quality of the divine-human encounter (2013, p. 72), that the possibility of an ‘irreverent’ take on religious teachings is enabled and sustained.

Developing this more, Erickson frames his perspective on theological irreverence from the vantage point of sensed experience in order to free the body and creation from the limits of hetero- and cisnormativity. He writes of how his work ‘attempts to reopen or stir afresh the clogged senses of queer wonder in the world’ (2013, p. 63) with the view to reorienting theologies towards ‘the actual textures of planetary, earthly life’ (2013, pp. 60-61). In this regard, he argues that theological irreverence is invested in a ‘fragile, playful hope that queer bodies, queer failures and pleasures, and queer play and hope might offer some distinctive imagination’ (2013, p. 60) to the texts and teachings of theology, beginning from the assumption that

divinity is something that 'intra-acts' and 'performs with the deep materiality of the becoming of the world' (2013, p. 72).[29] He writes of how 'divinity bursts and becomes in the most unexpected, elemental places, stirring up new possibilities for relationality, speaking back in scorched spaces, and seducing creatures in a fleshy display of queer play' (2013, p. 73), and argues that it is in response to this bodily and creaturely potentiality, with its implications for transforming our lives in ever-shifting processes of becoming, that theological irreverence arises and is necessitated.

Erickson is not alone in tying queer Christian theologies to such an embodied view of irreverence. Indeed, irreverence is at the heart of the theology of Marcella Althaus-Reid, a bisexual queer and Latin American theologian considered to be the 'founding mother' of queer Christian thought. On sketching out what it means to speak of 'queer theology', Althaus-Reid writes the following: 'Queer theology is basically an example of high theological doubting or queering, irreverent in the sense that it tends to desacralize what has been made sacred for the sake of ideological interests' (2001, p. 58). Like Tonstad in chapter three, for Althaus-Reid queer theology enacts its 'theological' qualities when its disrupts, rather than reproduces or solidifies, theological constructions of God. Indeed, she writes of how 'one of the most important characteristics of Queer theology' is its 'passion and ability to de-familiarise us with the accepted, with the God-norm' (2001, p. 62). In this way, there 'is nothing quite like Queer theology for making fun of idols' (2001, p. 58): it participates in 'Outing' theology in the sense that queer theology engages in an ongoing process of exposing traditional theology's hetero- and cisnormative hypocrisies and idolatries, with the

[29] Erickson draws from feminist materialisms in developing this perspective, in particular the work of Barad (2007).

view to grappling with an understanding of God that transcends such limits (2001, p. 60).

Crucially, the process of 'Outing' theology entails tapping into and building upon the unexpectedness of what arises through an engagement with personal story and material experience. Queer theologies are interested less in pinning down a comprehensive theology of God, and more in exposing such theologies to the messiness of human living, a messiness through which alternative possibilities beyond the norm can be necessitated and cultivated. Althaus-Reid makes this point when she explores how the themes of queer theology 'come from life. From the ordination of women in the ministry to the ethical challenge of the globalisation of capitalism, all themes are pertinent for a Queer theology. Life in itself is the Queerest of themes in theology' (2001, p. 64). She writes (with Lisa Isherwood) of how the divine relates to the flesh within her irreverent understanding of queer theological praxis by drawing from the incarnation in the birth of Jesus Christ:

> That the divine immersed itself in flesh and that flesh is now divine is Queer Theology at its peak. There can be no sanitisation here or something of the divine essence will be lost – it is not the genetically modified, metaphysical son of god that declares the divine-human conjunction, but the screaming baby born amidst the cow shit and fleas, covered in his birthing blood … (2007, p. 310)

In other words, it is by virtue of the infinitude that inheres within the particularities of living that the inadequacies and violence of hetero- and cisnormative doctrines and texts are irreverently rendered, not only inadequate, but inexcusable. In light of this an alternative imaginary for God becomes necessary. It is on this meaning that Althaus-Reid aligns queer theological work to the 'transgressive and provocative' (2001, p. 67) project of building up of an alternative 'Kingdom of God', one where the hypocrisies and idols of hetero- and cisnormative church teachings are no more.

Returning to a *kerygmatic* account of pedagogy, one built on an embodied sensitivity to hidden and unpredictable kinds of knowledge that underpin the teachings of religion, this emphasis on theological irreverence holds much promise, for it emulates our earlier pedagogical claim that the teacher does not have total control over the classroom. Indeed, by challenging the monopoly of hetero- and cisnormative theologies, the queer theologies outlined here enact a subversion of traditional church teaching, what Althaus-Reid calls a 'propheticism *in dialogue* with difference' that allows for alternative futures to open up and flourish (2001, p. 63, emphasis added). Queer theologies, in short, offer an approach to religious teachings through which a *kerygmatic* take on the teachings of faiths can be expanded and embodied beyond the religious/queer divide.

But what of the subject matter of pedagogy in the religious school beyond the 'doctrinal' aspect of religious teachings specifically? Is it possible, for instance, to think through these insights for engaging with the sacred texts or scriptures of religious traditions? Are there resources within queer theology that permit a double transformation of both self and world in ways that open such texts up to the potentialities inherent within the materialities of experience? It is in this regard that queer Jewish and Muslim accounts of theological hermeneutics become valuable.

Materialising subject matter: Queer Jewish and Muslim hermeneutics

Queer theological scholarship over the past two decades has engaged extensively with the question of theological hermeneutics (that is, the study and interpretation of sacred texts such as the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, or Qur'an, with the view to understanding more fully the nature of God's self-revelation on earth). This area of

focus began with a concern for deconstructing the conventional opposition often set up between biblical and Qur'anic texts on the one hand, and queer identities and experiences on the other. Much of these efforts were characterised by reading strategies that often fell into one of two domains: first, a refusal to accept that the biblical and Qur'anic texts ever condemned homosexual activity, with textual condemnations of same-sex activity being seen simply as misnomers in translation and/or interpretation across time; or second, an acceptance of the possible biblical and Qur'anic indictment of homosexuality (given the historicity of the texts themselves), combined with a commitment to reimagining these texts creatively for the present day. With respect to the second of these strategies, there exists a diversity of approaches in turn. Some writers claim that there have been queer streams in sacred texts all along (from queer characters and motifs, to queer rejections of heteronormative ideologies often tied to biblical tropes like procreation) that are simply in need of rediscovery and reclamation, while others suggest that queer resistances to the dangerous legacies of the bible and Qur'an are needed through an active renewal of how we understand and approach sacred texts to begin with.[30]

This latter commitment finds resonance in the Jewish tradition if we consider, as one example among many, the work of queer Jewish studies scholar Shlomo Gleibman, who offers an analysis of how the emergence of queer subjectivities in Jewish culture is made possible through an approach to Torah[31] study rooted in a 'queer hermeneutical strategy of (dis)identification' (2017, p. 6).[32] Gleibman grounds

[30] For an overview of the kinds of debates characterising these varying approaches to queer theological hermeneutics, see Cornwall (2011), pp. 114-146.
[31] The Torah ('Teaching') is the first part of the Hebrew Bible, and consists of five books (known collectively as the Pentateuch). The Torah forms part of the Tanakh, alongside the Nevi'im ('Prophets') and Ketuvim ('Writing') – hence TaNaKh. The Mishnah is distinct from these again, though is often called 'oral Torah'.
[32] Examples of other scholars who have written about homoeroticism in relation to Jewishness, queerness, and the Hebrew Bible include Martin Nissinen (1998), Howard Eilberg-Schwartz (2001),

this strategy in a conceptualisation of the Jewish yeshiva (that is, an institution in Jewish communities committed to the study of traditional Jewish texts) that is sensitive to the potentialities inherent within homosocial study partnerships (called *hevruta*). In other words, Gleibman is interested in thinking through the ways in which the yeshiva's conventional structuring of Torah study along male-and-male partnerships allows for forms of selfhood to emerge that point to the place of erotic desire in hermeneutical experience, forms of selfhood that challenge (or '(dis)identify) conventional boundaries often set up between and within such categories as 'Jewishness' and 'queerness'.[33]

Gleibman argues that possibilities for reimagining Jewish culture (and their concomitant selfhoods) arises when we tap into the ways in which the *hevruta* is charged with an erotic quality that subverts the strictures of heteronormative hermeneutics through the *hevruta's* embrace of homosexual relations. What does he mean by this? Is Gleibman claiming that every study partnership engaged in at the yeshiva ought to be sexual? Not quite. For Gleibman, the homoeroticism of the *hevruta* is to be understood as a 'polymorphous' (2017, p. 4) form of eroticism, an eroticism that arises from the proximity of two men studying the Torah alongside one another

Stephen Moore (2001), Susan Ackerman (2005), Theodore Jennings (2005), Ken Stone (2005), Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser and David Shneer (2009), and Lori Hope Lefkovitz (2011). Gleibman serves as my primary interlocutor here for his specific interests in the relationship between reader and text in the *practices* of Torah study, particularly in terms of the place of embodiment, affect, and desire therein. These emphases are valuable for my analysis as Gleibman frames them explicitly in terms of their relation to the potential transformation of queer and Jewish subjectivities, an effect to which, in my view, the practices of pedagogy, read *kerygmatically*, are also directed.

[33] It should be noted that Gleibman offers his conclusions through an analysis of a number of fictionalised 'yeshiva narratives', a sub-genre of American-Jewish literature interested in male same-sex desire in the context of *hevruta* study partnerships. Gleibman turns to fiction to make his arguments for 'this type of representation differs from dominant, normative constructions of Jewishness and queerness, from heteronormative and homonormative models of desire' (2017, p. 1). In particular, Gleibman brings insights from the novels of Michael Lowenthal (1999) and K. David Brody (2009) to bear on how we think about Torah study practices, insights that allow him to resist 'dominant binary discourses' between Jewishness and queerness (2017, p. 1).

with intellectual rigour and passion.[34] While by no means ruling out the possibility of sexual intimacy in *hevruta*, Gleibman describes this erotic form of relation in 'polymorphous' terms to allow for an expansive understanding of homosexual desire, one that is also tied to the ambivalences of affect and intimacy. In relation to the erotic, he writes of how sexual and affective desires constitute 'a continuum rather than a binary, as a major way of shifting the organisation of sexuality from repression, domination, and alienation under the performance principle to the immediacy of connection and relation' (2017, p. 4). Put differently, Gleibman sees the homoeroticism of the *hevruta* as indicative of the kinds of 'fun and fulfilling' relationships (intellectual, erotic, affective) that engaging with Torah can potentially engender between men, relations that are liberated from conventional heterosexual imaginaries that often ally male intimacy with sin, atomistic competition, or death.

Indeed, Gleibman goes on to suggest that the practice of *hevruta* is indicative of a 'text model' of queer desire, where relationships between men are imagined in all their diversities and beauty, and not reduced simply to acts of phallic penetration or imposed celibacy. In coming together in the yeshiva, the study partners embody a different kind of (potentially sexual) relation between men, relations that embrace a spectrum of erotic practices (such as watching, contemplating, and being looked at; speaking, intoning, and listening; touching, near-touching, holding, and pressing; dancing and spinning; embracing and kissing) (Gleibman, 2017, p. 19). Importantly, these practices manifest and enable Jewish intellectual life in all its pluralities and

[34] I write 'men' as it is specifically in terms of masculinity and homosexuality that Gleibman reflects on the yeshiva, hevruta study partnerships, and their value for rethinking theological hermeneutics. Sexism and (white) male-dominance in queer theory and theologising has been identified by Cornwall (2011, p. 73). My turn to Shannahan (2010) below is an attempt to respond to this limitation.

paradoxes, for it is in their uncontainability and unpredictability that possibilities beyond the immediately sensible are redistributed and brought to the fore.

Crucially, what allows for these intimate forms of relation to unpredictably bear fruit is *the text itself that is being studied.* The Torah is seen as mediating the homoerotic connections of male students or scholars to one another (2017, p. 9). In this 'text' model of queer desire, the 'text' (the image of the text itself or the images of the text's narrators and characters with whom the readers identify) is a mediate, connecting point between male partners studying it together in an 'erotic' triangle of sorts (Gleibman, 2017, p. 9). In this construction, Gleibman sees the eroticism of Torah study as enabling aspects of queer subjectivity to emerge that sometimes remain unrecognised in mainstream religious and gay cultures: for instance, that one can be Jewish and queer, that the intellect has just as much a role to play as passion in the embodiment of (sexual) desires, that 'to be' male need not entail a denunciation of traditionally 'feminine' expressions of intimacy and love, and so on. So while the men begin their engagement with classical Jewish texts by identifying with the text and the textual process, Gleibman sees the activities of the *hevruta* as ultimately enacting an exegesis of '(dis)identification' for it is in the desire-filled exchanges with the text that the fixedness of the men's identities are queerly resisted, and new (nonbinary and nonphallocentric) opportunities for becoming and relationship opened up. In this way, a queer Jewish hermeneutical approach can be read as one implicated in the transformation of (queer and religious) subjectivities.

But what of the texts themselves? In the 'erotic triangle' of the *hevruta*, is there scope for the text to be itself transformed by the readers' partnered approaches, its significances borne out in new and unexpected ways? Is there space within queer theological scholarship more broadly for an understanding of sacred texts as

themselves living and breathing documents that shift and transform in response to the particularities of time, place, and the 'hidden' kinds of knowledges attendant with these? Indeed, the reading of the *hevruta* engaged with above is exclusively male-centred: what might an engagement with sacred texts look like if the 'hiddenness' of, say, women's experiences were brought into focus? It is here that the works of Muslim scholars Kecia Ali (2006) and Dervla Shannahan (2010) become relevant, in particular their respective responses to Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle's (2003) strategies for reinterpreting the Qur'anic Lut narrative in queer ways.[35]

For Shannahan, the Lut narrative exists as 'a necessary battleground for queer believers' across the varying Abrahamic traditions (2010, p. 676). To summarise, the story begins with Allah's calls for monotheism being continually resisted by the people of Sodom. In an attempt to test the character of the community, Allah sends two angels to the Prophet Lut, who responds by offering them shelter in his home. The townsfolk, angered by the arrival of the angels, accost Lut's home, and in the process attempt to sexually assault them in turn. Lut's response is to continue to persuade them to be fearful of Allah, offering the would-be assaulters his daughters in exchange for the angels. The story ends by the community refusing Lut's offer, and Allah destroying the city of Sodom in punishment. This text, in its Qur'anic[36] and biblical manifestations, has been conventionally positioned across the varying traditions as a

[35] It should be noted that the field of queer Muslim hermeneutics is much younger than that in Christianity and Judaism. Nonetheless, queer Muslim hermeneutics is slowly emerging in theological discourse, both as a field of scholarship (Kugle, 2003, Ali, 2006, and Shannahan, 2010), as well as a form of religious practice. However, the literature within the former body of work often refers to Jewish and Christian queer theologies in its theorising. Yip (2005) offers an important overview of some of the leading hermeneutical practices engaged with by queer Muslims in engaging with the Qur'an and other Islamic religious texts. These are: 1) critiquing traditional interpretations of specific passages in texts; 2) challenging the interpretative authority of religious structures and figures; and 3) re-casting religious texts anew (Yip, 2005, p.51).

[36] The Qur'an is the main religious text of Islam, and consists of 114 chapters (known as surah). It is distinct from the Sunnah (the body of traditional social and legal customs of Islam) and hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad).

'clobber' passage expressly condemning homosexual sex acts between men. Indeed, as Ali observes, the narrative has functioned (and continues to function) as 'the constant referent for both classical and contemporary discussions of all same sex activity' (2006, p. 82), discussions in which 'spiritual corruption has been reduced to sexual transgression' (2006, p. 83). In an attempt to move away from heteronormative interpretations of the Lut narrative, Kugle offers an alternative, queer-positive reading of Allah's destruction of Sodom premised on an 'ethical' rather than 'juridical' hermeneutic (2003, p. 223). For Kugle, the Qur'an's 'vivid portrayal of diversity at so many levels of the natural and human world' (2003, p. 199) renders it illogical that Allah should condemn Sodom on the basis of homosexual sex acts. In this vein, Kugle argues that Allah's punishment is less about the penetrative nature of anal sex, and more about responding to the sins of Sodom's people, sins to be understood in terms of 'infidelity through inhospitality and greed, rather than about sex acts in general or sexuality of any variation in particular' (2003, p. 213). The Lut narrative directs its condemnations, not towards the sex acts with which the angels were threatened, but towards those guilty of 'violating the rights and dignity of guests' (Esack, 2005, p. 157).

While acknowledging Kugle's own awareness of the male-centredness of his reading, both Ali and Shannahan nonetheless ground their critiques in an examination of the place of gender in Kugle's analysis, and the kinds of questions this allows for (and not). Ali's response to Kugle is impelled by the paucity of research 'on female homoeroticism in Qur'an, hadith, or interpretive texts' (2006, p. 80), a frustration also taken up by Shannahan when she writes of how Kugle's re-reading of Lut 'does not fully explain the way that gender functions in the Qur'anic narrative' (2010, p. 677). Shannahan interrogates the following by Kugle as a basis for her view:

> The people of Lut rejected his Prophet-hood by violating his right to offer hospitality and protection to strangers and visitors … When Lut offers up his family members (who happen to be female daughters) in exchange for his guests (who happen to be male guests), he displays in most extreme terms the sacredness of protecting guests who are elevated even above the status of offspring. (2003, p. 215)

Here, the gender of the characters in the story is seen by Kugle as secondary to 'the most important underlying message' of hospitality informing the text (2003, p. 215). Shannahan takes issue with this, suggesting that 'Kugle could almost be read as ignoring the patriarchal context of Sodom, where the gender of Lut's offspring was surely a significant happening' (2010, p. 678). Ali makes a similar case, claiming that Kugle's decision to frame the community's attack on the angels in gender-neutral terms ignores how contextually loaded Lut's response to the attack is for the story, a story set in the context of a premodern patriarchy where 'only paternal consent mattered' (2006, p. 83). For Ali and Shannahan, the fact that Lut's efforts at 'hospitality' were possible only through the agency of Lut himself (rather than, say, through the agency and bodily autonomy of his daughters) is not incidental for understanding and reimagining the Qur'an's relationship to (queer) forms of desire. They both come to the conclusion that this significance is not sufficiently addressed by Kugle due to the 'the privilege of male sexuality' (Wadud, 2006, p. 271) often rescripted in queer attempts at Qur'anic hermeneutics (such as his own).

In an effort to respond to these limits, Shannahan proposes an approach to interpreting these (and other) Qur'anic verses that I see as allowing for the texts themselves to be transformed in the moment of interpretation. Shannahan's strategy is one that takes sexism and sexual difference seriously in how we interpret texts. With this in mind, she calls for a 'faith-centred, anti-homophobic reading of the Qur'an' that looks 'at the *whens* and *wheres* of how divine love has historically been interpreted as only present along straight lines, families, bodies, and love(r)s, and the

ways that interpretation may serve and write privilege onto gendered bodies' (2010, p. 680). Her queer hermeneutic is one that refuses to accept a literalist reading of the Qur'anic verses: the text is not eternal, but a product of its relationship to flesh-and-blood human beings. Because of this, the Qur'an becomes something other than incontestable words on a page. Instead, it has the potential to offer new theological insights and significances for the reader in and through the reader's own active sensitivity to structures of power, privilege, and patriarchy, and how these shape the contextual processes of reading and interpreting to begin with. In other words, Allah comes to reveal Allah's self through the reader's *interrogation* of the Qur'anic stories, and not in their mere acceptance of them. Shannahan demonstrates what this sensitivity might entail by offering some of the kinds of questions a queer hermeneutical approach might elicit for the reader of the Lut narrative (2010, p. 679). For instance, she asks: where does female desire feature in the narrative and in the act of reading it, and how does that contribute to configurations of desire today? If Sodom can be understood as London's G.A.Y. club on a Saturday night, she queries, what ways of being queer remain within the text, and what are their relationships to the myriad forms of union that exist outside it? As I read her, interpreting the Qur'an queerly becomes, for Shanahan, a dissident kind of endeavour that subverts and transforms hegemonic interpretations of texts in its receptiveness to forms of knowledge that may have been previously hidden or denied.

In summary then, Gleibman's reading of *hevruta* partnerships presents an erotic view of biblical hermeneutics that allows for the potential transformation of (queer and religious) subjectivities in a variety of sexual, intellectual, and affective ways. It achieves this by attending to the queer intimacies of Torah study itself, intimacies that bring with them new possibilities for human relationships and

connections in this world. The rereadings of Kugle's interpretation of the Lut narrative by Ali and Shannahan offer similar possibilities, particularly in their embrace of the importance of context and fallibility in the hermeneutic encounter with the Qur'an. I see the works of Ali and Shannahan as significant in allowing for an understanding of sacred texts that are not fixed and unchanging, but rather evanescently responsive to the diversities of structural contexts and questions (both seen and unseen) that the reader brings to the texts. In this way, the dialogue staged by *kerygma* is enacted and embodied, with implications for how texts are understood and reimagined in response to the lives we live. At this point, then, it becomes necessary to connect these theological contributions, with their *kerygmatic* resonances, to the school and its purpose. How does my liminal account of engaging with teachings in the religious school speak to the queer politics of the school's work? It is here where the Abrahamic threesome comes to the fore.

III. Teachings and the Abrahamic threesome

Figure 4: The Abrahamic threesome

The cross of the Abrahamic threesome establishes points of contact between the school and a *kerygmatic* account of engaging pedagogically with religious teachings in its dual concern for embodiment and disembodiment. Like the queer theologian who grapples with the embodied specificities of personal story and experience to enable a double transformation of self and world, so too does the teacher when they provide the space for religious teachings and texts being studied to transform through the material and affective intimacies of the classroom. Significantly, this happens when the teacher, in much the same way as *kerygma* is framed, divests themselves of an authoritarian self-concept. The teacher stages pedagogical moments when they offer texts, ideas, and experiences for students that are open to the unpredictable and receptive to hidden kinds of knowledges and experiences beyond the scope of what they themselves might deem valuable or important. On this meaning, the teacher creates opportunities for students to disidentify from singular narratives of religious identity and experience when they sustain the conditions for students to think with, and vocalise, the uncertainties of embodied life, and the implications of these uncertainties for understanding self and world in relation to religion. By offering the space for this kind of experience, the religious school exists to provide the chance for students to disidentify from the traditional ways in which religious teachings are framed, lived out and embodied.

But what of repetition, creativity, and attention? The crescent comes to the fore in this regard, as does the star of David. The crescent's resonances with the scholastic notion of repetition are evinced in the its repeated calls for worship in the Muslim calendar: like the crescent, the school is implicated in acts of repeating, in this case a repetition of what the world has to offer for students. When students enter the classroom, what is pedagogically presented to them by their teachers as the subject

matter for study is not something that has come from a vacuum: rather the subject matter emerges from traditions of thought and practice that have been engaged and re-engaged with through varying iterations across history. This repetitive quality of the pedagogical encounter, like the symbol of the crescent, escapes the charge of merely reproducing the world, as it is in the double transformation of the student and subject matter/world that the creativity of the pedagogical encounter, engendered in the dialogue of *kerygma*, is enacted. While the study partners of the *hevruta* meet in the same place and the same time each day, thinking about texts they have read and thought through time and again, this repeated meeting is nonetheless charged with a sense of newness or creativity in the affective, erotic, and intellectual desires arising from the *kerygmatic* dialogue itself. Through the mediations of the Torah, the possibilities for new and unknowable kinds of subjectivities emerge for students, subjectivities with futures beyond what is currently and permissibly the case. In a likewise fashion, when teachers and students at school engage with one another around a text of shared concern, possibilities open up that allow for themselves to relate to one another anew. The crescent becomes, then, a symbol of the repetitive creativity inherent within pedagogical practices in the religious school, a vibrancy already lived out in Gleibman's reading of the Jewish yeshiva each day.

The star of David becomes appropriate for charging the subject matter that constitutes the scholastic act of repetition with the same kind of transformative potential as the relationship between teacher, student, and text. The star of David calls for a responsive and proximal engagement with the otherness of one's neighbour. In the context of that which is repeated as the subject matter of pedagogy in school each day, that otherness can present itself in the form of a person, idea, or text. Queer Qur'anic hermeneutics, as Shannahan suggests, similarly calls for a radical form of

proximal engagement with a (textual) other that is sensitive to the importance of bearing witness to the world as it is, and not simply as we would like it to be. Indeed, Shannahan's Qur'anic reading strategies demonstrate an acute attention, not only to what the text is saying, but also to what it is not. The approach she calls for is one that cares so deeply about the text and its significances that it insists on a hermeneutic that faces the inadequacies and omissions of conventional interpretations of the present moment head-on, in ways that have the capacity to transform and renew the world and its structural oppressions. Leaving no stone unturned, Shannahan's queer and feminist 'faith-centred, anti-homophobic' reading of the Qur'an grounds its faithfulness in the kind of responsiveness the star of David emulates, a responsiveness rooted in a call for action in the here-and-now. The pedagogical encounter with text in the religious school provokes, in this way, a transformation of the world through a transformation of the text under study. It is for the purpose of offering *attentive* kinds of encounters like these that the religious school exists for students, a purpose to which the star of David also speaks in the 'imminence of redemption' to which it gestures (Reinhard, 2005, p. 21). Indeed, when the teacher-student relationship opens up to the untold and unforeseen, an attention to the uniqueness of the other is preserved by creating the conditions for the voice of the other, in all its singularity, to be articulated without being reduced to a footnote of the teacher's plans.

To summarise, then, this chapter offers a queer conception of engaging pedagogically with religious teachings in the religious school, one that preserves the double transformation of self and world through an embodied and creative understanding of pedagogy that is egalitarian and indeterminate, rather than authoritarian and totalising. These qualities to pedagogy are lived out through engagements with religious teachings that, while repeated in school time and again,

nonetheless elicit new kinds of relationships and subjectivities for, and between, teachers and students, relationships that arise from an attention to both the obvious and more hidden forms of knowledges available in the text or doctrine being placed on the table for study. This chapter's argument, then, rests on a view of pedagogy committed to a responsiveness to one's neighbour in the flesh-and-blood immediacies of this world, a critical responsiveness with the potential to make the world a better place in which to live. Furthermore, this chapter develops a view of pedagogy that refuses to leave the religious/queer divide uninterrupted. By tapping into contemporary queer theological resources that problematise this dichotomy, I argue that if a religious school engages with pedagogy in a way that takes the demands of *kerygma* in full seriousness, then it necessarily has to avoid approaches to religious teachings that allow for only one (hetero- and cisnormative) take on religious teachings, its doctrines and texts, to flourish. The chapter understands pedagogy in the religious school less in terms of a 'strong' view of identity formation, and more in terms of an encounter with religious traditions through which the hetero- and cisnormativity of certain religious teachings can be rendered open to the possibility of being questioned, challenged, and reimagined.

Relatedly, a question that now arises is one focused precisely on this notion of religious tradition: does this *kerygmatic* kind of pedagogical engagement with religious teachings sit well with how religious people themselves navigate and inherit faith traditions? Indeed, is there too much of a future-focused emphasis here, or is there scope within my thinking to image the work of the religious school with an attentiveness to the past, and to the values that arise from such traditions with impact upon the present? It is to this concern that I turn in the chapter to follow.

CHAPTER FIVE

Queering religious values: Fostering and ijtihad

> Since our heritage comes before us, it comes to us: it is received by us without our being given a chance to choose it. We are born to it, like we are born to our language which is part of it. What is left to us is the power to reaffirm it, that is to accept it, and to confirm it. Yet, not without a critical step … Consequently, and paradoxically, one can be faithful to one's heritage only in as much as one accepts to be unfaithful to it, to analyse it, to critique it, to interpret it, relentlessly. (Egéa-Kuehne, 2003, p. 273)

The values we inherit and live out each day are a consequence of our location already in the world: what we hold dear and embody in our lives precedes our place in the world that we share. The fact of our location already either within and/or alongside the religious traditions and values of old cannot be denied, for we live lives in contexts forever shaped by that which we have inherited. The above observations by Denise Egéa-Kuehne are appropriate here in their recognition of our embeddedness within worldly traditions, but are also interesting in their understanding of this embeddedness in refutable terms. This is a significant point, I feel, in its refusal to imagine social experience merely as an acquiescent aggregate of religious orthodoxies, practices, and/or value systems. Indeed, while religious values like love, justice, and charity (as well as others like abstinence and self-denial) have always existed and informed what it means to live in the world, so too have their detractors, from the dissident faithful to the radical apostate.

This point is important to make as it speak directly to the kinds of expectations often attached to the work of religious schooling. As we have seen, passing on a set of religious values is frequently allied to what the religious school is understood to be

for: Jewish schools, as one example, are often vested with the responsibility of ensuring the preservation of Jewish values onto the next generation. On one level this is a relatively unexceptional point, for the school, in the pedagogical encounters it offers students, necessarily engages with inherited values as a basis for the subject matter of pedagogy. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the pedagogical responsibility of the teacher is tied up precisely with sustaining something of the world that the teacher views as valuable for cultivating moments for student transformation.

Educational questions arise, however, when those values are framed in ways that ally what we inherit with immutability and fixedness. When the religious school becomes an arbiter for reproducing unchanging and dogmatic values, it loses something of the 'free time' that characterises the school's purpose. The aim for this chapter, then, is to think through what it might mean for a religious school to be (queerly) involved in the passing on of religious values. It draws from Bergdahl and Langmann's (2018b) work on the 'fostering' task of education to argue that the religious school is invested in engaging with religious values in both conservative and radical ways simultaneously. From here, the chapter moves to an exploration of the Muslim concept of *ijtihad*, which I read as referring to the *interpretable* manner in which Muslim values are taken up and reimagined by Muslim in the specificities of experience. I see an *ijtihadic* account of religious values as significant as it allows for a view of such values to emerge that is receptive to both conservatism and renewal at one and the same time. I then trace *ijtihad*'s resonances with the life stories of queer Jews, Christians, and Muslims. A turn to the life stories of queer religious is done in place of an analysis and application of queer theological texts to deliberately focus the reader on the realities of *ijtihad* in the day-to-day negotiations of religious values, values that are borne out and developed in the messiness of everyday life and its

ambiguities. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how these resonances allow for the 'fostering' task of education to be read as speaking directly to many of the priorities of religious communities, while also emulating 'points of contact' with the school as a weak site of queer politics.

I. The fostering task of the religious school

How are we to understand the relationship between the work of education on the one hand, and the passing on of societal traditions and values on the other? If the former is to be seen as allowing for the latter, is education reduced merely to an instrument for restoring the authority of the past? Alternatively, if the former is to be seen as a disjuncture from the latter, does education simply become a tool for denying the past and its enduring legacies and influences upon the present? Questions such as these animate the work of Bergdahl and Langmann (2018b), who argue for a view of education's relation to the passing on of values (what they refer to as the 'fostering' task of education) that is both conservative and radical simultaneously. Following Arendt (1962), the need for this simultaneous sense of conservatism and radicalism in the fostering work of education stems from Bergdahl and Langmann's positioning of education at the threshold between the old and the new. This positioning is a partial response to the 'crisis of traditions' brought about in western democracies as a consequence of the Holocaust, so it is with a discussion of this crisis in mind that I begin an exposition of the authors' arguments.

Responding to the 'crisis of traditions'

The ‘crisis of traditions’ to which Bergdahl and Langmann refer relates to the Arendtian view of how the liberal democratic values of western humanism can no longer be taken for granted in light of the atrocities that were committed during the Holocaust. For Arendt, since the unthinkable failed to be prevented by western humanism, the values of the past can no longer unthinkingly guide our judgements in making political or ethical decisions, and nor can they be seen as constituting a common and absolute moral ground for society. In other words, the crisis of traditions brought about by the Holocaust necessitates a radical approach to traditions and values that resists reducing ethical experience to the mere adherence (or otherwise) of fixed or universal moral codes, for it was precisely because of such fixedness that the collapse of the values of western humanism emerged to begin with.

Indeed, as Bergdahl and Langmann make clear, to engage with values in a way that does not pay due regard to the ambiguities inherent to the crisis of traditions is to reduce morality merely ‘to rule abidance, that is, to the following of social conventions and abstract ethical rules. Hence, and as a consequence, the possibility of making meaningful moral choices and judgements in concrete and lived cases [becomes] thwarted’ (2018b, p. 370).[37] This is detrimental for Bergdahl and Langmann for it fails to recognise our embeddedness already within the lived traditions of the world, an embeddedness characterised by ambiguities that need to be engaged with if we are to avoid the absolutism that characterised the atrocities of the second world war. Because of this, then, Bergdahl and Langmann suggest that the most appropriate route to take in engaging with values educationally is one that ought

[37] Indeed, post-Holocaust thinker Zygmunt Bauman draws our attention to the ‘originary status’ of morality as a basis for being human: he argues that human beings are always already implicated in moral relationships, and that this is necessarily ambiguous by virtue of the ambiguities of moral choice. See Bauman (1989; 1992; 1995) for a further treatment of this.

to be located at the threshold between conservatism and radicalism, what Arendt refers to as a 'radical conservatism'.

Their approach to the fostering task of education is conservative in the sense that education always entails an engagement with a shared cultural heritage: values such as solidarity, justice, emancipation, and peace, for instance, are longstanding principles that continue to inform the traditions we live by and embody. The conservative dimension to this element of fostering lies in the teacher's efforts at preserving that which society has deemed valuable or worth keeping. Rather than ignore the past (for this would deny the ambiguities of history), the teacher instead decides to listen to what the past has to offer us, and to sustain it by inviting students to take its values up through study and contemplation. Indeed, Bergdahl and Langmann write of how their view of the fostering task of education is 'conservative in the sense that it insists on responding educationally to the call from the past … by acknowledging our inevitable embeddedness in fragmented and living traditions' (2018b, p. 369). At the same time, though, Bergdahl and Langmann express sympathy with a radical approach to traditions and values in an effort to move away from the rigidities of modernist thinking critiqued in the previous paragraph above.

They ground this radical emphasis in the 'natality' or newness that each generation brings to the world. To foster the values of the past to the coming generation is less about sustaining an inevitable continuity with the traditions of old, and more about offering the time, space, and freedom for that generation to renew those values afresh, lest they fall back on the unyielding orthodoxies of the Holocaust. It is in this vein that they conclude that

> … the fostering task of the teacher is neither to strengthen nor to brake the next generations' ties with the past and tradition, but to let children and young

> people *remain at the threshold* between past and future by critically engaging in those values that previous generations have cherished and found valuable to pass on. (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2018b, p. 372)

The fostering task of education is not simply a matter of being loyal to, or dissenting from, our shared inheritances: rather, it entails being both repetitive and creative at one and the same time, for it is in the inbetweenness of this threshold that the old and the new can come together in ways that preserve the riches of the past, while also opening up possibilities for futures far beyond what is currently the case.

In the midst of this threshold, for the authors, commonalities are created between students in the fostering task of education, but not in the sense of prescribing or assuming a pre-existing set of similarities between them (for instance in terms of what the students themselves might value, believe in, live out, or *identify with* each day). For Bergdahl and Langmann, creating commonalities between students is an inherent possibility in the fostering work of the teacher in the shared nature of the values being engaged with as 'contested' objects of study. It is less the values themselves that bring students together, and more the educational experience of engaging with these values with others in the here-and-now of the classroom. They refer to these values as 'contested objects of study' in this regard: it is the contestability of these values between students in shared moments of dialogue and critique that creates commonality in 'what is not (yet) common', so to speak. While values themselves are up for debate by virtue of the ambiguities (and even agonism) of living traditions, what becomes assuredly possible is the collective sense of responsiveness to who or what is other (be it a value, tradition, idea, or indeed, fellow student) in the educational encounter itself.

In this manner, fostering traditions and values, as I read Bergdahl and Langmann, becomes less about inculcating a way of life for students to follow, and

more about creating opportunities for students to come together to recast a way of life that might be (im)possible, a way of life that lies beyond the determinations of their schools, teachers, and communities. It is with this in mind that I now turn to a discussion of the relevance of 'fostering' to how we understand the religious school and its relationship to the passing on of religious values.

The religious school at the threshold between old and new

While Bergdahl and Langmann's analysis pertains to the fostering task of education in terms of the passing on of liberal democratic (rather than exclusively religious) values, the educational basis for their claims nonetheless makes their work aptly suited to reimagining our understanding of what it might mean to pass on religious values in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim schools. This is particularly so in fostering's recognition of the ambiguous nature of the traditions in which we find ourselves, a fragmented quality that demands for the birth of the new even while something of that which is old remains intact.

A need for an approach to the fostering of religious values that is receptive to these ambiguities becomes pertinent when we consider some of the atrocities that have occurred in the name of religion. In reflecting on my own context, no greater example of this comes to mind than that of the Catholic Church, which, alongside the State, was directly responsible for decades for the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children, and the incarceration of women and babies. I am also thinking of international moments of global violence often associated with fundamentalist manifestations of Islam. On 12 June 2016, for instance, twenty-nine year-old US citizen Omar Mateen shot and killed forty-nine people and injured fifty-three more at

Pulse, a queer nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Prior to the attack, Mateen had made an emergency call, during which he reportedly pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Salafi-jihadist militant group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham). Religious traditions often manifest destructive tendencies when interpreted in absolutist or fundamentalist terms: I focus on these examples to illustrate the importance of humility and ambiguity if the fostering work of education is to extend to the passing on of religious values too. To this end, then, the implications of Bergdahl and Langmann's arguments on how we conceive of the religious school are twofold. First, they can be interpreted as disrupting the view that the purpose of the religious school is to pass on religious values that are in direct continuity with what has come before. And second, they can be read as resisting a perspective on the religious school that assumes from the outset that students' particular values (be they religious or not) are necessarily that with which the religious school also identifies. I address both of these points more fully below.

In terms of the first of these, I see the religious school less as an instrument for ensuring the inevitable preservation of religious values, and more as a time and space in which these values can be put on the table as interpretable objects of study. I say *interpretable,* rather than contestable, in order to avoid framing religion and education's relationship solely in propositional terms. Indeed, as we shall shortly see through the lens of *ijtihad*, the interpretation of religious values is far more spacious in what it implies than contestation, for interpretation brings together the material (the body, the emotions), as well as the propositional. By putting these values on the table for study, the religious school recognises its role in rendering particular religious values common to all its students, in a context steeped in the ambiguities of inherited legacies, traditions, and their day-to-day negotiations. When read in this fashion, the

Christian school, for instance, offers the time, space, and resources for the riches of two thousand years of Christian history to be grappled with by students, in ways that can be neither dislocated entirely from that history, nor fully determined by it in advance. In short, the religious school, in order for it offer an encounter for students that is fundamentally educational, situates itself at the threshold between past and future.

Turning to the second point, allying the religious school with a radical conservatism brings with it important implications in how we understand the place of identity within it. As Bergdahl and Langmann resist a view of fostering built on pre-existing commonalities, that which characterises the 'religiousness' of the religious school becomes less about a unified student commitment to *belonging* to the same religious values, and more about a unified commitment to *studying* the same religious values. I attended a Catholic second-level school throughout my adolescence, a school that explicitly set out to foster Christian values in its students (though in ways that were quite removed from how Bergdahl and Langmann understand fostering). If we are to apply Bergdahl and Langmann's conception of fostering to reimagine it, though, the 'catholicity' of the school I attended could be read as manifesting itself less in terms of the school assuming present or future valorisation of Catholic values and more in terms of a religious community (in my case, a Catholic charity chaired by Christian brothers) offering support to an institution that allows, among other subjects like mathematics or geography, for Christian values to be studied for the educational worth such an endeavour might offer students.[38] In this way the task of a Christian

[38] This is not to suggest, of course, that the study of Jewish or Muslim (or indeed, Buddhist or atheist) values would not also constitute a part of what the Christian school does. Indeed, any serious engagement with traditions and values as interpretable objects of study would necessarily entail an interreligious approach, particularly in light of Bauman's (1995) identification of the need for our institutions to respond to the moral ambiguities of human living, and the fragmented pluralities such ambiguities give rise to. For a fuller treatment of interreligious pluralism and its relationship to the

school fostering Christian values becomes an activity committed, in some way, to the study of Christian heritage (however discontinuous from tradition that encounter might be or become), rather than an exercise in promoting or solidifying a particular view of Christian identity and values as such.

As noted already, though, Bergdahl and Langmann's understanding of the fostering task of education is not specifically religious. Based on this, would the religious communities with which religious schools are so often allied even endorse such a view of the fostering task of schools? In the section that follows, I offer a response to this by expanding on the Muslim concept of *ijtihad*, tracing its resonances with the radical conservatism of the above arguments, before moving to its relevance to the life stories of those negotiating what it means to be queer as well as Jewish, Christian, or Muslim.

II. *Ijtihad* and queer Jews, Christians, and Muslims

To begin, what exactly is *ijtihad* and how is it relevant to the view of the fostering task of religious schooling I am offering here? *Ijtihad* can be understood as an interpretative approach to engaging the values and traditions of Islam. It is a strategy that entails 'exerting the faculties of the mind to the utmost' in one's interpretation of Islamic law, as detailed in the Qur'an, hadith, and Sunnah (Lane, 1984, p. 473). Indeed, as Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud observes, from a Muslim perspective 'every epistemological endeavour is … an *ijtihad*', rendering it inseparable from any practice concerned with

study of religion in schools, see Robert Jackson's (2004) *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy.* David Aldridge's (2015) *A Hermeneutics of Religious Education* is also helpful for navigating the limits and possibilities of religious education as a hermeneutical endeavour.

the revealed knowledge of Allah (Nor Wan Daud, 1989, p. 85). Originally associated with the legal reading strategies of the Islamic jurists, *ijtihad* has come to take on a much broader significance in recent years, referring more generally to the interpretive practices of any individuals seeking to uncover the meanings of Allah's guidance, and the religious values tied to this (Waghid, 1996, p. 359). Very little distinguishes contemporary conceptions of *ijtihad* from Shannahan's account of queer hermeneutics in the previous chapter, except perhaps the latter's more pointed emphasis on the *hidden* kinds of knowledges that inhere within *texts*, and the explicitly queer possibilities that these engender.[39]

Its similarities to Shannahan's thesis are numerous, particularly *ijtihad*'s embrace of flexibility in the kinds of interpretations one might make in engaging with those inheritances that are valued by Muslim traditions. Indeed, as Yusef Waghid observes, *ijtihad* recognises 'the need for flexibility' (1996, p. 360) in intellectual exertion, a view repeated by Fazlur Rahman (1982) in his resistance to hegemonic interpretation of Islamic values and traditions. Rahman substantiates the importance of flexibility in thinking through what Muslims deem to be valuable by referring to reports that the Companions (i.e. the disciples, scribes, friends, and family of the Prophet Muhammed) held different understandings of the Qur'anic verses, meaning that an 'absolute uniformity and interpretation [of religious values was] therefore neither possible nor desirable' (1982, p. 144). It is in this vein that Waghid aligns *ijtihad* with a form of practical judgement that allows for an embrace of the new and unexpected. He writes:

[39] This is not to suggest, of course, that an awareness of 'hidden' kinds of knowledges is lacking entirely from Muslim conceptions of *ijtihad.* Indeed, as Waghid (1996) makes clear, *ijtihad* also has as its focus 'non-revealed' knowledges. What distinguishes Waghid's reading of *ijtihad* from Shannahan's reading of hermeneutics is the latter's more *explicit* treatment of what is not said in texts, as well as the former's more general epistemological significance beyond reading strategies alone.

> In essence, *ijtihad* is a creative human practice that provides for flexibility in understanding the revealed and 'nonrevealed' sources of knowledge. Moreover, because *ijtihad* is a human practice, human actions cannot be absolute and perfect, but rather are practices constituted by creativity (Waghid, 1996, p. 360).

This latter emphasis on the relationship between *ijtihad* and creativity is important in allowing for an interpretive spaciousness to emerge in the Muslim tradition, a spaciousness that resists the unquestioned reproduction of those values that are inherited by religious communities. It is important to indicate, though, that the creativity associated with *ijtihad* is not without its limits. Indeed, Muhammad Asad identifies practitioners of *ijtihad* as those intent on eliciting truth (1980, p. 120), which, for Arabic-English translator Edward William Lane, refers to that which is 'suitable to the requirements of wisdom, justice, right or rightness' (Lane, 1984, p. 605). Taken together, these insights point to a view of *ijtihad* as an interpretive and creative human practice that relies on creativity, not for its own sake, but for the pursuit of the values of truth and justice (Waghid, 1996, p. 360).

It is because of this I argue that *ijtihad* can be seen as resonant with the radical conservatism that characterises the interpretive qualities of fostering detailed above. *Ijtihad* is radical in the sense that it both enables and encourages a newness of perspective in how we come to know and understand those values that have been inherited from the past. It demonstrates how different and varied interpretations and ideas create space for flexibility, and shows that a certain interpretation, once accepted, is not impervious to change (Waghid, 1996, p. 360). It is also simultaneously conservative in the sense that this interpretive approach is neither relativistic nor aimless. It is, instead, always attuned to the imperatives of what is right (in alignment with other inherited values), imperatives that are passed on and negotiated within the fragmented messiness of Islam as a living and ongoing tradition.

I see *ijtihad*'s radical conservatism as taking on a disidentifying quality appropriate to a queer perspective on religious schooling. The queerness of *ijtihad* comes to the fore in its refusal to demarcate the boundaries of what might constitute an appropriately 'Muslim' value. In its embrace of creativity in interpretive experience, *ijtihad*, in a queer move, renders essentialist identitarian narratives obsolete in the ever-shifting negotiations of living values. *Ijtihad*, as I read it, challenges imaginaries of identity that keep hetero- and cisnormativity in place in its resistance to ascribing absolute status upon those values and traditions often tied to fixed conceptions of 'Muslim' identity. The queer disidentification of *ijtihad* also comes to the fore in its potentially radical departure from the determinations often established by more conservative theological voices. *Ijtihad* sees tradition and its values as important, but not immutable, and because of this counteracts attempts at setting tradition along a self-fulfilling and continuous path immune from dissidence or interruption. For me, *ijtihad* points to a queer kind of encounter with religious values that echoes the radical conservatism of education's fostering task: in this way, the Muslim school can be read as fulfilling its educational purpose in weakly emulating the implications of an *ijtihadic* approach to the values given to us from the past.

However, as I made clear in the introduction to this thesis, I am not a Muslim scholar, and nor do I identify with the Muslim faith. Because of this, it would be reasonable to question the degree to which my reading of *ijtihad* is capable of speaking to the concerns of Muslim communities. Indeed, would some in Muslim communities stand by the interpretation of *ijtihad* I have offered? Below, I set about responding to this question in the affirmative by tracing how this reading of *ijtihad* speaks to a Muslim's relationship with the traditions and values of Islam. With the view to

sustaining the thesis's resistance to dichotomising religion and queerness, I engage with the story of a queer Muslim to draw attention to the relevance of a queer reading of *ijtihad* that disrupts the religious/queer divide. This is deliberately done in place of the queer theological engagements that have been carried out in this dissertation up to this point in order to pay due regard to peoples' embeddedness already within fragmented and living traditions and values.[40] Having expounded on the resonances between my interpretation of *ijtihad* and the life story of a queer Muslim, I then move to a critique of the *ijtihadic* view of the fostering task of religious schooling developed up till now, at least in terms of its relationship with a propositional framing of religious values, where religion boils down to acts of belief to which people are free to interpretively agree with or dissent from. In response to this, the chapter offers an analysis of the life stories of queer Jews and Christians to shed light on the affective, material, and embodied ways in which the implications of *ijtihad* might also be lived out and worked through in the fostering task of religious values in schools each day.

Muhsin's story

In Cape Town, South Africa, the principles of *ijtihad* have been used to support several practices over the past two decades, including gender equity in the mosque,

[40] It should be noted, though, that life narratives and queer theologies are not so relationally disparate in theological studies as one might suppose, especially as the former are so often used as a basis for the latter. Indeed, as Marcella Althaus-Reid observes: 'At the bottom line of queer theologies, there are biographies of sexual migrants, testimonies of real lives in rebellions made of love, pleasure and suffering' (2003, p. 8). So while the stories shared in this chapter do not make theological claims as such, narratives like them have been nonetheless valorised within queer theologising, both as a methodological device, as well as an epistemological framework. For a recent example of a queer theologian engaging with life narratives for theological ends, see Chris Greenough's (2018) *Undoing Theology: Life stories from non-normative Christians.* It is from this volume that I sourced Alyce's story, which I will engage with shortly. Greenough's work also thinks through the theological significances of the life stories of Caddyman, a former 'ex-gay' minister, and Cath, a Christian who engages in bondage and fetishist practices.

establishing an old-age home, developing Muslim organisations that offer compassion to people who are HIV-positive or who have AIDS, as well as forming a Muslim group that welcomes sexual and gender diversity (Hendricks, 2016, p. 104). The latter is The Inner Circle, founded by Muhsin Hendricks in 1996. The organisation was founded after Muhsin was ousted from a madrasa due to him publicly acknowledging that he was gay. His story, recounted in Kugle's (2014) volume on the life stories of gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims, is offered here.

Muhsin made the decision to become a religious leader in his community at a very young age. This was partly influenced by his family, many of whom took on significant leadership roles in the religious life of the locality: his grandfather was an imam, his father a spiritual healer, and his mother a teacher in the local madrasa. He speaks of his childhood as a period of intense religious engagement: 'I was virtually born in a mosque … My mother was teaching already at the mosque by the time I was born. My mother used to carry me to mosque in a basket. So I've heard Qur'an since the first day I could hear, and I could memorise Qur'an and hadith since the age of five' (Kugle, 2014, p. 24). Though his household was heavily immersed in a devotion to scripture and spiritual healing, Muhsin recalls the progressive and tolerant nature of his family's religiosity, particularly from his father's side. He allies this rearing with an upbringing characterised by an openness to questioning and challenging authority, a sensibility often at odds with the gendered norms pervasive in his wider community at the time:

> I grew up with the Qur'an. I think that is why I started, early on, challenging certain things about Islam because it just doesn't make sense to me … Why do I have to play with boys when I like playing with girls? [We children were] not segregated exactly, but it was socially expected that boys only play with boys. So I was teased a lot as a child, called all sorts of names, because I was very effeminate as a child … our community was just like that. It didn't have anything to do with Islam. (Kugle, 2014, p. 24)

In spite of the critical freedom Muhsin exercised with his family, he nonetheless experienced moments of deep distress in relation to his sexual identity. He describes his adolescence as follows: 'Because of my sexuality, I became withdrawn as a teenager. I spent a lot of time crying and resenting myself for who I am' (Kugle, 2014, p. 25). As a response to this, Muhsin chose to submerge himself still more deeply into the religious traditions of his family, endeavouring to become a religious scholar or *'alim*, an opportunity which he seized upon when The Call of Islam, a branch of the Muslim Youth Movement that actively embraced the antiapartheid struggle, sponsored him and five others to pursue a six-year madrasa training course in Pakistan. He reflects on this choice in this way: 'I thought if I threw myself into my religious studies then I would forget about [being gay] or that I would change …' (Kugle, 2014, p. 22), later remarking that: 'I was like a hermit … My mother actually encouraged it. She thought I was going to become some great imam' (Kugle, 2014, p. 27) At an affective level, then, Muhsin felt his religious and sexual identities were incommensurate (hence his turning to the duties of the former to deny the latter). This tension left Muhsin deeply conflicted, even while he had long-since demonstrated his rational capacity to question the normativities contributing to his anguish. This agonised sense of denial culminated in Muhsin marrying a woman, moving to Pakistan, and fathering three children by the age of twenty-eight.

Four years in, Muhsin's madrasa training was cut short by his wife's unhappiness at living so far from home, coupled with his increased feelings of guilt and unease for falling in love with a man in Karachi with whom he had had an affair. As knowledge of the affair had reached neither his wife nor his community, Muhsin was welcomed home with open arms and immediately dispatched to teaching positions at two madrasas in the locality, despite not entirely completing his studies. Muhsin

enjoyed high social status upon his return, with many referring to him as *mawlana* (our master), a title of respect for one of learning and piety. This increased social esteem, however, led to an intensification of the inner tension he was experiencing around his sexual orientation. He speaks of how his students and peers: 'used to call me *mawlana* at school. I used to hate that title … Then they called me *imam* (leader) when I was at the other madrasa, and I thought, "No, if you guys knew who I am, you would not want to call me imam"' (Kugle, 2014, p. 28). It took Muhsin another two years to work through his struggles, before finally deciding to divorce his wife and share with others the truth of his sexual orientation. While his wife and mother were shocked by the news (Muhsin remembers his mother fainting at the revelation), it was the community at large that took most issue with Muhsin's sexual orientation. In spite of his continued insistence that he was a devout and pious Muslim, Muhsin's employment in the madrasas was terminated almost immediately, leaving him to source an alternative means of income as a tailor and dress designer for weddings.

Reflecting on this period in his life, Mushin recounts how important his belief in Allah was in helping him reach the point where he could openly share his sexual orientation with others without fear or shame: 'But I've managed, because of my in-depth relationship with God, to reconcile the two. I was completely comfortable saying to the world that I'm gay and I'm Muslim. So that's how I became an activist' (Kugle, 2014, p. 23). The independence and flexibility that came with his tailoring and dress designing work gave Muhsin the time to prioritise his activist endeavours, which he saw as geared towards helping people understand 'that they can be Muslim and can be gay and can be moral as well' (Kugle, 2014, p. 29). His efforts in this regard began with the formation of an informal organisation called the Gay Muslim Outreach, which had, at its peak, a membership of one hundred Muslims. Its aim was to offer a space

for informal social gatherings for (predominantly) gay and lesbian Muslims, as well as the opportunity for members to engage in discussion and study of the Qur'an in a structured and interpretive way. Central to this, from Muhsin's perspective, was the responsibility of each Muslim to read and interpret the Qur'an from their own perspective and experience (Kugle, 2014, p. 31). This strategy was rooted in Muhsin's conviction that the Qur'an does not directly address homosexuality as it is contemporaneously understood, and because of this needs to be encountered in a spirit in harmony with the progressive dynamism Muhsin associates with the Islamic tradition as a whole (Kugle, 2014, p. 32).

Two years after the formation of the Gay Muslim Outreach, Muhsin revived the organisation under a new and more Islamic name (Al-Fitra Foundation), which later became The Inner Circle following its partnership with the Cape Town Project. The name of the revived support group had its roots in the Arabic term *fitra* meaning 'one's true nature': Muhsin deliberately chose this from the Qur'an with the view to offering a Qur'anic basis for supporting Muslims who also identified as gay. He recalls:

> The message then was to let people know that [homosexuality] is not a pathology, that it is [one's] nature – you were either born that way or even if you were conditioned to be that way through society, it was when you were too young to have a decision in that. So it is part of your *fitra* – your nature. That's why we called the group Al-Fitra … We chose an Arabic name [because] it was closest to being Muslim. (Kugle, 2014, p. 30)

Even when Al-Fitra Foundation regrouped with the Cape Town Project under the new name of The Inner Circle, Muhsin was still at pains to return to the Qur'an and other traditional sources of Muslim piety in his conceptualisation of the project. However, this strategy was not without its critics. Some members of the Inner Circle were resistant to Muhsin's efforts at reconciling Islam and their sexual and gender identities

on the grounds that Muslim traditions were, to their minds, irredeemably beyond change. In responding to these concerns, Muhsin had to rethink the group's relationship to the values of Islam somewhat, concluding that the group was less about being religiously adherent in the strictest sense, and more about offering the space for gay and lesbian Muslims to liberally use 'spiritual tools toward personal development' (Kugle, 2014, p. 32). This certainly shifted the group's perception of what Islam was, which for Muhsin was essential in moving the project away from an understanding of the tradition that was 'dictatorial or dogmatic' (Kugle, 2014, p. 32).

At the beginning to this section, the rootedness of The Inner Circle's formation and development in an *ijtihadic* philosophy was indicated. For me, the above snapshot into this period of Muhsin's life is illustrative of my earlier reading of *ijtihad* (in which I drew queer parallels between it and the fostering task of education) on several levels. For instance, Muhsin's insistence upon the dynamism of the Islamic tradition draws attention to the ways in which what is valued by a religion can be engaged with in potentially radical and transformative ways. Interpreting shared inheritances in the context of present concerns, realities, and experiences necessarily entails interrupting how those inheritances are understood and taken up. This reaches more radical heights in Muhsin's story when he has to fundamentally rethink his organisation's relationship to Islam. It becomes less a matter of assuming a shared set of values and commitments in relation to Islam, and more a matter of spiritually engaging with the religion for the personal implications it might have for members as they live lives with themselves and others in community.[41] In terms of thinking

[41] When I write 'personal', I do not mean it to be read in an atomistic or isolated sense: indeed, as I have demonstrated previously, there is always a communitarian dimension to personal, ethical experience. I choose to use the word here to avoid equating experiences with religion with a shared sense of identity that might not always speak to how individuals themselves engage with the traditions and values of religion.

through what it might mean for a religious school to foster values and traditions educationally, this latter point is significant in its illustration of how an *ijtihadic* approach to engaging traditions communally does not necessarily rely on an identical or shared sense of commitment on the part of those engaging with it. Indeed, it was only when Muhsin abandoned the assumption that everyone in his group were of a like mind, that spaces opened up for a more personally enriching, challenging, transformative, and united encounter with Islam and its values to emerge, an encounter that I see as deeply educational. While Muhsin's efforts were still conservative in the sense that he sought to pass on a history (rooted in a liberal fidelity to the Qur'an) from which he believed gay and lesbian Muslims could benefit, his willingness to live a life that called those values to task in new and challenging ways points to the possibilities intrinsic to *ijtihad* and its relevance to the lived realities of Muslim communities each day. It is in light of this, then, that I argue that the radical conservatism intrinsic to the fostering task of education is directly attuned to the *ijtihadic* traditions of Muslim communities (in particular, the community that Muhsin helped form), and because of this is aptly suited to helping us understand the limits and possibilities nascent to what it might mean for religious schools to pass on religious values.

By way of critique, though, while *ijtihad* is valuable in translating the fostering task of education to the life stories of Muslims in ways that dissociate the religious school from a presumed sense of shared (religious) identity, I nonetheless see a limit to its application up to this point. In particular, I am struck by its implicitly 'propositional' account of religion. *Ijtihad*, as it has been illustrated thus far, would appear to rest heavily on a view of interpretive religious engagement that is reducible to assent to, or dissent from, different propositions about what God, religion, and/or

the world is like.[42] Indeed, framing the 'intellectual exertion' of *ijtihad* in terms that are only tied to agreeing or disagreeing with the tenets of the Qur'an, hadith, and Sunnah presents us with numerous difficulties for thinking through the implications of *ijtihad* for this thesis, pedagogically, religiously, as well in terms of being true to the complexities of religious experiences. In the sub-section below I chart these difficulties, before moving to a response to them through an interpretation of the life stories of Benay, a lesbian rabbi, and Alyce/Jerry, an intersex Christian. I analyse Benay's and Alyce/Jerry's stories together to proffer a reading of *ijtihad* that is not only interpretive of lived traditions in a propositional sense, but is material, embodied, and affective too.

Difficulties with a propositional account of ijtihad

Pedagogically, difficulties arise when the interpretation of religious values is reduced solely to a set of interpretable propositions about the world. In particular, such reductionism loses sight of the transformative possibilities that open up when religions values (and how we negotiate their limits and possibilities) are construed in ways that are sensitive to the ambiguities of affect, intimacy, desire, and bodily closeness. Recall the liminal and *kerygmatic* pedagogical approach to religious teachings in the previous chapter. Through an interpretation of *hevruta* study partnerships, I made the case for a view of pedagogy that achieves a double transformation of self and world through a sensitivity to the eroticism of embodied experience. In other words, pedagogical

[42] This propositional account of religion is resonant with how Michael Hand (2015) understands religion in his analysis of the extent to which the relation between a worldview and education might be rationally justified. He writes of how the 'differences between the followers of different religious and irreligious paths are fundamentally differences of belief: the followers assent to different propositions about what the world is like'.

moments take on their pedagogical quality when the transformative effects of what the teacher and student ambiguously think, feel and embody are taken together and embraced, rather than denied. Bergdahl and Langmann make a resonant point in their exposition of what the fostering task of education entails. In explaining what it means for education to render values common to all as objects of study, Bergdahl and Langmann resist tying the purpose of this endeavour to the formation of the autonomous liberal subject who makes ethical choices as though from a vacuum (2018b, p. 371). Alternatively, they envisage fostering as relying on 'a decentred moral subject that, while still able to act and make moral choices, is no longer the origin of its own actions but operates always in a mode of response' (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2018b, p. 371).

This 'mode of response' that acts as the basis of studying lived values rests on a view of the pedagogical encounter that is already enmeshed within the fragmented and contextual realities of religious values. Fostering values educationally (if it is to be a transformative endeavour pedagogically) therefore becomes less a matter of weighing up the pros and cons of abstract moral codes, and more a matter of encountering and responding to the uncertainties and paradoxes of what it means to *live out* values and traditions with others, values that are always already 'socially embodied' (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2018b, p. 373). To think with *ijtihad* in ways that are solely propositional, then, would seem to deny the material ambiguities upon which the pedagogical potential of fostering depends. In this regard, recall Muhsin's motivations for revealing to his community the truth of his sexual orientation.

While he had indeed succeeded in intellectually reconciling his sexuality with the norms of the Qur'an, it would be inaccurate to suggest that it was this and this alone that brought him to the point of sharing the truth of his identity with others.

Feelings of guilt and shame also brought him to that point, as did a desire to free himself of the hypocrisies tied to his status in the madrasa. His interpretation of Muslim values after this revelation also evolved beyond the propositional. In rethinking The Inner Circle's relationship to Islam in response to the concerns of the group's members, Muhsin demonstrates how our engagements with religion are not solely privatised moments of atomistic cognition, but instead always rely upon encounters with other people, whose thoughts, feelings, desires, and actions have an effect on how we experience religion and its traditions and values. So, while I seek to think with *ijtihad* (as it has been played out in Muhsin's story) for its embrace of the interpretative dimensions of religious experience, I also aim at broadening its generic understanding in Muslim thought to capture its material, affective, and embodied dimensions. I do this to offer a perspective on the fostering task of religious schooling that is explicitly responsive to how one's engagement with what is valued in religious traditions has pedagogical potential beyond what can be articulated in purely propositional terms. Fostering, as I imagine it here, entails a receptiveness to what is felt and embodied in our encounters with religious values, as well as with the material realities of religious life. It is with the need to demonstrate the relevance of this view to the concerns of Jewish and Christian communities that the stories of Benay and Alyce/Jerry are given together below.

The stories of Benay and Alyce/Jerry

Benay Lappe was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York in 1997, and is a member of the Rabbinical Assembly, the international

association of Conservative rabbis.[43] In the collection *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation*, Benay (unlike many of her contemporaries in the volume) presents a picture of her childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood that is removed, at least initially, from the discourses of shame and inner conflict often characterising narratives around queer and religious lives. Indeed, she admits to Judaism's irrelevance to her life in her early years, even when she began to ask spiritual questions:

> I loved Hebrew school and going up on the bimah to drink the grape juice Kiddush at Friday night services. But as I grew up and competing worldviews – feminism, gay rights, and American you-can't-tell-me-what-to-do-ism – entered the picture, I dismissed Judaism as irrelevant … Judaism had just never popped up on my mental radar as having anything to do with the spiritual endeavour, and so, when I went looking for a way to find God, it never occurred to me to try the Jewish way, whatever that might have been. (Lappe, 2001, pp. 198-199)

Benay's dismissal of Judaism as irrelevant in her early years was accompanied by a 'confidence in the rightness of [her] sexuality', a 'matter of fact' sense of pride in being lesbian that led to her immersing herself in a 'gay world, disregarding the institutions and assumptions of the straight world "out there"' (Lappe, 2001, p. 199). Benay reflects on this confidence as being 'indispensable' in helping her to realise, along with the encouragement of her partner at the time, 'that the larger world really did belong to [her] too, and that [she] was cheating [herself] and it by living only in the sheltered world of the gay and lesbian community' (Lappe, 2001, p. 199).

[43] Conservative Judaism can be seen as a 'middle path' between Orthodox Judaism on the one hand, and Reform Judaism on the other. Like the Orthodox tradition, Conservative Judaism is committed to studying and interpreting Jewish law as an authoritative source of divine revelation, in light of traditional commentary. At the same time, though, Conservative Judaism echoes the commitments of the Reform movement in placing value on the importance of including contemporary understandings of ethical behaviour and norms into more traditional exegetical practices. In this way, it both affirms emancipation while continuing to embrace biblical and rabbinic traditions. Its affinities with the radical conservatism argued for by Bergdahl and Langmann (2018b) are therefore strong in this regard. Sue Levi Elwell and Rebecca T. Alpert's introduction to *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation* offers a helpful overview of the histories and theological distinctions between the varying denominations of Judaism, and the place of women and lesbians within these developments.

Engaging with questions of religion and spirituality was Benay's first attempt at claiming this 'rightful place in the larger world' (Lappe, 2001, p. 199).

Benay initially moved to Japan after graduate school, where Buddhism, particularly Vipassana meditation, became her path and her practice. She describes herself as a 'perfectly happy Buddhist', meditating every morning and evening and learning 'to see the world in Buddhist terms' (Lappe, 2001, p. 200). As her immersion in Buddhist meditative practices deepened, though, Benay began to feel a growing sense of discomfort at having 'unfinished business' with Judaism. With this in mind she sought a meeting with a local rabbi in Tokyo, in the hope of confirming her initial dismissal of Judaism so that she could 'return to being a Buddhist … in good conscience' (Lappe, 2001, p. 201). Far from quelling her concerns, Benay's meeting with the Japanese rabbi led her to a literature that totally subverted her initial assessment of her childhood religion. She writes of how she 'started to realise that the Jews might just be as smart as the Buddhists after all' and that Judaism was far more complex and diverse than she had originally thought. She continues:

> I then realised that the Judaism that I grew up with was only one of many authentic Judaisms, and that what I believed about God and the way the world worked did not make me a bad Jew, just a bad Orthodox Jew. I saw that the circle containing authentic Judaism was much bigger than I'd thought previously and that I actually fell quite squarely within it, and not at all way outside it, as I'd imagined. (Lappe, 2001, p. 201)

Benay's return to her Jewish faith was confirmed after her experiments with the ritual practices of Shabbos[44]: following her meeting with the rabbi in Tokyo, she decided that, one day a week, she would celebrate Shabbos as a way of 'testing the waters' into Judaism once again. She did this (in combination with Vipassana

[44] Shabbos, or Shabbat, is the Jewish Sabbath, observed from sundown Friday to sunset on Saturday.

meditation, bamboo sukkahs[45] and Sanskrit chanting) for seven years, building a sense of 'wholeness' to her religious affiliation and its attendant values that she had not experienced before. She describes Shabbos as the first Jewish 'place' where she 'felt that [she] was completely present – as a woman, as a lesbian, and as a Jew', a sense of completeness that began as soon as she started lighting the first candles at the Shabbos table (Lappe, 2001, p. 202). She sees the celebration of Shabbos as a religious experience requiring the coming together of every aspect of her life: through Shabbos, Judaism suddenly became the path for her to find God, however restrictive or oppressive its rituals might have appeared to her at first glance. Controversially for some, she writes of how it was precisely because of her physical and sexual attraction to women that Shabbos spoke to her spiritually:

> Shabbos was about a way of shaping time, and appreciating life, and doing so as a lesbian, with my lover, allowed it to work. It couldn't have otherwise. Shabbos wanted – *needed* – me to bring my whole self, sexuality included, to it. Shabbos was my first inkling that there was a path of wholeness for me – as a Jew, and as a lesbian. I was determined – passionately – to pursue this path to wholeness, to God, and would let nothing stop me. (Lappe, 2001, p. 202)

It was the relationship to her partner, with its emotional and sexual intimacies, that informed Benay's approach to her encounter with Shabbos, and it was this (among other material and affective factors) that influenced her decision to pursue rabbinate studies in the Conservative tradition.

Alyce/Jerry's story is different from those of Muhsin and Benay in that theirs does not feature taking on the mantle of leadership in the religious community in navigating religious values. Alyce/Jerry have always aligned themselves with Catholic values, but only ever in 'lay' terms. Alyce/Jerry identifies as intersex. Intersex bodies

[45] Sukkahs are temporary booths where practising Jews spend part of their time praying, dining, and/or sleeping during the week-long festival of Sukkot, also known as the Festival of Tabernacles. Benay's reworking of the sukkah for Shabbos would be considered highly unorthodox in traditional Jewish practice.

are those where genitals, gonads, hormones, or chromosomes are various, and do not line up with the perceived male/female binary.[46] Chromosomes (threadlike structures of nucleic acids found in the nucleus of most living cells) can vary along the combinations of XX (female) and XY (male). Alyce/Jerry identifies as XXY[47], which relates to a medical diagnosis of a male (XY), with an underdeveloped penis and large breast tissue (which Alyce/Jerry sees as arising from the additional X chromosome). At Alyce/Jerry's birth, they would have been named Jerry, and from then socialised as a boy. At the age of forty-two, though, Alyce/Jerry began to openly affirm a female identity (Alyce), which Alyce believes was repressed by the guise of Jerry, a male-presenting public persona adopted by her to match the (underdeveloped) genitalia and gender assigned at birth. In this way, Alyce/Jerry's story (recounted from Alyce's perspective in Chris Greenough's work) is a 'polyphonic narrative' featuring the voices and experiences of both Alyce and Jerry, even though it is with Alyce that they now identify:

> One point I'd like to make clear is that I am Alyce. Technically I'm the pseudonym. I don't want you to think that there's some 'Three Faces of Eve' thing going on in my head. It's not like that. I just believe that I am female in temperament and have been repressed all these years. The male persona was just a creation to match the genitalia. So if I refer to HIM, it's just my way of

[46] The distinctions between intersex and transgender identities are complex, and are certainly beyond the scope of a footnote. However, generally speaking, while intersex people may sometimes be misgendered at birth, transgender people are always misgendered. In other words, some intersex people will identify with the gender they have been assigned at birth while others will not: transgender people, by contrast, will necessarily identify differently to the gender into which they were initially socialised. Differences over anatomy are also significant here: intersex people will have physical characteristics of both male and female bodies (hence their being misgendered sometimes, and appropriately gendered at others) while transgender people will generally not present with such physical ambiguities. Such complexities make it necessary to state that Alyce/Jerry's story should not be seen as representative of intersex experiences as a whole. Indeed, as Ian Morland reminds us, there is a 'narrative plurality' (2009, p. 194) when looking at the lives and experiences of those who identify as intersex, and that 'there may be more than one narrative about intersex, and those narratives may differ radically' (2009, p. 196). Queer theologian Susannah Cornwall, who has written extensively on intersex theologies, makes a similar point when she writes of how 'the voices narrating [intersex experiences] are always multiple … there is no such thing as [a] monolithic [intersex] experience' (2010, p. 224)

[47] Alyce/Jerry has not received an official diagnosis of XXY chromosomes: Alyce/Jerry's self-identity in this regard stems from suspicions brought about by Alyce/Jerry's anatomy and their affective response to it and their environment.

> differentiating between the male and female personalities. (Greenough, 2018, pp. 68-69)

Alyce, in this way, is the person whose story I am recounting in this chapter[48]: Jerry is the male personality Alyce had to adopt as she lived a life presenting as male to a world that believed her to be so.

It is important to note that, while transgender people are not intersex, some intersex individuals are transgender: that is, some intersex people are dissatisfied with the medically determined sex/gender assigned to them at birth (partly because of their non-binary physicality) and therefore seek to present differently. Alyce's decision to present as Alyce can be read as indicative of such dissatisfaction, though she is also clear that Jerry is part of her in ways that some transgender people would resist.[49] Alyce's description of her masturbating goes some way in illustrating this dynamic. For Alyce, when she masturbates, it is Alyce who takes control of the sexualised space, and it is Alyce who enjoys orgasm. Simultaneously, though, Alyce emphasises how her masturbating was almost 'like two people servicing each other', an experience where 'both climaxed' (Greenough, 2018, p. 87). Alyce is Alyce, but Jerry is always there, a dual presence, a persona, a history, that Alyce does not seek to shift or deny (for instance, through gender confirmation surgery), for to do this would be (for her) a rejection of God's creation, an unwillingness to accept the physical gifts God has given her. It is this theological claim that brings us to how Alyce's story relates to her lived experiences of religion.

[48] It is for this reason that I use 'Alyce' rather than 'Alyce/Jerry' for the remainder of this chapter.
[49] From a purely anecdotal perspective, it is my experience that some transgender people find it offensive to be identified with the gendered identity they espoused before 'coming out' as trans. Indeed, for those who have changed their name to correspond with their identities, being referred to by their 'old' or 'dead' names would be considered grossly insensitive.

Born and raised as a Catholic in the United States in the 1950s, Alyce recalls experiencing a great deal of shame and guilt around her gender identity, especially in moments when Jerry would behave in 'effeminate' ways. For Alyce's mother, 'boys acting like girls was a "sin". If I held my sister's pocketbook for her, my mom would make me hand it back to her because it was a sin' (Greenough, 2018, p. 70). This sense of shame was propounded further by the cruel behaviour of the other boys in Alyce's school (who would harass her in the school locker rooms for her breasts and small penis), as well as the cold evasions of her parents (who had once caught Alyce wearing her mother's old clothes, but chose to ignore it).

In an attempt to resist granting these experiences hegemony in how she makes sense of, and lives out, her Catholic values, Alyce grounds much of her spirituality in a theology of the trinity that sees the trinity as capable of reconciling the duality often at play between herself and Jerry. This reconciliation emerges for Alyce in the possibility of adopting a 'third', 'androgynous' persona, which she believes gains theological credence in the threefold imaginary of the trinity:

> There is one God, but He's comprised of three distinct entities. They are all God, but they're not the same being. The Father is not the Son who's not the Holy Spirit who's not the Father … One is not more powerful than the others, they're all the same even though they're not the same … If I decided to split my life between Alyce and Jerry, people would see two entirely different people. If I adopted an androgynous persona, it could be a totally different third person. I could be any one of those three personas, but I'd still be Me. It would be just how I decide to manifest myself. I don't know if that's a good analogy, but it kind of makes sense to me. (Greenough, 2018, p. 89).

Here, Alyce refigures conventional Catholic theological values and works through their implications for thinking of intersex bodies as three rather than two. It is in the threeness of God that Alyce sees herself: for Alyce, the intersex experience is indicative of her having been created in God's image and likeness, a God who, in her words, 'made [her] … loves [her] … and wants [her] to find peace and happiness'

(Greenough, 2018, p. 92). It is her *embodiment* as an intersex person, and the dualities that that brings for her in moments of orgasm, that leads Alyce towards this theology. It is her body and her emotions, expressed in complex relationships to names, pronouns and clothing choices, that ground her interpretation of what she deems valuable in religion, not the reverse. It is with this in mind, then, that I flesh out the importance of Benay and Alyce's stories for thinking through *ijtihad*'s value for the fostering task of religious schooling.

The stories of Benay and Alyce indicate the limitations of construing religion (and one's interpretation of it) purely in terms of teachings or worldviews. Indeed, the physicality of Benay's sexual relationship with her partner was deeply formative of her interpretation and experience of Shabbos. In a likewise fashion, the ambiguities surrounding her embodiment as an intersex woman were deeply formative for Alyce in how she made sense of the doctrine of the trinity and its relevance to her life. Affect also played a significant role in each of the women's engagements with religion (from Benay's self-assured confidence, to Alyce's shame), as did materiality (think of the bamboo sukkahs and Shabbos candles in Benay's case, and the old clothes Alyce experimented with as a child). If the fostering task of the religious school is to be seen as resonant with the Muslim conception of *ijtihad*, then the significance of Benay and Alyce's stories to this conception is their illustration of the fact that one's interpretation of what we inherit as valuable by traditions is never simply a matter of agreeing or disagreeing with a set of truth claims about the world. Yes, such truth claims play an important part in one's interpretation of religions and religious experience, but that interpretation is also shaped by bodily, affective, and material realities that cannot be side-lined or ignored. In short, *ijtihad*, when read in conversation with the stories of Muhsin, Benay, and Alyce, enables a view of one's

encounter with religious values to emerge that is responsive to how traditions and values are lived out and taken up in the messiness and specificity of lived traditions.

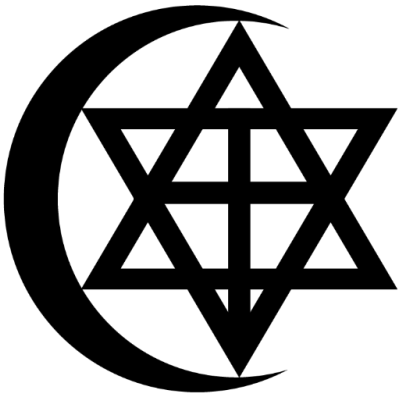
By appreciating that an *ijtihadic* approach to religious inheritances entails a sensitivity to how students live out relationships with traditions and values that are irreducibly bodily, affective, and material, the fostering task of religious school becomes an endeavour attuned to the fragmented and pluralistic nature of lived values, values that can be neither reduced to neat identitarian narratives, nor situated along inevitably self-fulfilling trajectories. In this way, viewing the fostering task of education in resonantly *ijtihadic* terms becomes an endeavour that is queer in the sense that it disrupts the fixedness of identities that serves as a hallmark of heteronormativity and its related imaginaries. Indeed, as I have reformulated it here, thinking with *ijtihad* for the fostering work of religious schooling serves as a direct challenge to any assumption of identitarian commonality in the religious school, even in situations where all students might nominally (or otherwise) identify with the same faith (a trend particularly relevant to 'minority' religious school contexts).

As the stories of Muhsin, Benay, and Alyce attest, our experiences of religion are so diverse, so shifting, so irreducibly unique, that a school's claim to a unified sense of religious identity (say, in terms of a supposed antithesis to queerness) becomes highly dubious at best. What brings a religious school community 'together' then, is the collective nature of the experiences it offers. Students unite with a shared concern to study those values that have shaped the religious landscape of our world, to imaginatively encounter those values in ways that are transformative for them and for the world (propositionally, bodily, affectively, and materially). Read with *ijtihad*, the work of the religious school becomes a commitment to fostering, a commitment

to the study of religious values as interpretable objects of study. As the next section makes clear, this is a task that directly responds to the demands of the school.

III. Values and the Abrahamic threesome

Figure 5: The Abrahamic threesome



To what extent can an *ijtihadic* approach to religious values be seen as resonant with the symbolism of the Abrahamic threesome? How, in other words, can the fostering task of the religious school speak to those dimensions of the scholastic to which schooling demands, while also being simultaneously receptive to the particular kind of symbolic registers often adopted by religious communities? Taking each element of the Abrahamic threesome in turn, I address these questions below, arguing that an *ijtihadic* approach to the fostering of religious values is precisely within the parametres of what the scholastic democratisation of free time sees as important about the school.

First, the star of David. Recall Rosenzweig's emphasis in chapter four on how the star of David communicates the ethical importance of responding to the proximity

of one's neighbour in achieving redemption. I drew parallels in chapters three and four between this and the scholastic through a focus on attention. The school exists as a time and space to take notice of what the world has to offer us, to listen to the voice of the other and to respond to that voice in ways that bring about personal and social transformation. The perspective on the fostering task of religious schooling offered in this chapter speaks directly to this idea of attention when we consider Bergdahl and Langmann's resistance to the alignment of fostering with a view of ethical action tied to an autonomous and liberal decision-making subject. For me, Bergdahl and Langmann's embrace of a more heteronomous view of ethics is valuable in its reliance on a responsiveness to the other as a basis for ethical behaviour. Our perspectives, choices, and actions are always already informed by those with whom we live and relate each day. The expansive reading of *ijtihad* offered in this chapter finds much resonance here: think of Benay's reinterpretation of Shabbos in light of her relationship with her partner, or of Muhsin, who lived a brief life of secrecy in response to the expectations and standards of his mother and wider community. By offering students the chance to engage with religious traditions and values in a way that recognises our interconnections with others (both human and non-human alike), the fostering task of the religious school becomes an endeavour that is deeply attentive to the proximity of one's neighbours and the values informing this, as well as to the personal and social responsibilities that come with these.

Second the cross. In chapters three and four, I focused on how the cross communicates that simultaneous sense of embodiment and disembodiment within the Christian story, and how that emphasis connects with my reading of the scholastic when we consider how the school is a flesh-and-blood community within a particular time and space, but is also capable of transcending itself in the pedagogical encounters

it offers students. This twin sense of embodiment and disembodiment is communicated in the fostering work of the religious school when we reflect on fostering's refusal to reduce students to a mere aggregate of identitarian commonalities. What is shared in the religious school is less a common adherence to a core set of values, and more the experience of studying those values and traditions in a way that can bring about transformation. Through a responsiveness and sensitivity to the role that students' affective and material lives play in their engagements with traditions, the religious school comes to foster values in ways that are attuned to the particularity of students' lived experiences and concerns, a particularity that undermines the neatness of the religious/queer divide. In short, fostering becomes an irreducibly *bodily* kind of engagement with religion, much like how Alyce's reappropriation of the trinity relied largely on her relationship to her body and to sexual pleasure as an intersex person.

At the same time, though, fostering also gives students the chance to transcend these limits. Indeed, the shared nature of the experience of studying values as interpretable objects of study will always be infused with a sense of the unknown (with that which transcends the body, if you like) in light of the liminally pedagogical nature of such an endeavour, a quality that necessarily refuses to reify our embodied encounters with religious values. Indeed, Alyce again comes to mind here, particularly as it was through an embodied reformulation of the trinity that Alyce began to engage with an androgynous imaginary of the divine that *transcended* the gendered limits of her life as Jerry, as well as the cisnormative limits of classic trinitarian thought. This open-endedness, intrinsic to *ijtihad* and to the embodied nature of the religious school's fostering work more generally, brings us to the last element of the Abrahamic threesome: the crescent.

I focused earlier on the capacity of the crescent to communicate a twin sense of repetition and creativity in the values of the Muslim faith, a characteristic that can be likewise aligned to the work of the school. The school *repeats* that which has come before in what it puts on the table for study, but at the same is *creative* in the educational nature of such encounters. The queer, disidentificatory work of the school is assured in the religious school bringing something potentially new to the religious values of the world, something that refuses to simply parrot the demands of the home or city/state without at least navigating those demands in a tactfully pedagogical (and hence transformative) way. The fostering task of the religious school echoes my alignment of repetition and creativity with the queer politics of schooling when we reflect on Bergdahl and Langmann's focus on fostering's location at the threshold between old and new. Engaging with religious traditions and values is an endeavour that is both radical and conservative at the same time.

It is conservative in its responsiveness to the 'call from the past', and radical in the educational quality to this responsiveness. Viewing the radical conservatism of fostering as an endeavour attuned to my more expansive reading of *ijtihad* offered above becomes possible when we consider the following statement by Benay, who reflects on her decision to become a rabbi in the Conservative tradition in this manner:

> I have always had a profound respect for tradition and mess with it very carefully, only where absolutely necessary, and only then after spending a great deal of time in debate, having given it a second, third, fourth, fifth, even tenth chance before I allow my gut to trump it. I feel strongly that you have to understand what you're changing before you change it. (Lappe, 2001, p. 203)

Here, the repetitive and creative dimensions of the crescent rings through in Benay's desire for institutional change, coupled with a deep reverence for, and responsiveness to religious values, and their attendant traditions and histories. In this way, Benay's encounter with her faith echoes the *ijtihadic* activities of Muhsin, particularly in his

choice to preserve distinctively Arabic names (and their theological implications) in setting up a queer Muslim support at odds with conventional Muslim traditions and practices.

As I have stressed in previous chapters, though, each element of the Abrahamic threesome should not to be taken in isolation: their symbolically sexual arrangement in a threesome lends itself to an interpretation of the fostering task of the religious school that is resonant with varying elements of the scholastic in mutually informative and simultaneous ways. Indeed, while an *ijtihadic* approach to the passing on of religious values may speak to, say, a school's (dis)embodied qualities, it is impossible to separate that embodiment from those traditions and values that are repeated and reinvented each day, nor from an attentiveness to others to whom our embodied lives are always inclined in a mode of response.[50] A queer theory of religious schooling, then, is one that embraces the messiness and fragmentations of this ongoing task. Fostering, informed by *ijtihad*, becomes an embodied, repetitive, and creative endeavour that responds to the propositional, affective and material dimensions of living values in pedagogically attentive ways. For me, this is the task that the religious school inherits each day.

The purpose of this chapter, then, was to queer what it means for a religious school to foster or pass on religious values in ways that are sensitive to the weight of tradition and heritage, without at the same time being determined by them. This is important in granting the space for the religious values that a school passes on to shift

[50] My use of the word 'inclined' is a nod to the work of Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2016), who argues for a view of subjectivity that is understood altruistically as a responsiveness to others, rather than in 'vertical' or autonomous terms. Theorising subjectivity in terms of inclination is resonant with the significances of the star of David, particularly in my reading of it in terms of an attentiveness to the proximity of the other as a basis for ethical action. For a compelling treatment of the place of inclination in how we imagine the 'geometry' of the educational relation, see Bergdahl and Langmann's (2018a) paper on the posture of pedagogy.

and transform in significance. However, an important question to reflect on at this point is the tenability of such a view with regards to more fixed and communitarian forms of religious traditions, for instance religious practices or rituals. This question seems especially pertinent in light of ritual practices like prayer that continue to take place in religious schools during events like school assemblies and graduations. A queering of religious rituals is what acts as the focus of the chapter to come.

CHAPTER SIX

Queering religious rituals:
Publicness and kavvanah

> Full participation in the rituals of the Roman Catholic Church would only be feasible in a Catholic school with a homogenous population of Catholic pupils. For the vast majority of Catholic schools in the world this is a purely theoretical notion. Hence the aim of ritual education cannot be for all pupils to participate in all ritual practices to the same extent. (Altena & Hermans, 2003, p. 115)

Engagement in religious rituals is a common feature in the life of many religious schools, and is often used as a key aspect in determining the supposed distinctiveness of a school's religious identity. The above statement by Patrick Altena and Chris Hermans is a direct acknowledgment of the apparent difficulties that arise when expectations to facilitate ritual are placed upon the school, particularly in contexts where students' attachments to specific religions and their attendant rituals cannot be uniformly assumed on the basis of a collective sense of religious belief or identity. While I welcome Altena and Hermans' perspective insofar as it recognises the importance of questions of pluralism when thinking through the place of ritual in religious schools, I am nonetheless hesitant at endorsing some of the underlying assumptions that could be read into their claims.

For instance, in assuming that homogeneity of religion ought to be a prerequisite for ritual participation in school, could the above comments not be read as suggesting that the work of the religious school is invariably tied to religious identity, rather than education? Indeed, is it not possible to think about what it might mean for a religious school to provide opportunities for ritual without tying such activities to the inevitable reproduction of religious adherence? This raises the

question of whether or not it is possible for us to imagine rituals with a religious heritage pluralistically, recognising the fact that one's engagements with ritual can engender opportunities for relating to the world and its histories differently, in ways that are attentive and receptive to the other. This brings me to the last point that I am interested in: namely, that rituals are fixed, unyielding practices that will inevitably exclude diverse others due to the impossibility of them being re-created or re-invented anew. What would it look like if we began imagining rituals in religious schools in ways that were open to new perspectives, new practices, and new approaches to thinking, feeling, and acting in this world? Indeed, why should one view of ritual dominate in our educational theorising, particularly when we consider the transformative pluralities intrinsic to the nature of pedagogy and the work of the school itself?

As a response to these assumptions, in this chapter I suggest that religious rituals can justifiably feature in the life of the religious school in ways that are educationally valuable. This perspective is rooted in the valorisation of ritual engagement in school for the *pedagogical* (rather than necessarily religious or identitarian) value such engagement might offer students. Providing opportunities for students to engage in religious ritual is argued for, not with the view to preserving or sustaining a uniform or shared commitment to a particular religion's identity or inheritance, but is instead done (like my approach to values in chapter five) with a sensitivity to the pluralism to which ritual encounters are capable of attending, and the potential transformations (personal, social, and/or religious) that can be engendered by such diversities. In this vein, the chapter proceeds from the view that religious rituals can be engaged with in religious schools in ways that are sensitive to difference, and open to student transformation, irrespective of how students might personally

identify (religiously or otherwise). In coming to think about how religious rituals in school might be conceived of in these terms, I suggest that our reflections begin from the premise that religious rituals exist, not as chances for confirming a shared religious identity, but as opportunities for remembering the past.

Conceptualising ritual from the perspective of memory is helpful for this chapter as it captures something of the transformative qualities to ritual. Rituals provide a time and space for us to attend to the present and respond to its limits by turning to what the past has to offer us. In this vein, I suggest (through an interpretation of Biesta) that it is through an encounter with the pluralities, dissonances, and disjunctures of what ritual demands that spaces can be created for students through which an education that is *public*, in the sense of being activist, experimental, and demonstrative, can be enabled. On this meaning, the Jewish school, for example, would see itself as offering opportunities for students to engage in rituals for the transformative pedagogical value such experiences might elicit for students, thereby resisting the tendency to frame such rituals as endeavours of a necessarily 'faithful' nature, or as exercises in inevitably sustaining certain religious practices and affiliations over others.

In an effort to translate such commitments across to the priorities of religious communities, this chapter engages with the Jewish notion of *kavvanah* ('intention' or 'attentiveness'), suggesting that this concept can be read as valorising a sensibility both to the legacies of the past, as well as to the incompleteness of the present. I illustrate the pertinence of *kavvanah* for reframing rituals in these terms by focusing on queer theologies on Christian worship, as well as on transgender reclamations of

Jewish *mikveh* rituals.[51] I then conclude by translating how such an argument sits comfortably with what the school is tasked with, through the mediations once again of the Abrahamic threesome. But first, I offer a general focus on the extent to which ritual, in its remembrance of the past, can be seen as educationally worthwhile in religious schools in our pluralist world, specifically in the context of a commitment to the 'public' nature of education.

I. Ritual, remembrance, and the 'publicness' of education

To begin, what do I mean when I speak of ritual? How we define religious ritual is difficult at best, and is largely relative to such factors as social, cultural, political, and religious contexts, as well as disciplinary boundaries and priorities. In a minimal sense, though, a 'religious ritual' can be conventionally understood as any embodied activity that a person or community engages in with the view to communicating, recognising, performing and/or experiencing an individual or shared sense of attachment to, belief in, and/or appreciation for religion and community, God, gods, and/or the transcendent (Bell, 1992, pp. 19-20). Religious rituals are often tied to specific environments, for instance, synagogues, churches, or mosques, as well as the family dinner table or bedside (Grimes, 1982, p. 21; Bell, 1992, p. 98) and mediated through material objects, such as candles, prayer mats, baths, and traditional dress

[51] As I gesture to in chapter three of the dissertation, a significant limitation of this chapter lies in its lack of engagement with queer Muslim accounts of ritual. This omission is due to the non-existence of such accounts (to my knowledge) within queer Muslim theology. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the relative newness of queer Muslim theologising when compared to that taking place within the Jewish and Christian traditions. In spite of this, it is my hope that the translation provided in section three of this chapter (with the Abrahamic threesome's nod to the symbolism of the Muslim faith) will be capable of opening up at least the potential for these insights to resonate with Muslim communities and their associated school contexts. For sociological (rather than strictly *theological*) accounts of queer Muslim experiences of ritual that might achieve similar effects, see, for instance, the fourth chapter of Kath Browne's, Sally R. Munt's, and Andrew K.T. Yip's *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places*, pp. 81-109.

(Grimes, 1982, p. 23). Furthermore, religious rituals are typically allied to the guidance of some source of religious authority or tradition, whether that be the rabbi, priest, or imam, or indeed the liturgical directory, siddur, or sunnah (Bell, 1992, p. 118). Examples of rituals that fall into this provisional definition can include such observances as kneeling, sitting, bowing, blessing, crossing one's hands, arms, or legs, lighting a candle, reciting a litany, chanting a prayer, singing a hymn, reflecting on a surah, and so on.

Given the fact that such observances are typically seen as being contextually-bound and in relationship with some kind of religious authority, rituals can therefore be understood as *inherited* kinds of practice, emerging from complex religious and political histories, traditions, and events. On this meaning, rituals participate in a form of *remembrance*, whereby the voices and traditions of the past are taken up and brought to bear on the present, exposing, in the process, the present's inherent incompleteness, an incompleteness calling for further action and response. In the previous chapter I offered a reading of the religious school as providing students with a time and space for engaging with inherited religious traditions and practices as interpretable objects of study (*ijtihad*), irrespective of the personal identities or affiliations that students might themselves bring to such a space. This chapter's defence of ritual as a justifiable practice in religious schools is motivated by this same commitment: I see engagement with ritual as offering pedagogical potential for students to become otherwise. Read in this way, ritual engagement in school becomes less a matter of instilling (or feigning!) a shared sense of religious belonging, and more a matter of pedagogically engaging with (remembering, if you will) inherited observances for the personal, social, and/or religious transformations that might arise from such an experience.

However, an important consideration to offer at this point is the fact that classrooms and schools are not oratories or churches, and that the role of the teacher is different to that of the vicar: if ritual is dependent on context and authority, does its inclusion within the work of the religious school (and, in particular, the classroom space) lose all possibility? In other words, does the religious ritual lose its 'religiousness' by being engaged with pedagogically (rather than, say, piously), becoming an experience of a different (even tokenistic or appropriative?) kind and quality altogether? This is a legitimate and necessary challenge, to which I respond with the preference of framing such observances in the religious school less in terms of religious rituals (in a strong sense) *per se*, and more in terms of opportunities for weak kinds of encounters with religious practices. Imagining such experiences in terms of a weak engagement with religious ritual is helpful as this qualification recognises the importance of remembering the traditions from which such practices emerge (thereby avoiding appropriation), while at the same time acknowledging that the classroom is a different space to the church, and therefore demands a different (and pedagogical) kind of relationship to such activities that could potentially transcend the religious.

I commit myself, in short, to imaging such rituals in weak terms to allow for the spaciousness necessary for the possibility of a more disaffiliate relationship to religion and ritual to emerge in how students might engage with rituals as forms of remembrance, for the inclusion of ritual encounters in the school context would lose its pedagogical value if inevitable 'faithfulness' (however diverse) were assumed. In section two of this chapter I trace how this view of religious experience is recognised within theologies of ritual, with reference particularly to queer theologies across the Christian and Jewish traditions. For the moment though, it falls on me to briefly sketch

what I mean when I speak of rituals as forms of *remembrance*, and how this might be engaged with in ways that are educationally weak.

Ritualising remembrance: Naming the present's incompleteness

A very particular understanding of remembrance informs Roger Simon's (2003) work, one grounded in a commitment to education.[52] In beginning to understand the nature of Simon's thinking, considering the kinds of questions motivating his efforts is worthwhile. He writes of how his concern for remembrance in and through education arises out of a sensitivity to 'the problem of what it could mean to live historically, to live with an upright attentiveness to traces of those who have inhabited times and places other than one's own' (2003, p. 46). Like Bergdahl and Langmann in chapter five, Simon positions education as necessarily attentive to the call from the past: its interests are in practices that 'might embody a sensibility through which an encounter with the testament of another is lived within an ethics of responsibility' (2003, p. 46). Simon's interests in remembrance are framed not simply in terms of contributing 'to knowledge of the past' in ways that might underwrite 'a claim to group or communal membership' for instance. Instead, his interests are in the capacity of remembrance

[52] William Losito (1996) also offers an engagement with ritual that has an explicitly educational focus. He calls for a renewed appreciation for the public role of sacred myth and ritual in schooling, framing his argument as a response against the use of ritual in public schools that aims at promoting religious hegemonies or 'theology-as-ideology' (1996, p. 69). Instead, he makes the case for an approach to religious ritual in schooling along the following lines: 'The purpose would not be to encourage the adoption of one particular set or interpretation of sacred or non-sacred myths and rituals. Rather, the purpose would be to invite students to understand the significance of the quest for the sacred in cultural myth and rituals (1996, p. 75).' Given that Losito is writing this in the context of the United States (where a clear demarcation between public and religious schooling exists), his argument only goes so far as the study of sacred ritual in public schools, and therefore does not refer to student participation in rituals, at least not explicitly. I take the educational quality to Losito's argument, though, and extend it by suggesting that participating in rituals can have an educational value for students, insofar as they are enacted in ways that are pedagogically creative (in the sense of creating something new) through the remembrance to which they attend. Simon's account of *kavvanah*, remembrance, and education offers the resources for preserving this sense of pedagogical creativity, especially in his alignment of hope, as we will soon see, with transformative recollection.

(particularly public practices of memory) to enact 'a transitive function; that is, they may be conceived as actions that "pass over" and take effect on another person or persons (2003, p. 46)'. In short, Simon's commitment to remembrance stems, not in the identitarian significance such practices might have for people, but rather in the capacity of public practices of memory to engender change in some way, in and through what one learns *from* an encounter with the past, with difference.

Central to Simon's understanding of remembrance in this regard is *hope*, seen less in terms of an ever-deferrable future ('a desired "not-yet" always still to come'), and more in terms of a 'structural condition of the present', by which he means a condition 'rooted in a conception of what it means to be positioned in the present' (2003, p. 47).[53] In other words, public practices of memory recall the past in order to expose and change the present, and in this way open up alternative futures that are responsive to past and present at one and the same time. Read in this way, the hopefulness of remembrance becomes, for Simon, a 'transformative recollection', a 'practice of unsettling the present' by rendering it 'exposed, vulnerable' (2003, p. 49). The hopefulness of remembrance allows for 'a way of naming the present's inherent incompleteness', as well as a way of responding to this incompleteness by becoming 'an opening, a learning, a moving beyond that which is recognised as a concern of the present' (2003, p. 49). The 'opening' of the present that is enacted through remembrance is initiated for Simon by a 'rending', a 'tearing of continuity' with tradition in those moments when continuity with tradition becomes inadequate for responding to what the incompleteness of the present demands. Hence, remembrance (as I read it) can be seen as *disidentifying* from the present, tapping into alternative

[53] See Biesta and Säfström (2011) for a critique of hope in education, when understood in terms of an ever-deferrable future.

possibilities that go beyond identifying in continuity with extant social structures and discourses. Simon writes the following in this vein:

> On these terms, remembrance becomes a social process within which a collectivity considers how and on what terms we can admit accounts of the past into our contemporary moral community such that they possess an active claim on our present and future actions in ways that do not reduce the terms of this admittance to projections of our own identities and desires. (2003, p. 49)

Remembrance becomes educational in opening up opportunities for the untold and unpredictable, opportunities necessitated by an attentiveness to the present, and, perhaps most significantly, to those *in* the present who make it up.

It is in understanding remembrance in these terms that I argue for the place of religious rituals in the religious school. By offering students the chance to engage with ritual, the religious school creates spaces where the incompleteness of the present (including its religious traditions) can be recognised, and in this way open up possibilities for fracturing the rigidness with which religious traditions and rituals are often approached and navigated, particularly in those moments where the religious/queer divide persists. On this meaning, engaging with religious rituals would be seen as opportunities for tapping into the legacies of tradition with a receptiveness to the invisible and forgotten. Before developing the ways in which this account of remembrance and ritual speaks to queer theological resources, it is firstly necessary for me to think through an approach to education capable of enacting it. It is in this regard that I turn to Biesta's account of public pedagogy, for it is in the 'publicness' of pedagogy that a disidentificatory kind of relation can emerge, one that disrupts 'strong' accounts of ritual participation as tied to the inevitable reproduction of collective forms of (hetero- and cisnormative) religious identities.

Action, freedom, and the condition of plurality

Biesta draws extensively from the work of Hannah Arendt in developing his take on the publicness of education, so it is through his reading of her that I proceed.[54] For Arendt (1958; 1962), human beings can be understood as active beings, beings with the capacity to act in the world. Biesta notes how she draws a distinction between three modes of active life (labour, work, and action) and likens the last of these to the ability to take initiative, to begin something new, to give rise to something that previously did not exist. Biesta focuses on how Arendt compares the human being to an *initium*, that is both a 'beginning' and a 'beginner' (1962, p. 170): with speech and action, human beings are in the business of creating newness, calling 'something into being which did not exist before' (1962, p. 151). He cites her in writing: 'With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world and this insertion is like a second birth' (Arendt, 1958, pp. 176-177). Importantly, Arendt connects this understanding of action to freedom: our freedom as human beings is exercised, neither before nor after the creation of a new beginning, but is instead enacted *in* action itself.

For Biesta, the significance of this view of freedom as action in Arendt's work comes to the fore when we consider how, in the moment of acting, there will always be others 'who respond to our initiatives and take up our beginnings' (2013b, p. 19). To freely engender a new beginning relies on the responsiveness of others, for it is through the presence of others in our lives to begin with that our actions can be taken up in the world. Freedom as action rests on our dependence upon others who escape the limits of our own comprehension and experience. It is because of this that

[54] I engage with Biesta's understanding of public education as his account is one that takes seriously the public *qualities* of education itself. His interests are less in instrumentalising education for, say, narrowly construed and strategic ends, and more in exposing and sustaining the intrinsic publicness of education, a publicness that is politically significant but not politically prescriptive. The dissertation's valorisation of educational weakness is in harmony with this.

Biesta points to how Arendt makes the case that 'to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act' (Arendt, 1958, p. 188), that is, the capacity to bring something new into the world. Think of this thesis for instance. It could only arise as something new into the world in light of my previous encounters with texts, ideas, and scholars who held perspectives and lived lives different to my own. The freedom I exercise in offering this thesis to the world as a new beginning depends entirely on others informing and responding to its content, including (especially) your engagement with it as a reader in this moment. In this way, Arendt's insistence upon the 'impossibility' of remaining 'the unique masters of what [we] do' (Arendt, 1958, p. 244) holds true: freedom is not a phenomenon of the will, determined by the choices of a private sovereign, but is instead something that is enacted in the flesh-and-blood realities of living with, and depending upon, others.

The import of this reading of freedom for understanding the public character of education emerges for Biesta in Arendt's reflections on the necessity of a 'public realm' (1962, p. 149) as a condition for freedom as action to occur. Biesta quotes Arendt when he argues that the 'public domain' is to be seen less as a physical location, and more as that which denotes a particular quality to human interaction:

> The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be … It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men [sic] exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly. (Arendt, 1958, pp. 198-199)

The public domain, in other words, captures the dependence upon others that serves as a basis of freedom as action in our world. Read in these terms, the notion of 'publicness' or 'publicity' gestures to the fundamental condition of plurality inherent to human freedom: action becomes impossible without the difference intrinsic to

human togetherness, for it is in this difference that new beginnings emerge. It is because of this that Biesta offers the idea of a 'citizenship of strangers' (2012, p. 690) as a helpful lens for thinking through what human togetherness demands of us. Sustaining the 'public' quality of our relationships with others involves preserving and pursuing plurality, for it is only through an embrace of others' 'strangeness' to me that the freedom of human action is maintained, and newness enabled.

The 'citizenship of strangers' that acts as a foundation of Biesta's appraisal of Arendt can be seen as valorising a view of the public that rests on a 'mode of human togetherness which is not after a common ground but rather articulates an interest in a common world' (2012, p. 690). Understanding 'the public', through this lens, becomes less about keeping intact an identitarian sense of sameness, and more about recognising (and preserving) a mutual sense of dependence upon each other in the face of our inevitable and necessary differences. Given education's investment in the beginning of something new (in freedom as action, it seems), Biesta sees Arendt's work as highly appropriate for reflecting on what it means to speak about the public nature of education, understood in three modes.

Public pedagogy in three modes

Biesta critiques two conventional approaches to public pedagogy in educational thinking and practice: a pedagogy *for* the public, and a pedagogy *of* the public. Biesta characterises a pedagogy *for* the public as a mode of instruction that sees the world 'as a giant school' (2012, p. 691). Read in this way, a pedagogy for the public is invested in 'educational agents' (such as teachers) instructing the citizenry on what to think, how to act, and what to be, with the view to upholding and sustaining a particular

understanding of public life. A pedagogy for the public manifests itself in interventions that aim at students being 'tolerant', 'law-abiding', or 'respectful', for example, often in ways that are moralistic and/or in tune with the demands of the nation state (Biesta, 2012, p. 692). A pedagogy *of* the public resists this former approach to public education in the sense that it conceives of the teacher as a facilitator, rather than instructor. A pedagogy of the public aims at the generation of critical consciousness, achieved through what is learned as a result of the collective experience of students studying the world and its injustices together. Biesta is critical of both accounts of public pedagogy on the grounds of their elision of certain pluralities within the educational encounter, pluralities from which the 'publicness' of education (in the Arendtian sense) derives and depends.

In terms of a pedagogy for the public, pluralities are eroded for Biesta in its erasure of those differences that fracture the limits of what might be deemed acceptably 'public' for the nation state: instructing the citizenry to behave or to think in certain ways necessarily closes off possibilities that transgress what is expected of the public. With respect to a pedagogy of the public, Biesta acknowledges that room exists for a more pluralistic account of education to emerge, specifically in this pedagogy's attention to resisting the privileged position of the teacher as an authoritarian voice. Its limits, though, present themselves in its tendency to frame the generation of critical consciousness in terms of what can be collectively *learned* by students: for Biesta, learning is not quite as open-ended as is often assumed, and can have the effect of closing down as much as it opens up. He writes:

> … unlike what is often assumed, learning is not some kind of open and natural process that can go in any direction, but is actually a very particular and specific 'regime' … a regime, moreover, that demands a particular relation of the self to the self, that is a relation of awareness, reflection and conclusion. (Biesta, 2012, pp. 692-693)

As Biesta notes elsewhere (2015), a focus solely on learning can have the effect of closing down certain existential possibilities in education: if education is to be read solely in terms of what we can learn about our world, the world becomes reducible to what the student can determine and grasp. Biesta writes of how the reduction of education to learning:

> … means that in a very fundamental sense my existence 'occurs' before the existence of the world: I assume that I am there first in order then to start making sense of the world. It also means that I assume that the world exists for me, that is, that the world is in some way at my disposal as an object for me to make sense of and construct knowledge about. (2015, p. 238)

Plurality is denied here through a conception of education that has, as its starting point, the centrality of a self that exists prior to the world: on this meaning, the generation of critical consciousness in a pedagogy of the public depends upon a view of the world as 'a giant adult education class in which educational agents perform the role of facilitator' (2013, p. 22). For Biesta, plurality is lost here as such a view of public pedagogy is not sufficiently 'interruptive' enough: a pedagogy of the public opens up possibilities for transformation, this is true, but only within the terms of what the student can comprehend, understand, and/or reflect upon.

Biesta's response to the limits of both of these is to propose a third mode of public pedagogy, one understood as an 'enactment of a concern for "publicness" or "publicity", that is, a concern for the public quality of human togetherness and thus for the possibility of actors and events to become public' (2012, p. 693). Returning to his reading of Arendt, Biesta's proposal entails 'keeping open the possibility of a space where freedom can appear'. A public pedagogy is one that exposes, sustains, and builds upon the pluralities upon which the generation of 'newness' arises in our world. Interpreted thus, the teacher becomes neither an instructor, nor a facilitator, but rather someone who 'interrupts' the students' world with the view to cultivating those

encounters with difference through which freedom can be enacted. In this third mode of public pedagogy, education becomes less instructive and learning-focused, and 'more activist, more experimental, and more demonstrative'. Activist in the sense of creating real alternatives for human togetherness that reclaim opportunities for 'public relationships-in-plurality'. Experimental in the sense of inventing new possibilities for being and doing in the world. And demonstrative in the sense that such a pedagogy demonstrates, in its publicness, that alternatives are always possible, and that things can always be done differently (2013b, p. 23).

Practically, Biesta's views on public pedagogy involve the introduction, by the teacher, of an event, an experience, or an object that (in its difference) interrupts the world of the student, making public forms of human togetherness possible, creating spaces, in short, where freedom can appear, in an 'ongoing process of "becoming public"' (2012, p. 684). For me, this is the crux of what this chapter argues for: the chance to engage in religious rituals is offered by the teacher with the view to exposing students to an interruptive experience through which public forms of human togetherness become possible. Through the remembrance of ritual, an encounter with the incompleteness of the present can be facilitated, and, through freedom as action, the possibility of the present's transformation enabled.

Conceptualising public pedagogy in this third sense might, at first glance, seem antithetical to what is often expected of ritual in religious schools: for instance, is freedom as action denied in ritual in its conformities to the legacies and practices of religious contexts and authorities? Indeed, is the publicness of human togetherness lost in the homogeneity of identity often tied to communal ritual practices? Below, I engage with queer theologies and accounts across Christian and Jewish traditions to dispute this characterisation. As the theologians in section two make clear,

experiencing ritual is a far messier and more complicated business than more traditional and orthodox theologies would suggest, implicated in, and inspired by, inheritances that I read as being pointedly public *through* their orientation towards remembrance. In starting this engagement, I gesture first to the Jewish understanding of *kavvanah*, the vantage point from which this view of ritual begins.

II. *Kavvanah*, memory, and the publicness of ritual

Kavvanah, *kavannah*, or *kavana* literally translates as 'intention' or as the 'sincere feeling' informing the 'direction of the heart' as one prays or engages in ritual acts (Giller, 2008, pp. 20-21). As John D. Rayner indicates, *kavvanah* comes from an ancient verbal root meaning 'to direct, to prepare, to establish': it is a concept that attempts to communicate the 'orientation of mind, heart and intention' implicated in a prayerful and considered engagement with Jewish ritual (1998, pp. 73-74). *Kavvanah* emphasises the importance of engaging in ritual practices in ways that are heartfelt and considered, rather than merely mechanical and mindless: indeed, as Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (2012) argues in terms of the Jewish ritual practice of davening (that is, the recitation of prescribed Jewish liturgical prayers): 'To daven with *kavvanah* means to pray with focus, intention, meaning. It means praying from the heart, rather than prayer centred solely on the mind'. Louis Jacobs (1995) quotes the eleventh century Jewish moral philosopher Bahya ibn Pakudah in claiming that ritual without *kavvanah* 'is like a body without a soul'. *Kavvanah*, on this meaning, captures a fuller conception of the kind of focus and disposition that people bring to ritual, one informed not only by declarative statements about God and the world, but also by an embodied attentiveness to the world, to the present, and its people.

In terms of the last of these points, *kavvanah* is significant in pointing to the role of remembrance in ritual engagement. Returning to Simon, *kavvanah* can be understood as a 'form of presencing, a being-for-another': *kavvanah* is a concept that captures and sustains in ritual a 'proximity, not as a state, a repose, but a restlessness, a movement toward the other' (2003, p. 53). On this meaning, *kavvanah* demands in ritual an attention to the world, its failings and shortcomings, so as to enable 'the possibility of a "social practice", a relationality within which one might enact the very cracking of fate, fate understood here as the necessities of the present' (2003, p. 55). *Kavvanah* points to the fact that, in their remembrance of past inheritances, rituals entail a disposition necessarily open to discontinuity and change, to the transformation of the structures of the present in the face of those who are other. In this way, a *kavvanic* approach to ritual emulates *an orientation towards publicness* in that it frames remembrance as a means through 'one becomes self-present to, and responsive toward, an existence beyond oneself, signalling problems of answerability and address' (Simon, 2003, p. 51). A pedagogical concern for publicness through engagement with rituals, then, is one that takes *kavvanah* seriously by 'answering to alterity, to a difference not ever ethically reduced to the terms of one's own self-understanding' (Simon, 2003, p. 51). Below, I focus on the degree to which such an approach to ritual can be read as having queer theological resonance within the Christian and Jewish traditions.

Queering Christian worship: A transformative recollection

I see Siobhán Garrigan's queer perspectives on Christian worship as emulating *kavvanah*'s 'embodied attentiveness', specifically in her articulation of the 'need for

a [ritual] space that can "queer" supposed norms of power and play in this world in favour of an emancipatory vision' of human experience (2009, p. 225).[55] For Garrigan, worship's queer potential presents itself in the 'perennially counter-cultural' quality to ritual acts, which she conceives as sites through which the 'endlessly changing divine-human alliance is established and developed, *contested and investigated* in this world' (2009, p. 225, emphases added). Rituals, read in this manner, become less about reproducing fixed identitarian narratives or religious orthodoxies or modes of belonging, and more about offering participants the chance to grapple with, tease out, and actualise a commitment to 'the undoing of any and every site of supposedly established worldly power', in connection with God and/or the religious inheritances of the past (2009, p. 225).

Importantly, though, Garrigan's 'queering' does not end at a simple counter-cultural framing of ritual practices: indeed, she writes of how 'it is not enough to talk about how Christian worship queers the pitch of a consumerist culture or even to rely on a self-satisfied queer ritual ethic … that is to spin the word 'queer' out too poetically, if not to wholly (mis-)appropriate it' (2009, p. 226). She makes the case that Christian 'worship cannot truly be queer in this culture unless it integrates sex, unless it stems from the life experiences of those whose sexed lives entail their acceptance of the label queer (whether happily or as an imposition) in this culture' (2009, p. 226). She continues:

[55] In her essay on queer worship, Garrigan tends to use the terms 'worship' and 'ritual' in an interchangeable way, so it is for this reason that her work is explored here. To my mind, though, the distinction is subtle, and does not entail the mutual exclusion of either. Ritual, as we have seen, is more formalised, with a direct relationship to inherited forms of practices in some way. Worship, however, is a much looser term, conveying admiration and/or respect for the divine, in ways that might be expressed in more traditionally ritualised practices, though not necessarily. Worship, in short, relates to ritual only when ritual is used to revere the transcendent. In this sense, worship can be ritualistic, though need not be at all times.

> LGBT dating and union-making, threesomes, bathhouses, periodic celibacy, open relationships, adoptive families and self-insemination need to be talked about, just as straight-dating and marriage, monogamy, nuclear families, nursing-home romance and immaculate conceptions(!) are. (Garrigan, 2009, p. 226)

Read in these terms, Garrigan's queer account of Christian ritual both demands and engenders a disruptive flexibility and inventiveness that arises from, and integrates, the particularities and details of our own individual lives as human beings in community. Ritual becomes both theologically vibrant and socially disruptive here when it opens itself up to the possibility of effacing its own limits, in and through a responsiveness to the embodied lives of queers.

The appropriateness of *kavvanah* comes to the fore here as it is the specificity of queer experience (coupled with the 'incompleteness' of hetero- and cisnormative accounts of religious ritual and its exclusions) that acts as the vantage point from which the significance of ritual manifest itself and can be queerly reimagined. Rituals are not, for Garrigan, sacrosanct or exclusivist practices that exist to hallmark the supposed purity and homogeneity of traditions and communities. Indeed, she emphasises the importance of transcending this incompleteness by viewing rituals as being 'shaped by [participant] experiences and needs, their symbol-structures and language-games as much as by anybody else's' (2009, pp. 228-229). In this vein, rituals, in their queerness, become works only ever in progress, forms of *kavvanic* remembrance that responsively shift and transform the exclusions and hierarchies of the present through an attention to the diversities of human experience:

> Queer worship, like all genuine worship, is a work only ever in progress: that's why it's called 'liturgy'. As many liturgics teachers remind us, the root 'urg' means work in the sense of being wrought, and just as ore is wrought from iron in metallurgy, so 'lit', the people, is what is wrought by the work of liturgy. But, unlike the ore analogy, worship is a time and space in which we are only wrought, never completed and held up as a finished product. (Garrigan, 2009, p. 228)

If ritual is that which is wrought by the people, then I think it becomes possible for the values and dispositions of those across varying religious, ethical, and sexual positions (among others) to have a constituting and creative role in how rituals are shaped and conceived. Garrigan's view allows for the multiplicity of experiences and priorities of the present to be remembered, 'taken up', and responded to with full honesty and seriousness, in ways that go beyond such perspectives being merely 'tolerated' within larger ritualistic structures or narratives.

Interpreted through this lens, Garrigan's theology allows, in short, for a public conception of ritual to gain credence that is pedagogical in its activist, experimental, and demonstrative qualities. Hers is *activist* in the sense that she seeks to disrupt the conformities of traditional conceptions of ritual with the view to creating possibilities for queers and others to authentically come together around a shared experience. Her work is a testament to more *experimental* modes of theologising in how hers is a theology invested in understanding such togetherness in ways that can creatively reshape and reimagine how ritual can be understood, structured, and embodied. And finally, her theology is *demonstrative* in exemplifying a concrete commitment to showing (in response to the exclusions as well as diversities of the present) the possibility of there always being another way of seeing, doing, and experiencing things.

Of course, a realistic question to ask is the practicability of this kind of theology: have there been efforts to concretise rituals in these terms, and if so, what do such creative efforts look like? It is here where a consideration of Jewish transgender *mikveh* rituals becomes fruitful, not least in terms of demonstrating the possibilities that can be achieved through a pedagogical engagement with ritual grounded in its publicness.

Transition and transformation: Mikveh *rituals responding to transgender lives*

Mikvaot (singular, *mikveh),* are ritual baths traditionally used in Orthodox Jewish circles to mark, through ritual immersion in water, important transitions in the life of a person, from menstruation to marriage. Historically, *niddah* - the monthly ritual immersion after menstruation – has been the most common use for *mikvaot*, traditionally formulated as a 'purification' practice for women seven days after the end of menstruation before re-engaging in sexual activity with their husbands (Crasnow, 2017, p. 179). The practice has garnered much critique from more progressive theological voices within Judaism. For example, given the fact that *niddah* has persisted for women but not for men (to retain purity after seminal emission, for instance), many have read it as sexist, and outside the realm of egalitarian Jewish practice (Crasnow, 2017, p. 179). Indeed, this, combined with how immersion in *mikvaot* is typically segregated along gender lines (with men immersing with men, and women with women), has led to the rejection of *mikveh* rituals by many Jewish denominations, particularly those in American Jewish communities.

Perhaps surprisingly, though, *mikveh* rituals have recently experienced something of a rebirth in Jewish theologies and practices, particularly among theologians and faith community members who are transgender. Transgender and queer Jewish scholar Sonia Crasnow relates this development to the growing need among the transgender Jewish community to ritually celebrate pivotal moments of transition in their lives, for instance if transgender people 'come out' to others as trans, or if they undergo gender confirmation surgery. Crucially, these moments of transition include those 'that have not traditionally been observed through *mikveh* ritual':

transgender engagements with immersion practices have therefore been accompanied with an impulse to change and re-create *mikveh* spaces so that they reflect feminist and queer sensibilities (Crasnow, 2017, p. 180). Indeed, Crasnow writes of how these reclaimed *mikveh* practices 'allow the ritual creator and/or participant to imagine and engage in a queer Jewish world – built on queer theologies and hermeneutics – that affirms their queer and trans identities within Judaism' (2017, p. 197). An example of such reinvention is the ritual's reliance upon immersion as a symbol of transitioning into a new (gendered) life, a newness brought about by the uncertainty signified in the coming together of body and water. For Crasnow, the immersive ritual of the *mikveh* acts as a celebration of ambiguity and paradox, which she relates to the ritual's healing capacity to performatively disrupt the certainties of heteronormativity and its rigid binary accounts of gender. In this regard, she writes of how ritual immersion in the *mikveh* 'does not serve to cleanse the (queer/trans) body of its own essential impurities, rather it has been reconceptualised as a method for healing the queer/trans body from the toxicity of hetero- and cisnormativity' (2017, pp. 187-188). She continues:

> In these rituals the tradition of immersion in the *mikveh* has been restructured to frame gender transition as a miraculous act of perpetual queer becoming, and of queer world-making, in which the ritual becomes God's partner in the task of creation. This ritual moment allows queer Jews to glimpse a utopian future: a queer Jewish world where queer and transgender lives are not condemned, ignored, or even simply included, but *celebrated*. (Crasnow, 2017, p. 197)

Crucially, it is as a response to queer and trans experiences and priorities that the creative theologies underpinning the reimagination of *mikveh* arise: *mikveh* rituals are here shaped as malleable *modes of response* to particular personal and theological needs, rather than as set codes of practice within and around which people must invariably (and, in some cases, inauthentically) fit and structure their lives. This last point brings me to the helpfulness of *kavvanah* as a framework for assessing the

potential 'publicness' of rituals with a religious heritage. It is the response to the exclusions of the transgender community by traditionally cisnormative Jewish ritual that shapes how *mikveh* is understood, engaged with, and recreated in Crasnow's account.

Kavvanah finds resonance in the perspectives of other transgender Jewish theologians, for instance Elliot Kukla, who authored a *mikveh* ritual for gender transition. His reformulation of *mikveh* practices is grounded in a theological appreciation for the irreducibility of bodily life, a particularity that, for him, opens up possibilities for embracing the diversities of God's creation. Recognising the diversities of human experiences as a basis for reinventing theological and ritual inheritances is borne out in Kukla's views on the importance of living lives unfettered by the limits imposed by heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and its attendant religious orthodoxies:

> God wants and needs difference. Holiness comes from diversity, as opposed to sameness. This theology can liberate all of us from the boundaries that circumscribe our lives. It asks us to throw away the expectations that our bodies or our souls are containable within two categories. It allows us to see each and every other person as a uniquely created being. And it commands us to move through the world embodying infinitely diverse manifestations of God's own image. (2006a, p. 8)

Claims to theological or sacred 'propriety' in how rituals are understood or structured fall short in this approach. The diversities of human experiences render us all so uncontainably unique, that efforts to streamline how we express a possible relationship to the divine quickly collapse under the weight of their own redundancy. This theology is expressed in the second of Kukla's three blessings that he incorporates into a *mikveh* ritual for gender transition: 'Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God, Ruler of Time and Space who has made me in God's image' (2006b, p. 2). To my mind, the appeal to God's image ('*imago Dei*') frames the participant's encounter with the *mikveh* ritual

in terms of the irreducible uniqueness of the participant's (transgender) life: as God's image is that which is, in theological terms, at once both unknown and ineffable, so too is the participant's, and it is this that both exposes the 'incompleteness' of cisnormative *mikveh* practices, as well as reformulating immersion with an internal spaciousness that transcends (and disrupts) Orthodoxy's original conception of the practice.

With this *kavvanic* account of ritual in mind, the claim that ritual practices enact a publicness that is at once activist, experimental, and demonstrative becomes more plausible. The account of ritual offered above speaks to Biesta's concern for activism in its creation of the possibilities for new modes of human togetherness, of relationships-in-plurality. Rather than framing the relationship between transgender people and the traditions of Judaism inevitably in terms of exclusion, invisibility, condemnation, vilification, or disgust, Crasnow and Kukla open spaces in their theological reflections on *mikveh* rituals through which alternative forms of practice open up, practices characterised by a receptiveness to, and celebration of, transgender experiences. Crasnow's and Kukla's perspectives liberate ritual practices from monological accounts of religious ritual sustained through Orthodoxy's commitment to such practices as *niddah*. Crasnow and Kukla take the irreducibility of trans Jewish experience seriously, and through this build a theological account of ritual encounters through which all Jews, transgender and cisgender alike, can celebrate their relationships with God and with their religious communities *together*, however diverse from one another they might be.

In this vein, ritual becomes something that is continually invented and re-invented anew: read with *kavvanah* in mind, it becomes an *experimental* kind of activity, open to, and *demonstrative* of, alternative possibilities for people to relate to

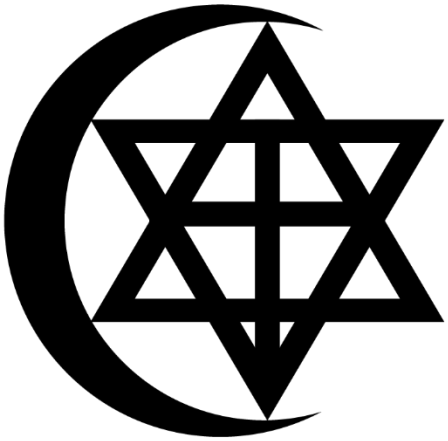
themselves, to others, and to God, beyond the strictures of hetero- and cisnormativity and their attendant exclusions. Understood in this fashion, ritual becomes a public kind of endeavour, opening up new beginnings through which people and their social, cultural, and religious contexts, can be transformed and created in ways that transgress what is currently deemed possible by the religious/queer divide. To my mind, such an approach does not exclude the possibility of apostasy, atheism, or agnosticism within the *kavvanic* attentiveness of ritual, for to ignore these perspectives, experiences, and/or their future possibility would be to rob remembrance of its transformative nature.

In summary, then, through the lens of *kavvanah,* I forwarded a view of ritual as a practice that could be restructured and reimagined in response to the particularities and diversities of the present, diversities both within and beyond religious traditions and affiliations. The claim for engaging with rituals with a religious heritage in this way was made first through recourse to the work of Biesta, who draws from Arendt's conception of the *polis* to develop an understanding of public pedagogy as taking place in *interruptive* spaces where relationships-in-plurality can be fostered and sustained. It was my contention that religious rituals could offer such opportunities for public pedagogy to be enacted, in and through a *kavvanic* attentiveness to the other, in particular the queer other often excluded in the present by religious discourses and practices. To showcase this argument, the resonances between Biesta's public account of pedagogy and queer Jewish and Christian traditions were mapped, through a particular focus on the theologies of Crasnow, Kukla, and Garrigan. This theological work was offered to substantiate the claim that a publically pedagogical engagement with ritual is possible, in light of the very publicness of ritual itself. A key question that arises though is: how does all this relate to a view of the school as a site for

enacting a queer politics of disidentification? In what follows, I engage with the Abrahamic threesome once again in translating these theological insights across to the work of the school and its priorities.

III. Rituals and the Abrahamic threesome

Figure 6: The Abrahamic threesome



To what extent can a pedagogical engagement with the publicness of religious rituals be seen as resonant with the symbolism of the Abrahamic threesome? How, in other words, can the significance of *kavvanah* and its relationship to how we pedagogically think about, and 'take up', ritual practices speak with the school, while also being simultaneously receptive to the particular kind of symbolic and theological registers often adopted by religious communities? Translating each element of the Abrahamic threesome in turn, I address these questions below, arguing that the approach to ritual

inheritances argued for in this chapter is precisely within the parametres of what the scholastic democratisation of free time deems valuable about the school.

First, the star of David. Think back to Rosenzweig's emphasis in chapter three on how the star of David symbolises the ethical importance of responding to the proximity of one's neighbour in achieving a better life. I drew affinities between this and the school through an emphasis on attention. The school offers a time and space to behold, in a spirit of humility, what the world has to offer us, to become receptive to the voice of difference, and to enact a responsiveness to that voice in ways that bring about transformation across and between the domains of the social, personal, cultural, and religious. The view on the pedagogical value of ritual offered in this chapter speaks directly to this idea of attention when we consider how Biesta's conception of public pedagogy is one deeply rooted in the Arendtian understanding of the *polis* as gesturing to a very specific quality to human relationships, one characterised by a necessary dependence on others as a basis for freedom as action to occur. For me, public pedagogy's commitment to the cultivation of spaces through which relationships-in-plurality can be sustained is worthwhile in plurality's reliance upon an attentiveness towards the other as a basis for bringing about something (ritualistically?) new into the world. On this meaning, the experiences and concerns of those who are rendered invisible or excluded within the current state of things are taken up and responded to in full seriousness.

The expansive reading of ritual offered in this chapter also echoes here. Rituals are not static and inflexible practices, but are instead to be read, through the transformative form of recollection they offer, as continually evolving kinds of engagements capable of being created and re-created anew in light of the diverse particularities of the present, and the sort of intentions and experiences brought to

these (queer, trans, or otherwise). On this meaning, engaging with religious rituals becomes less a matter of reaffirming or instilling a shared sense of religious identity, and more a matter of encountering an experience through which an attentiveness to the other can be enabled. By providing students with the chance to engage with rituals with a religious heritage, the religious school recognises ritual's interconnections with past, present, and future, and in this way enacts a pedagogy that is deeply attentive to the proximity of one's neighbours, and what this demands of us as ethical creatures. Thus, the hegemony of hetero- and cisnormative modes of identity is disidentified from in the religious school: the religious school, through the ritual experiences it offers students, queers the limits of the religious/queer divide and opens up spaces through which alternative futures can emerge.

Second, the cross. I earlier focused on how the cross connects that simultaneous sense of embodiment and disembodiment within the Christian imaginary, and how that emphasis speaks to my reading of the school when we consider how the school is a flesh-and-blood community within a particular time and space, but is also at the same time capable of queerly transcending itself and its limits in the pedagogical encounters it offers students. This dual sense of embodiment and disembodiment is emulated in the ritual work of the religious school when we reflect on how offering students the chance to participate in rituals with a religious heritage begins from the position of their irreducibility as human beings, as opposed to the vantage point of the supposed sameness of religious identity. What is *shared* in the religious school is less an identitarian adherence to a conformist set of ritual practices, and more the *material* experience of attending to those practices together in a way that transforms (and transcends) that embodied particularity. In other words, by fostering a *kavvanic* disposition in ritual experience, the religious school comes to engage

publically and pedagogically with ritual in ways that are attuned to the specificity of students' lived experiences and concerns (the horizontal), to the injustices and disjunctures of the present, while at the same time opening up the space for that present to be rendered limitlessly otherwise in and through the interruptive work of the teacher. This interruptive work endeavours to expose students both to the differences within ritual itself, as well as to the difference of those otherwise excluded from, or denied access to, the resources of religious traditions (the vertical). This open-endedness, necessitated through *kavvanah* and the embodied nature of the religious school's pedagogical work, stirs us to the last element of the Abrahamic threesome worth reflecting on: the crescent.

Chapter three shed light on the ability of the crescent to point to the twin sense of repetition and creativity to be found in the inheritances of the Muslim faith, a characteristic that can be likewise aligned to the work of the school. The school repeats that which has come before in what it puts on the table for study (inherited rituals and practices, for instance), but at the same is creative in the interruptive nature of such encounters. A queer politics of disidentification is assured here by the school bringing something potentially new into the world, something that refuses to reproduce the rituals of religious communities (and their attendant identitarian investment) without at least exposing, sustaining, and building upon the (potentially generative) pluralities intrinsic to these. Engaging with rituals in a manner that enacts and maintains a concern for publicness echoes my alignment of repetition and creativity with the school when we reflect on the creativity with which theologians like Garrigan, Crasnow, and Kukla approached questions of ritual and worship. Rather than accept that the current state of things is all that could ever be, each of these thinkers instead suggest (in a *demonstrative* fashion, if we return to Biesta) that theologies of ritual, as

forms of transformative recollection, have built within them a responsiveness to (queer) differences through which the inherited structures of conventional religious practices can be altered and reimagined in radically irreverent and novel ways. This kind of commitment, in which the old and the new come together in interruptive moments of public pedagogy, is what grounds this dissertation's weak conception of education in relation to ritual engagement, and it is this that makes the religious school queer. In what follows overleaf, I condense and assess the merits and limitations of a queer conception of religious schooling as a way of drawing this thesis to a conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Queering religious schooling: Tracing the (im)possible

> The missing part, the missing past, can be an opening, not a void. It can be an entry as well as an exit. It is the fossil record, the imprint of another life, and although you can never have that life, your fingers trace the space where it might have been, and your fingers learn a kind of Braille. (Winterson, 2011, p. 5)

I began this thesis by reflecting on the story of Jeanette, and on the abuse she experienced at the hands of her family and church for simply loving another girl. I take up Winterson again in this conclusion, but this time I move forward twenty-six years from *Oranges are not the only fruit*, to the publication of what has been referred to as that novel's 'silent twin': *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* In it, she reflects on being adopted as an infant, describing it in the terms used in the above quotation. For me, such insights are important as they indicate how living life can be a simultaneous oscillation between the possible and the impossible, the permissible and the forbidden, the remembered and the forgotten, and the visible and the invisible. We embody the possible, even while traces of the impossible (of what could or could not have been) inflect our experiences each day. I say simultaneous quite deliberately, for what is known and unknown, allowed for and not, frame our lives at one and the same time.

A thesis invested in queering religious schooling is located at the point at which one's fingers begin to 'trace the space' of the (im)possible, for it begins its reflections with the view to making the impossible possible. Reimagining religious schooling in ways that overcome the divide between religion and queerness has been

a task that has involved facing the realities of hetero- and cisnormativity within religion, and using this as a basis for refusing these realities an all-encompassing status within our imaginations. Central to this endeavour has been a commitment to protecting the religious school from reproducing the antagonism between religion and queerness, and it was this that spurred the thesis to engaging with two overarching questions. The first: how is religious schooling typically conceptualised within Jewish, Christian, and Muslim discourses? The second: how ought this understanding be reimagined in ways that interrupt, rather than sustain, the conventional opposition often set up by the religious/queer divide?

In responding to the first of these questions, I drew attention to the alignment of religious schooling with the preservation of religious identities, particularly those that set themselves apart from others through a largely propositional account of religious identity and experience. I focused especially on how the tendency to frame the religious school in terms of an exclusively propositional understanding of religious identity risks repeating the conventional antagonism between religion and queerness through its reliance on *already existing* modes of religious identity. I suggested alternatively that rethinking religious schooling beyond the religious/queer divide requires a more fundamental shift in how we theorise the religious school. In this regard, I gestured to the importance of framing religious schooling in terms of a weak conception of education, for such an understanding paves the way for forms of subjectivity to emerge that resist being reduced to extant religious identity markers and their attendant hetero- and cisnormative discourses, structures, and limits. I also pointed to the importance of emphasising the materiality of religion and religious experience in thinking through this question so as to enact a sensitivity to the potentialities of embodied life, though did so in a manner that avoided granting

religion hegemony in how the relationship between religion and education is navigated.

In terms of this latter point, the first question necessitated an approach that involved having religion and education meet without merging, for such a trend characterised many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts tying the religious school to identity formation. I suggested instead that framing this relation in terms of translation was a productive route for this thesis as it sustains points of contact between both discourses, while simultaneously honouring their differences. Through the mediations of the Abrahamic threesome, I staged a coming together of educational and queer theological discourses in a way that could redistribute what these symbols signify beyond fixed notions of religious identity, while also communicating the affinities between queer theologies and the school in terms of embodiment, attention, creativity, and repetition. For future education scholarship that engages with schooling and its relationship to religion, I believe this strategy of translation is helpful in ensuring that that which is educational about education is preserved, without at the same time denying the significant effects that religion and culture have on our educational institutions, contexts, and communities. Indeed, the first question to this thesis required an alternative way of imagining religious schooling that brings the educational and the theological, the traditional and the queer, together, without at the same time sugar-coating the divergences and tensions that can often exist between these varyingly disparate discourses and sensibilities.

The second question brought about a productive response to the above points, and has led me to the view that queering the religious school involves an approach to religious schooling that disrupts the religious/queer divide through:

1. An embodied commitment to people living with, and being taught by, others;
2. A receptiveness to people's embeddedness within the religious traditions of schools;
3. An avoidance of granting religious traditions uniformity over themselves or others.

In consolidating the insights of this thesis in a way that can also point to some of its limits (and, in this fashion, to its related possibilities), I unpack each of these in turn.

An embodied commitment to living with, and being taught by, others

Queering religious schooling entails staging a relationship between religion and education that is weak in light of education's basis in our relationships with others. A queer understanding of religious schooling is one that aims at cultivating the conditions for dialogue between people and the world, with the view to opening up possibilities for the untold and unpredictable to emerge.

My *kerygmatic* account of pedagogically engaging with religious teachings enacts this concern for living with, and being taught by, others through its rejection of a 'strong', instrumental account of education. In drawing our attention to the liminality of pedagogical experience, a queer understanding of religious schooling becomes one sensitive both to the embodied nature of pedagogy, to the material uniqueness of our encounters with others, as well as to the open futures that are created by such relationships. By virtue of this, the religious school fulfils its pedagogical role when it steers away from attempts at reproducing fixed religious identities, and the teachings, values, and rituals that often inform these: its pedagogical qualities arise in cultivating

the conditions for students to enter into relationships through which the possibility of *disidentifying* from extant social, political, and religious structures and discourses is allowed for.

On this meaning, the religious school provides the chance, in a manner akin to the demands of *ijtihad*, to interpret the religious values of the past (and, in this way, fosters and conserves them) but in a fashion that opens up these values to the possibility of transforming in potentially radical ways. Crucially, this potential transformation of religious values is enabled in and through exposure to others (human and non-human alike) who lie beyond the parametres of what students' themselves might currently know or value. In this fashion, participating in religious rituals in school becomes less a matter of confirming religious identities or expressing already-held religious convictions, and more a matter of encountering religious traditions in ways that attend to, and remember, those others for whom the obligation to transform religion and society arises. *Kavvanah* as a form of embodied attentiveness reframes religious school rituals as opportunities less for solidifying or confirming faith, and more as spaces for remembering, investigating, challenging, and responding to the past, and the effects they can have in exposing the incompleteness of our present lives and traditions in relationship with others. Much like what the Abrahamic threesome enacts, religious school rituals are read here as experimental practices that play with religion and its traditions in light of our ethical connections with others. Queering religious schools, in short, involves taking the educational potential of living with, and being taught by, others seriously, for it is through such seriousness that our world can grow, letting go, in the process, of those features of social life (including the antagonism often set up between religion and queerness) that continue to stunt and divide us.

While the constraints of this dissertation have prevented me from offering any extended treatment of this, an important question to consider is one related to the limits of living with and being taught by others in school. For instance, what are the implications for the religious school if the 'other' that we encounter is diametrically opposed to the kinds of relationships a liminal account of pedagogy demands? Is it desirable, say, for the religious school to enter into relationship with fundamentalist accounts of religion and religious teachings (accounts often related to violent extremism, abuse, homophobia, and sexism, for example)? Indeed, to what extent can the teacher tactfully 'invite' such teachings into the classroom, and to what extent are they compelled to leave them out? And while my understanding of pedagogy as open to the unpredictable through our relationships with others might serve as a baseline for assessing the limits (or otherwise) of these kinds of engagements, it is nonetheless a question that demands, in its complexity, for a much fuller treatment. Relatedly, the commitment to living with and being taught by others in the religious school calls for sustained reflection on the kind of *content* that acts as the subject matter of pedagogy in the religious school. What resources (texts, practices, rituals) from religious traditions would be most effective for the double transformation of self and world, and how does a teacher begin the process of making, and enacting, these choices? Furthermore, to what extent ought the inheritances of the school's affiliate traditions be prioritised in these kinds of decisions? Such are some of the challenges that arise when the value of living with and being taught by others frames what it means to queer religious schooling.

A receptiveness to people's embeddedness within the religious traditions of schools

As well as valorising the importance of living with and being taught by others, queering religious schooling also brings with it a related consideration for our *situatedness* or *embeddedness* within the traditions often allied to religious schools. Indeed, creating opportunities for pedagogical transformation cannot be sustained unless a contextual basis, a community, exists for this transformation to occur. Queering religious schooling is committed less to denying traditions, and more to creating spaces through which such traditions (both past and present) can be experienced, thought about, and related to differently.

This dissertation's focus on the materiality of religion speaks directly to this embeddedness: religions are not reducible to a disconnected and propositional set of codes about the world and God, but instead involve embodied and affective forms of experience within which we are entangled, and through and from which the potential for transformation depends. In the spirit of *kerygma*, a pedagogical engagement with the materiality of religion opens up the possibility of overcoming the religious/queer divide by offering the time and space for the grittiness of religion, the fact of its *thereness* (both historically and contemporaneously) to be experienced and interpreted anew. Such reimagining was at the heart of the stories I interpreted in grounding *ijtihad* in the lives of queer Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Think of Muhsin, for instance, who expanded the Muslim concept of *fitra* in naming a queer-positive Muslim space in response to the exclusions of his community, or of Alyce, who refigured the classical Christian doctrine of the trinity to speak to her embodied experiences as an intersex person. Their stories, like Benay's in her reappropriation of Shabbos, testify to how religion and its traditions are navigated and negotiated in the complexities of the lives we live, and because of this are never fixed or immutable, but instead fluid, flexible, and open to experimentation and change. It is this to which a queer

understanding of religious schooling across Jewish, Christian, and Muslim contexts attends.

Read in this way, the religious school enacts its disidentificatory work when it puts the flesh-and-blood realities of religion and its inheritances on the table for study and contemplation, giving students the chance to face (and respond to) the fact of religion's impact on the stories we live, breathe, and feel each day. As my queering of religious school rituals makes clear, though, getting to grips with this embeddedness does not entail acquiescence to any particular reading of these material traditions, but instead demands a *kavvanic* kind of remembering, an embodied attentiveness to the other often forgotten or denied within these inheritances. In terms of the publicness of pedagogy, such remembrance is crucial, as it is through this that opportunities for personal and social transformation can arise and be sustained, opportunities that, in their experimental qualities, actively demonstrate the possibility of building together alternative futures for others, ourselves, and the traditions with which we are always already in relationship.

The challenge that arises from this, though, is how far does such an account of religion as both embedded and material take us? Can the religious school, while taking this embeddedness in full seriousness, nonetheless choose *because of this* to divest itself of association from certain religious traditions altogether, perhaps no longer becoming 'religious' at all? To my mind, this is always a possibility, but this in turn begs the question of how these choices can be made in ways that have education at their heart, but are also sensitive to the diversities of perspectives informing the school's work. Indeed, if we are to take this possibility to its fullest, what are the limits to understanding religious belonging to begin with? Indeed, think back to the Abrahamic threesome, and to the blurring of the distinctions it performs between the

symbols of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths. In light of this, is it possible for us to identify the fault lines within and between religions and traditions at all, and, whether affirmatively or not, what would a queer theorisation of the religious school look like that is responsive to these? Reframing the religious school as a time and space for engaging with the material situatedness of religion brings with it an intractable messiness that exposes a plurality of further questions in turn. In what follows, I expand this plurality still further by gesturing to the intra- and interreligious pluralities that constitute a queer account of religious schooling.

An avoidance of granting traditions uniformity over themselves and others

Queering religious schooling is predicated on the assumption that religious traditions (both within themselves, and in relationship to other traditions) are internally diverse, and any educational engagement with religion in school needs to be receptive to these pluralities.

Pedagogically, it is important to stress from the outset that the recognition of the internal diversities of religion does not equate the school with the reproduction of multiple modes of religious identity: indeed, the *kerygmatic* account of pedagogy offered in this thesis is one that enables students, in its liminality, to disidentify from religion, opening it up to possibilities beyond the distribution of the sensible. In this vein, a pedagogical engagement with the internal diversities of religion is interested less in framing these diversities on an identitarian level, and more in terms of viewing these diversities as pedagogical opportunities for destabilising monolithic accounts of what a tradition distinctively 'is' or not, and, in this way, what it can become, or not. On this meaning, the religious school pedagogically exposes and builds upon the fact

that oppositions, say, between religion and queerness (and, indeed, other antagonisms like religion and science, or religion and feminism) do not have monopoly over religious experience, and that religious teachings and traditions arise and develop precisely through the affinities and dissonances that are staged and enacted through these multiplicities. When it comes to the religious school fostering religious inheritances (teachings and values, as well as rituals and practices), then, a queer understanding of religious schooling suggests that this needs to be done in ways that are attentive to the multitudinous complexities of these traditions, complexities of story and experience that can be both inconsistent and agonistic, as well as enriching and empowering at one and the same time.

Shedding light on the diversities both within and between religions for understanding a queer account of religious schooling exposes in the process certain limits to this dissertation, not least methodologically. Indeed, the dissertation by and large engaged with queer theological sources that had God in view: what, though, of those 'theologies' located at the edge of theologising? I have in mind atheological accounts of the divine, for instance, as well as theothanatologies (more commonly referred to as 'Death of God' theologies), and anatheism (returning to God after God). What would a queering of religious schooling look like if it were to engage with these kinds of resources more explicitly? In connection to this, what would Hindu, Buddhist, or Sikh accounts of divine and/or human experience do to how education and religious schooling are understood and lived out? Furthermore, where is the State in all this? How should the diverse expectations and demands of secular and civic societies inform a queer reading of religious schools, and how might a symbol like the Abrahamic threesome mediate this kind of translation when the secular is brought explicitly into the equation? Indeed, would the disruption of the queer/religious divide

look differently if these varying resources and traditions were brought to bear on the two questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation? Such is the beauty of a thesis that is queer: it traces the (im)possible, while also showing in the process what it itself leaves out and, in this fashion, allows for.

'The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is'

> Of course that is not the whole story, but that is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It's a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained, it's a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. (Winterson, 2001, p. 119)

This served as the opening quotation to this dissertation. I conclude with it now too, for it points to significant themes that have emerged throughout the course of this thesis. To my mind, Jeanette's is a story that calls on the religious school to respond to religiously-inspired hetero- and cisnormativity, not defensively, but in a spirit of 'tactful' openness and humility. In cultivating the conditions for such openness in our theorising, the above excerpt raises important questions. For instance, how can the religious school challenge the dichotomy between religion and queerness, in a manner that sets about 'explaining the universe' a little, while also 'leaving the universe unexplained'? How can we do this in a way that keeps the religious school alive, not boxing it in time? Indeed, are there ways of imagining the religious school that acknowledge and build upon the fact that the traditions we encounter and live by are determined neither entirely by their 'beginning' nor 'end', but by the messiness of what is 'there' in the materiality of the present each day?

I have waged the claim that we are (queer or straight, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or other) more than how we identify, and, indeed, are identified, and that it is in the work of the religious school that such a view is borne out for education. Queer theologies and life narratives provide much hope in this regard, for they offer us discourses that, in their embodied attentiveness and creativity, open up spaces for us to rethink ourselves, the world, and its religions without granting monopoly to dogmatic narratives of alienation or shame. The Abrahamic threesome that weaves its way through this dissertation's pages has similar effects, for it enacts the possibility of religion and education entering into conversation with one another in ways that transcend the sometimes divisive limits of religions and their relations with one another, and with queers. While my queering of religious schooling is by no means exhaustive, I nonetheless hope it goes some way in opening a conversation between religion and education that delights in the 'knottiness' of it all. Indeed, the only thing for certain is how complicated it all is.

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