SUMMARY (A Godly Vocation)

The nature of spirituality belonging to teachers in orthodox-Protestant education and how this influences the practice of education is portrayed in this study. In particular, attention goes to the role of religion in that spirituality. Spirituality is considered to be ‘the manner in which one – by orienting oneself on sources – relates experiences of inspiration and/or transcendence, more or less methodically, to the actual practice of life’ (working definition). The study on spirituality is carried out on teachers in two types of orthodox-Protestant schools, (1) the Experiential Reformed or Pietistic schools and (2) the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated) schools. These schools belong respectively to two distinct communities of orthodox-Reformed denominations in Christian education, the associated community of the Experiential Reformed (abbreviated as Reformed-Pietistic) denominations and the single community of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (liberated), (abbreviated as Reformed-Liberated).

The research questions of this study are formulated as follows: (1) How does spirituality figure in the professional identity of the teacher in orthodox-Protestant education? (2) Which aspects or facets of spirituality can be determined in the (development of the) spirituality during the professional development (preparation, curricular education and post-graduate education) of teachers? (3) How does the spirituality of the teacher shape the professional identity of the teacher? (4) Which opportunities does initial teacher education have to integrate spiritual aspects in the process of formation of a teacher? (5) Which conclusions can be drawn for the advancement of professional development of teachers after their initial teacher education, in particular concerning the integration of spirituality with other aspects of professional identity?

The research consists of a theoretical part and an empirical part. In the theoretical part (chapters 1 to 4), existing knowledge of spirituality and in particular the spirituality of orthodox-Protestantism is treated. In the empirical part (chapters 5 to 11), the

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1 The school system in the Netherlands allows for differing religious denominations that are instituted according to their religion and/or worldview. One-third of the schools in the Netherlands are public, i.e. state designed schools, having secular charters and subject to close government control. The other two-thirds of the schools are based on ‘special’ charters (bijzonder onderwijs), that include religious as well as non-religious (or secular) charters, are not designed by the state and are indirectly controlled by government. Amongst the schools having a special, religious charter, we find two large groups of schools that have mainstream religious affiliations with either the Protestant-Christian denominations (e.g. the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, PKN) or the Roman Catholic Church. We also find a number of smaller groups of religiously affiliated schools. Belonging to these smaller groups, two orthodox-Protestant types appear. (1) The Experiential Reformed denominations together supporting the ‘Reformed-Pietistic’ schools. The Experiential Reformed schools are best referred to as Reformed-Pietistic, whereas in Dutch practice, they are called ‘Reformatorisch’ (Reformational) following the name of their leading newspaper Het Reformatorisch Dagblad.) (2). The denomination of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated) supports own schools carrying the same name (abbreviation used is ‘Reformed-Liberated,’ following Dutch practice). Both types of religiously based orthodox-Protestant schools have their own teacher training faculties and school advisory services for quality improvement that are closely associated to their faith practice.
qualitative research as carried out on a sample of twenty teachers drawn from orthodox-Protestant schools is reported. In the closing chapter, the answers to the research questions are summarized.

The first chapter presents arguments for engaging in this research and its relationship with established knowledge is clarified. A reason for this research is, amongst others, that the teacher has at least as great an influence on the process of formation of the learner as does the learning content. The (religious) spirituality colours the involvement of the teacher. It is, however, unclear in which manner this ‘involvement’ plays a role in the conduct of the teacher. Under influence of secularization and individualism, it is no longer self-evident that teachers bind themselves to the religious convictions holding for an institution they are employed in. As well, research carried out by Van Hardeveld (2003) points out that the pedagogical views of teachers in orthodox-Protestant schools were not so much influenced by the identity of the school, but rather by their own individual beliefs. However, there is a lack of scientific knowledge concerning the manner whereby the teacher’s personally experienced identity and experience of faith are manifested in practice. The research results of the studies by De Wolff (2000) and Van Hardeveld (2003) show that research is needed to bring to the foreground the teacher’s quality of being the ‘bearer’ of identity in the daily practice at school. Pertaining knowledge is crucial for teacher education, for post-graduate education and for the involvement in identity formation by school teams (whereby one can think of the so-called ‘identity deliberation’ as designed by Bakker (2003)).

The current research of spirituality in education then can be positioned on three existing research themes, respectively (1) the research on the identity of schools (that in most cases is directed towards the school as institute or focused on the position of Christian education in society), (2) the research on being a normative professional and having a professional identity, and (3) on the research regarding biographies and vocations of teachers.

In the second chapter, a report is provided of research on literature concerning the concept of ‘spirituality’ and the related terms of ‘faith,’ ‘religion,’ and ‘meaning.’ Conclusions are drawn that concerning the conceptualization of spirituality, the following elements must be taken into regard. In the first place, spirituality concerns transcendence, that is, experiences that transcend commonplace reality. In the second place, spirituality concerns inspiration, which mainly says something about bringing zest and courage into one’s vocation. In the third place, spirituality is characterized by a process of searching to bring the experiences of inspiration and transcendence into relation with commonplace practice (in this study: the vocational practice of teachers). Finally, the concept of spirituality also displays methodical aspects that connect with the regular attention one gives to that searching process (for instance in prayer and scripture reading). These four aspects are brought together in the working definition of spirituality, as introduced above.

Following the working definition, a conceptual framework of spirituality is formulated. The conceptual framework displays how the four aspects of spirituality are connected together. So we see that when calling upon sources, inspiration and transcendence can take place. Sources are understood to be those documents that are crucial to the tradition in which teachers stand. Also experiences in life can be sources of inspiration. The conceptual framework further discloses that the search process (see
above, third aspect) can be recognized on various levels of reflection by teachers engaged in their vocational practice. Here the theory of ‘Gestalt’ formation (Korthagen & Lagerwerf, 2001) is used. Each teacher uses the categories of ‘needs, feelings, values, significant experiences, knowledge and behavioural tendencies’ (Dolk, 1997: 17). This includes also significant experiences of inspiration and transcendence. ‘Gestalts’ function in the practice of education, but are not explicitly mentioned in daily performances. By reflecting on conduct, teachers design conscious representations: concepts are used to designate experiences and when the representations are organized logically, it is possible to speak of the formation of theory. Reflection then reveals what has not yet been verbalized. Becoming aware of the representations and theories again assist in naming new experiences. The reflection can take place on several levels, that is, reflection-in-performance (the immediate reflection while one is performing), reflection-on-the-performance (the reflection after conduct or preparing for new conduct) and reflection-about-the performance (reflection drawing upon more expansive reasoning, for instance regarding an educational theory or a social development). The distinctions, as they are described in the conceptual framework, are used in the empirical research to interpret the searching process that is followed in spirituality.

In the third chapter, a survey is provided of the (religious) spirituality as found in orthodox-Protestantism of the Netherlands. The two target groups where the respondents have been drawn from, have as faith communities (population groups) differing ‘histories’ and so distinguishing characteristics. Yet, both faith communities are regarded as exponents of orthodox-Protestantism because they both share adherence to the Bible as divine authority and to the classic Reformed Confessional Creeds (The Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt) having a derived authority.

The first faith community, the Experiential Reformed (Reformatorisch) community is rooted in the tradition of the Second Reformation or Dutch Pietism (16th – 19th century), where much emphasis is placed on the personal and experiential knowledge of one’s path of faith as this is drawn from the Bible. The spirituality of this community is characterized by a distinction between having an objective and subjective (or experiential) experience of faith (if one experiences something cognitively, that does not say that one also experiences it authentically), a sharp distinction between the converted and non-converted and a shunning of modern culture.

The second faith community, the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated) originated because members of the former Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ‘liberated’ themselves (i.e. seceded) in the year 1944 of the binding synodical views regarding covenant and baptism binding on all ministers and members. Characteristic for the spirituality of this faith community is the emphasis on the assurance of faith. The belief of ‘belonging to the covenant’ is taken to mean ‘faithfully affirming’ it and there is no explicit ‘special’ requirement of experiential faith. The spirituality of the Reformed Church of Netherlands (Liberated) is qualified by historians as being ‘activist’. Believers aim at the unity of faith and life and they may display an open attitude towards modern culture.

Both communities of orthodox-Protestant faith have instituted their own schools, mainly in the second half van the twentieth century. The first community of the ‘Reformed-Pietistic’ designates a wide range of Pietistic churches that have found each other in the emphasis on the experiential expression of faith. Therefore, we find a
great diversity in these schools concerning the church membership of teachers and of pupils. Contrastingly, the schools with a Reformed-Liberated charter are focussed mainly on their own church, so that almost all teachers and pupils belong to the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Liberated).

In the fourth chapter, a number of tentative statements (assumptions) are formulated, which function as start for the qualitative research. These statements are based on knowledge as treated in chapter 1 pertaining to theories of congruent research, on knowledge in chapter two on concepts concerning spirituality, and on knowledge discussed in chapter 3 regarding the spirituality of the orthodox Protestants and the history of orthodox-Protestant education.

The fifth chapter contains a methodological account of the entire study and the set-up and course of the empirical research. Qualitative research has been opted for because exploration is needed whereby theory development regarding spirituality can take place.

The primary goal is to gain insight in the possible function of spirituality in the practice of education. The qualitative research followed, focuses on conduct of the respondents, in particular their searching process, and is open for the generation of views that may come about through interaction with respondents. Therefore, qualitative research provides us with good possibilities for generating new knowledge. The method followed is known as ‘analytic induction’ and has been introduced in the Netherlands by Maso and Smaling (1998). One of the characteristics of this method is that it follows already existing theory development. First, one verbalizes and summarizes how one observes the phenomenon to be studied. Based on existing knowledge, the formulated concepts and relationships between concepts are reformulated throughout the process of doing research, with the goal of most accurately representing the reality of the situation. The development of theory is an interactive process of gathering information on the one hand and adjusting theoretical statements on the other. Part of the procedure is that during the course of research, assessments are made whether there are certain characteristics of the respondents or of certain conditions in which they perform professionally that give important information concerning their spirituality. These indications were used as for the selection of new respondents.

The empirical part of the research commenced by selecting the schools possibly representative of the two types of orthodox-Protestant schools. Arguments for the choice of schools were based on the insights of experts regarding the Reformed-Pietistic education and Reformed-Liberated education and of certain demographic and statistical knowledge of the respective faith communities. From each community of faith, three schools were chosen. For each community, there was at least one school of average size, at least one in a rural area and one in an urban area, at least one school having a homogeneous population (children belonging to one denomination) and at least one school having a heterogeneous population (children belonging to more than one denomination). Two of the selected schools in each population are located in the concentration area of the pertaining faith community. For the Reformed-Pietistic schools that area is the province of South Holland and for the Reformed-Liberated schools that is made up of the Northern provinces (Groningen, Friesland, Drenthe and Overijssel).
The research was presented to the teams of the participating schools. A survey was presented to the teachers of the selected schools (total 104) aimed at giving insight into a number of characteristics of the teachers. Questions were asked about personal characteristics (gender, marital state, and parenthood), the measure of experience, the variation in working experience, the involvement in church activities, the socialization, and the degree of reflective propensity. Data gained on these items allowed for choosing new respondents during the course of research. The respondents were interviewed on three occasions (sometimes two or four) of an hour's duration. An open and following interview technique was used, whereby three questions were introductory: ‘What inspires you in your vocation?’ ‘Why did you choose to become a teacher?’ ‘How does your inspiration show in your professional performance?’ In addition, the researcher was present on one or more moments in the classroom of the respondent. Based on his observations, it was possible to pose questions concerning the background of the performance of the teacher. It appeared that the questions brought about by the observed performance served as strong boosters for reflection by respondents. The data of the interviews were processed with the software program Atlas-ti. After having interviewed three or four teachers, the interview material was examined and the original assumptions were changed or adjusted. In total, ten teachers from the Reformed-Pietistic schools and ten from the Reformed-Liberated schools were interviewed.

In the sixth to the eleventh chapter, the results of the qualitative research are reported. The sixth chapter consists of an introduction to the schools and to the respondents. Following a journal maintained during the research, impressions are provided of the schools. In addition, relevant information regarding the spirituality of the schools is summarized. Resources used are (a) the printed information about the schools as submitted by school management and (b) the interviews with all school managers. Items discussed were, amongst others: the population of the pupils, the parents and the teachers, the relationship with the churches, the spirituality of the directing manager, and the image that the director has of the spirituality of the teachers at his school.

In the following five chapters, the factual data generated by the research are summarized. The display of results is organized according to the main clusters of themes that the analysis has generated. Successively, the following topics are treated: the spirituality in the professional identity and the personal identity (chapter 7), the spirituality in the professional development (chapter 8), the sources of inspiration and the barriers to inspiration (chapter 9), the searching process and the transcendence (chapter 10) and the spirituality of performance (chapter 11). Each chapter is closed off with a list of concluding statements, the results of continuing adjustment and additions to the original assumptions. The original seventeen presuppositions resulted in a list of eighty-one statements. In the twelfth chapter, the answers are formulated on the research questions of this study. In the conclusion to this summary, we present the answers to these questions, thereby providing the conclusions of the chapters 7 to 11.

The first research question concerns the role of spirituality in the professional identity (Klaassen, Beijaard & Kelchtermans, 1999: 377). The professional beliefs and reflection patterns of the teachers in orthodox-Protestant education appear to be closely related to their religious convictions. This becomes apparent from the views they have on the pedagogical relationship with the child. There is a deep realization that the
teacher and the pupil stand similarly in their relation to God and that both are subject to the authority of God. The teacher must – as does the child – account for the own sinful and vulnerable position in regard to God. We encounter here the ‘belief’ that one does not have an autonomous position (that is to say: without God) towards the child, which qualifies as a central characteristic of orthodox teachers. Remarkable is that the teachers accounted for their performance in reference to the body of thought belonging to the tradition in which they were formed and in which they had found their occupation. In contrast with what had been suspected on the grounds of earlier research (Van Hardeveld, 2003, see above), we find that the beliefs of orthodox teachers are not necessarily individually determined, but are connected by them to the convictions as these are found in the ‘community of values’ in which they work. Orthodox teachers are thereby good representatives of the formal identity of the school. Still, the bond they experience with their tradition has for all teachers a personal colouring. It becomes apparent that each teacher finds a unique balance between demonstrating loyalty to the body of traditional thought and serving critique on it. An obvious difference between the teachers of each of the two faith communities is that Reformed-Pietistic teachers have a predominant cognitive relationship with traditional body of thought within their community, whereas the Reformed-Liberated have a more performance-directed relationship to polices within their community. Reformed-Pietistic teachers are more hesitant in publicly giving critique than are their Reformed-Liberal colleagues. At the same time, the range of criticism by the Pietists is greater than found amongst their Liberated counterparts. Reformed-Liberated teachers appear to display more satisfaction with the open strategy that (more than before) has been followed by their ecclesiastical community.

The individual determination and colouring of the professional beliefs of orthodox teachers appears in the variation of motives they possess. We encountered amongst the twenty respondents, six main motives: (I) ensuring security, (II) providing care, (III) (learning) to know God, (IV) bringing about an awareness of God, (V) prompting inquisitiveness, and (VI) wanting to help in development. These motives display themselves in various patterns. Motives we can define as ‘longings that one harbours / cultivates in view of what is satisfactory in the educational situation (here and now) and what one considers as satisfactory in view of the ultimate objective of education (the ideal).’ In the third and fourth motive, we see the pedagogical and the religious domains strongly interwoven. At the sixth motive, it becomes apparent that teachers are strongly driven by personal drives. They have the tendency to bring to the foreground what has great value for them in education. Orthodox teachers sometimes express anxiety about the future of their pupils in a secularized society. For experienced teachers that especially is an important motive to ‘equip’ pupils with something regarding morality.

The second question concerns the role that spirituality has had in the professional development of orthodox teachers. It must be concluded that the youthful experiences (their own association with children in childhood and images of their own childhood teachers) form lasting and inspiring influences on the conduct of practice. Also, the stories provided by the teachers allow us to conclude that not necessarily one’s formal curricular training (in particular the modules religion or worldview) formed a contribution to spirituality, but more so the group of fellow students with which one has built up a close contact during the course of study. Remarkable is that often negative
internship experiences by teachers may generate views that their formal, curricular study is not inspiring. Of great influence – and as lasting source of inspiration – are their internships and field experiences having a special character: internships in the ortho-pedagogical (special needs) schooling, and working experiences abroad. These had the character of exposure, whereby students became confronted with difficult working situations. On the one hand, these experiences had confronted the fledging teacher with (a shortage of) basic pedagogical skills. On the other, in this situation, there was often a type of learning climate in which one could make mistakes in which one's own responsibility could be fully recognized and in which one could call upon the assistance of colleagues.

The third question relates to the spirituality as found in the performance of the teachers. Spirituality is recognizable not only in rituals such as singing, praying and Bible story telling, certainly also in narratives, the views on pupils, the physical contact and the creativity in handling situations. In addition, one's dealing with difficulties and diversity in the classroom, one's composure and self-revelation, clarify how the motives of teachers are expressed in their conduct.

Noticeable is that all orthodox-Protestant teachers undergo special experiences in this respect. Two types of transcending experiences have been found, which we respectively refer to as experiences of pedagogical transcendence and as experiences of religious transcendence. We speak of an experience of transcendence in case the experience surpasses the actual situation, the teacher ‘undergoes’ the happening, and the element of surprise is involved. Pedagogical experiences of transcendence appear in case one feels wonderment about the behaviour of children or when one enjoys the results of interaction with children. Religious experiences of transcendence appear especially during the communal prayer and singing with the children and during the Bible story telling. During the Bible story telling, the experiences of religious and pedagogical transcendence converge because the teacher experiences something special regarding the content of the story, may be astonished about the reaction by the children, and simultaneously reflects on the formation of the pupils. The religion of the teacher generates extraordinary experiences of transcendence that clearly flow forth from his or her orthodox orientation, as the teacher sees oneself as an intermediary of God’s message. This does not concern the experiences of transcendence as such, as these could be explicitly sought as the zest or the aesthetics of one’s work. The experiences are nonetheless of great value and lead to joy and wonderment. The force of spirituality of orthodox teachers appears to cohere with the meanings as these are externally ascribed and which are lived through together with the pupils.

Furthermore, there appear to be a number of inspirational sources, which yet may contrarily function as barriers to inspiration. To be sure, important sources of inspiration for teachers in primary schools are: the relationship with children, the problems with children, the results achieved together with children, one’s personal conduct, one’s personal faith, the colleagues and the parents. In the interviews, we discovered certain conditions holding for a coming about of experiences of inspiration and transcendence. The most important are: observing children well, the ability to express approval, being open and creative, showing one’s emotions, developing empowerment, having a passion for subject matter, knowledge of pedagogical concepts, the scope of performance, the dimension of the school, the pedagogically and socially aware leadership by the school director, and the presence of an open school climate.
Answers to the three research questions generate conclusions on spirituality in the vocational practice of the teacher. In this respect, we need to differentiate between vocational spirituality (in which sources of inspiration and conditions hold generically for teachers) and religious spirituality (as nourished by religious beliefs). The religious spirituality sometimes has a clear overlap with the vocational spirituality (concerning those moments of inspiration in which the pedagogical and the religious transcendence coincide) and often we can say that the religious spirituality enforces vocational spirituality. That enforcement becomes manifest in the motives and the beliefs of teachers. Because teachers experience their responsibility in relation to God, they take their duties seriously and transform their deep concern for the future of the children into activities for their formation. The interpretation of this phenomenon adjusts the working definition of spirituality by adding the concept of ‘beliefs.’ This brings about the final definition of spirituality: ‘the manner in which one – by orienting oneself on sources – relates beliefs and experiences of inspiration and/or transcendence, more or less methodically, to the actual practice of life.’

On grounds of this study, we conclude that the following elements are of great importance for the theory of spirituality in vocational practice: the motives and the beliefs on the basis of which one conducts oneself, the experiences of pedagogical and religious inspiration and transcendence, the sources of inspiration and its barriers, and the conditions holding for the rise of inspiration. In the final chapter, an argument is put forward for applying this theory to education in other religious faith communities (other than the orthodox-Protestant denominations) and to other types of education (other than primary schooling, for instance secondary and vocational schooling). Moreover, a number of recommendations are made for the teacher training colleges (question 4) and for the development of spirituality in post-graduate vocational settings (question 5). During curricular training, the right conditions have to be advanced for the development of spirituality, such as the use of internships in relatively difficult situations in the second half of the curriculum and a positive learning environment. Also recommended is that teacher colleges should position the knowledge of the spiritual sources in a clearly defined manner and so that a continuously engaging of the sources becomes possible. Concerning further vocational perspectives, it is emphasized that professional development of spirituality requires direct contact with the inspirational sources in the classroom (the interaction with children). In addition, there must be opportunities for the sharing of experiences of inspiration and transcendence with colleagues. Also, teachers ought to be allowed to gain new experiences in other places, for instance in excursions and internships. Of great value is an open pedagogical climate in which professional support is joined to direct social or personal support. Many findings confirm the notion that having an attitude of ‘presence’ by the director is of great importance for the spirituality of the teachers.