

Toward an Inclusive Model of Relational Spirituality:
An Exploration of Spiritual Type among Australian Anglicans

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This thesis is presented for the degree of
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates spiritual formation and expression in the context of the increasingly pluralized world of the twenty-first century. Using qualitative empirical methods, it examines where, how, and, indeed, *if* ultimate meaning and purpose are being found at a time in which the givens of the past have given way to the relative uncertainties of the present. In line with Henri J M Nouwen's concept of the 'three movements of the spiritual life', the project assumes a triadic relational structure to spirituality—the dynamics of which the empirical-findings suggest are now being renegotiated, and most notably in relation to the D/divine.

The study was undertaken with Anglican churchgoers in Perth, Western Australia. It sought to construct a model of contemporary spiritual development, but the findings were such as to move the research in an unanticipated direction—albeit in accordance with its grounded-theory methodology—and, ultimately, a typological model was constructed. The emergent typology incorporates six distinct types of spirituality. It uncovered polarization among the participants, with some displaying spiritual uncertainty, dissatisfaction, and a shifting of religious beliefs; while others were confident, certain, and assured.

The research introduces a number of innovations which may have value in academic studies of spirituality beyond the boundaries of this project. For example, building on earlier empirical work undertaken by the researcher, music was used in the study as a conduit to the spiritual. Further, the analytical process led to the creation of two new research tools: the Relational Triad allows the spirituality of the individual to be measured and plotted; while The Relational-Self Model of Spirituality is a presentational template designed to allow spirituality to be charted visually.

The thesis takes an inter- and multi-disciplinary approach, engaging primarily with the disciplines of Christian spirituality, psychology, sociology, and music. It is argued that, conceptually at least, the emergent typology offers a possible framework for embracing spirituality of all forms across religious, social, and cultural difference.

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