ART AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: SEEKING MEANING IN THE SACRED SERIOUSNESS OF ART

Submitted by

Gina Bernasconi

Dip. Ed. Primary., Dip. Ed Fine Art., M. E. (Religious Education)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree of Doctor of Education

School of Religious Education
Faculty of Education Victoria

Australian Catholic University
Research Services
Locked Bag 4115
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065. Australia.

Date of submission: June 2006

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Gina Bernasconi, declare that this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

In relation to the post-compulsory religious education program of a Catholic secondary college for boys, this research study set out to ascertain the role of art as a medium for the self-revelation of God in the linking of aesthetic and religious experience. In other words, this research study proposed to provide a group of students with a space and opportunity for a 'calling to attend' experience of God; that is, an experience that was compelling.

The theoretical framework called on two types of concepts: first, those related to the theological investigation of revelation and its connection with the aesthetic and religious experience; and secondly, those developed from current educational research and research into Religious Education paradigms. The development of this research study therefore:

- ❖ established the context within which the study was situated;
- ❖ discussed a theological framework from Hans Urs von Balthasar and its links with this research study;
- ❖ examined the theory of Bernard Lonergan that art was a carrier of meaning for religious experience;
- ❖ discussed the role of revelation, aesthetic and religious experience and the religious imagination located within the 'graced nature' concept of Catholic theology; and
- ❖ sought to determine the contribution such a learning experience could make to the religious development of post-compulsory students in a boys' senior secondary college.

This research study operated within a constructivist paradigm using case study and qualitative research methods. A focus group provided the research instrument for data gathering and included:

- ❖ participant observation;
- ❖ field notes;
- ❖ focus group discussions; and
- ❖ transcript analysis of the taped conversations of participants.

The findings of this research study provided direction for further research and practice in post-compulsory religious education classroom program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would never have reached completion without the enduring love, patience and generosity of my family, particularly Kim, Lisa, Dean, Damien, Holly, Giacomo, Ken and John.

I also wish to acknowledge my principal supervisor, Dr. Marian de Souza and associate supervisor Dr. Peta Goldburg. My thanks are extended, in particular, to Dr. de Souza, for her understanding, perseverance and encouragement. Thanks as well to Dr. Tony Kelly for his assistance and support in the development of my thesis and to my dear friends, Agnes, Paul and Margaret who were my critical colleagues. I am indebted to all mentioned for their support and encouragement they have offered me in this endeavour.

My appreciation extends to my Director at work, Fr. Kevin Lenehan for his recognition and understanding of the increased demands placed on me by my desire to combine post-graduate study with the needs of my workplace. In addition, sincere thanks to Dr. Kath Engebretson, Dr. Anne Hunt and Dr. Graham Rossiter for their critical reading of my thesis.

Finally, I am most grateful for my upbringing, for the love of my parents, Bet and Tobe, and the generosity of my teachers, colleagues and friends — all of whom have coloured my Catholic reading of life. Theirs has been a gift.

Gina Bernasconi

June 2006

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INTRODUCTION

The Context and Significance of this Study

The context for this research study was the post-compulsory religious education program of a boys' Catholic secondary college. A core belief in Catholic teaching is that Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God's love and that, analogously, creation also mediates God's self-communication. This research study proposed that analogous with creation, artworks, as carriers of meaning for religious experience, also mediated God's self-communication (self-revelation). In accord, and as a component of their religious education program, this research study intended to provide a group of post-compulsory secondary students with a space and opportunity for an aesthetic and religious experience of art in a 'calling to attend' experience of God. As a component of the religious education curriculum this opportunity allowed that for those who experienced it, God's self-communication could occur instantaneously and that for others, God's self-communication unfolded across time.

For many, a personal, deepening experience may operate within a framework of spiritual experience (Wilson, 2004, p. 38). Spiritual experience, here, referred to the capacity of the person to transcend her/him self through knowledge and love in relation to self, others, the world and the Transcendent, this last term referred to God (Creator) or Transcendent Other (cf. Durka & Smith, 1979; Schneiders, 2000). Given the context of this research study, the intention was to offer the Catholic tradition as the ground for spiritual experience, which,

potentially, would have implications for students, their moral behaviour and the ways they chose to live and consciously operate in the world.

The development of a religious education curriculum that provided for the experience described above was examined and situated within current religious education theory and practice in a country Diocese of Victoria.

Augustine's — a Catholic secondary college for boys in regional Victoria — was the intended location for this research study. For 113 years Augustine's had provided day and boarding school facilities for its students. A tradition of pride and excellence typified much of Augustine's history and the work of its founding religious order, and extended to include the college's extensive Old Collegians' network. The vast college grounds included three ovals and together with the double storey red brick buildings which housed classrooms, were testament to the age of the college. Augustine's, with its regional location, remained relatively isolated from the effects of multiculturalism, multi-faith and indigenous populations. The college body was reasonably described as Celtic/Anglo and nominally Christian, and no assumptions were drawn with regard to the community's lived commitment to the Christian tradition.

During the period of data gathering, 2002, inclusive student enrolment at Augustine's numbered 873 with a teaching staff of 20 female and 49 male teachers — a number of whom were returned past pupils. From a pool of 23 Positions of Leadership, 16 were held by male teachers. The college's Leadership Team of six persons included one representative who was female (Augustine's Annual: Headmaster's Report 2002, pp. 6-11). In 2002, the college began a reorganisation of its educative operations into three schools:

Senior School Years 10-12; Middle School Year 9; Junior School Years 7-8.   These schools continued to operate on a single site but with their own Heads of School (all male) and their own teaching and learning precincts.

In its 2002 Annual, the college was identified as a school for boys "where the boys do everything, if the boys don't do it, it does not get done" (Augustine's Annual, "Augustine's Annual: Headmaster's report," 2002, p. 4), consequently, a broad range of activities continued to be offered at Augustine's to enable each boy to find a pathway to personal success. These activities included academic study, community service, sport, the arts, technology, vocational education and leadership. The college was particularly noted however for its sporting tradition which included football, cricket and rowing, and the college 'war cry' was taught to Year 7 students at camp in their first weeks at Augustine's.

Although this description of Augustine's is limited in scope and detail it did reflect a male dominated culture and a potential for clichéd macho behaviours at the college. Given this social context which was particular to Augustine's but which was located within the broader context of difficulty associated with boys' education, and going one step further - difficulty with engaging post-compulsory students with Religious Education — there existed an opportunity to address, innovatively, teaching and learning difficulties at Augustine's. Consequently, the particular significance of the curriculum designed for this research study resided in its explicit focus and promotion of affective learning for Religious Education so that post-compulsory students at Augustine's might express their masculinity positively and, in doing so, explore and develop their spirituality in an environment of safety. This last point was most important given that student engagement

with Religious Education was perceived by many as 'uncool'. As a result many students, for various reasons, frequently opted out of participating in religious education activities.

In relation to the preceding observations, this researcher's experience and observation of Catholic secondary Religious Education in the Diocese involved in this research study, also suggests that many colleges have difficulty engaging post-compulsory students in their college-based religious education programs, with a ripple-down effect from post-compulsory to junior students. Corresponding with this apparent devaluing of Religious Education however, there has been increased interest in spirituality and a human search for meaning (Ranson, 2004; Tacey, 2003). As well, the nature of the traditional family and student cohort has changed, with implications for Catholic Education and specifically, Religious Education:

> The nature of family life is changing. Today it is difficult to describe an all-encompassing set of family experiences of a typical child or adolescent…Australian society is being transformed in response to increasing globalisation and accelerating technological change…There is a growing tendency for people to search for spiritual meaning and significance both within and outside the mainstream churches…Catholic schools exist as part of the evangelising mission of the Church. They are challenged to foster a distinctive culture, educational vision and practice (*Awakenings*, 2005, pp. 66, 68, 72, 74).

The preceding factors presented challenges for the contemporary post-compulsory religious education classroom with a student cohort on the periphery of adulthood.

In light of these factors, the initiative of this research study was to provide a teaching and learning pathway in Religious Education which promoted a claim for spirituality grounded in a Catholic educational style. The theological aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar provided the theological underpinning for such a teaching and learning pathway. In educational terms this intention translated into recognition of the imaginative principle of

the Gospels; an understanding of the needs of the present; the utilization of contemporary technologies and practices; and the guidance of the hope and vision of the future.

Research Defined

This research study proposed that if an aesthetic and religious experience of God, mediated through art, engaged the students and was acknowledged within religious education curriculum, it would contribute to their development as 'human persons' (Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium — hereafter referred to as CSTTM). It would also have the potential to draw them into the formal and more traditional elements of classroom Religious Education in a Catholic college. Such needs were implied by Tacey (2000, p.14) in his statement, "Australians have deeply internalized negative attitudes on religion and suffer from a self-inflicted repression on this matter." The attitude described by Tacey (2000) was one that was often reflected by students when they dismissed Religious Education as 'irrelevant' or 'boring' (cf. Rossiter, 1981, Moran, 1989). This research study explored a different, innovative method of approaching Religious Education that addressed such outlooks. Consequently, through the examination of specific instances, this research study led to the identification of a new approach to curriculum development in Religious Education in association with the theological aesthetics.

The theological aesthetics involved a particular understanding of the experience of art from a religious perspective. The understanding and application of the theological aesthetics proposed that, as part of the creation of God (through the talents of the artist), an artwork (principally painting, in this study) had the capacity to mediate and reveal

something of God to the person contemplating that artwork; more than that, the experience had the capacity to shift the human heart towards God.

Given such an understanding, an exchange between the artwork and the individual occurred in which the artwork operated as a carrier of meaning for a religious experience. This openness and willingness of the individual to be attentive and receptive to the offer of God's self-communication, interpreted here as God's love, has been described as the divine artwork 'grasping' the viewer who responded in faith to that spiritual experience (Kehl & Löser, 1997).

Through an analysis of this approach, the research study explored the possibility of providing the opportunity for the experience of a spiritual dimension in a school context. Incorporated into this research study was an exploration of the religious imagination, and the revelation of God from the experience of beauty (encountered concretely as a transcendental attribute).

The Research Question

The anticipated outcomes which generated the question for this research study included the students' conscious development of a sense of personal spirituality together with a broadened vision of and respect for the spirituality, religious outlook and expression of others. A broadened vision of that nature also offered a possibility for their claim of a relationship with God and for such a relationship to be personalised, life-related and developed. Accordingly, the research question was articulated as follows:

This research study intends to ascertain if visual art can be a medium for religious and spiritual experience for post-compulsory adolescents to enhance Religious Education.

This intention raised a number of secondary considerations and questions.

I. What is the understanding of the theological aesthetics that grounds this research?

II. In terms of the theory of Lonergan, how is art understood as a 'carrier of religious meaning'?

III. Is there a relationship between art as a carrier of religious meaning and a religious and spiritual experience?

IV. How can the learning environment and strategies enhance these experiences in a Catholic college's post-compulsory religious education program?

V. How can these experiences contribute to the religious education program?

The significance of this research study resided in its focusing upon Religious Education for post-compulsory male adolescents, particularly with regard to affective learning (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964) located in religious and spiritual experience (de Souza, 2001) . Affective learning related to a person's attentiveness and willingness to receive meaning. Affective learning as such did not operate independently of cognitive learning — the latter residing in knowledge and its recall - but was most often treated informally as a silent adjunct to teaching and learning for measurable educational outcomes. This research study was significant for the overt emphasis it placed upon affective learning for Religious Education. Affective learning was not quantifiable as such but was noticeable, observable and recordable in relation to student responses to artworks in the context of this research study.

The theological aesthetics which provided the theological framework for this research study expressed religious experience in terms of a person's reception of God's love — God experienced as love (Jn 3:16) — or as 'God present to me'. This fundamental analogue in

human experience offered a means, albeit limited, for sensing and expressing the inexpressible. The affective learning of students in response to artworks for this research study may or may not have pointed explicitly to an overwhelming sense of God's presence for them; their experience of God's presence or love might be less than overwhelming or not at all. The difference in this research study was that it sought to focus on the experience of the student that was a personal response to an experience of God's self-communication which was offered, received and responded to in freedom. The teaching and learning strategy here was not concerned with something that was didactic, but with the provision of an environment that was conducive to reflection upon an experience in the religious sense. In this there rested the potential consequence of a willing, or at least more open-minded engagement by students, with regard to the college's religious education program.

In addition to providing the opportunity for an experience such as that identified above, this research study has additional relevance and significance as it addressed the multi-faith population of the current classroom (within the established framework), and facilitated the potential participation of all students at their own entry points. In a culture where for many, universally accepted standards and figures (such as Christ) were lacking, this research study allowed for another way of experiencing God's self-communication or love that might offer students points of connection with others as well as with God. Such an experience, understood as having embraced the mystical through the imagination also allowed for the connection of seeing the divine in all people and all things (Harris, 1991, p. 76).

Research approach

Emerging from a Constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2003, p. 9) the research method for this study was Qualitative, using Case Study (Stake, 2000, p. 436) and a focus group as the data-gathering instrument. This provided the rich narrative from which the findings of the study were drawn and interpreted. Criteria developed from Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method provided the interpretative lens for the findings of this research study.

Case study has been described as an intensive and detailed study of one individual or a group as an entity through observation, reports and any other means (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard, 1994; Tesch, 1990). As a result, case study is applicable across many fields of educational research (Ferguson, 1992; J. Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Reinharz, 1992). Although for some, the various applications of case study presented issues for its identity as a unique form of research, Stake (2000) claimed that case study research was not defined by a specific methodology but by the object of study. Even though critics (R. Yin, 1994) argued against the breadth of Stake's (2000) description, generally speaking, most agreed with the focus of case study "on a particular instance (object or case) and reaching an understanding within a complex context" (Mertens, 2003, p. 237). In light of this discussion, case study was considered to be most appropriate for this research study.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Study

Before participating in the research study students were advised (and assured) that there were no right or wrong responses. Teaching is a moral action entailing ethical obligations to students, consequently, and in relation to this research study, it was incumbent upon the researcher to intend "a level of care for students beyond the confines of class time…in an

anticipatory reflection about the teaching-learning encounter and the experiences of students" (Mercer & Foster, 2001, p. 131). It was also important for this researcher to assist in the development of a peer culture in the classroom that supported students who entered into previously unexperienced realms of learning. Given such a requirement this researcher's role as participant-observer helped make that development more manageable. As well, a critical colleague who was also a teacher at the college, by means of her own observations and discussions with students, was able to identify emerging concerns and confirm successful practices. In light of this understanding of professional responsibility however, Mercer and Foster (2001, p. 131) also suggested, "The obligation to care for students does not equate with a duty to repair all disrupted relations."

As this research study took place in a Catholic boys' college (for reasons of accessibility) the findings were applicable to the students and curriculum of that college. Given the gender and context of the sample, this study made no claim for the general application of its findings. The school's situation framed the study, e.g. its Catholicity, all male student population, its nature as a boarding as well as a day college, its links with a founding religious order, conservative tradition, administration and location in a large country city were all factors which limited general application of the outcomes to other colleges and curricula. Nevertheless, since this research study related to teaching strategies in Religious Education, particularly at the post-compulsory stage, the findings could inform teaching and learning in Religious Education in other contexts. As well, it identified areas for future research.

Terms to be Defined

Beauty: for the purpose of this study, beauty was understood as a transcendental category, analogous with God (Creator) in the sense that God is beauty made visible through the incarnation of Christ who is the supreme creation. Christ, as beauty, is the manifestation of God, requiring a reflection upon what has been seen with the eyes of faith (O'Donnell, 1992, p. 18).

Aesthetics: the appreciation of beauty in terms of that which moves the human heart (Garcia-Rivera, 1999).

Human heart: refers to the biblical notion of 'heart', the *leb* of the Hebrew Scriptures and the *kardia* of the New Testament (best described in Rom 7:13-25). Incorporated into that understanding, the term heart intended 'that which is closest to the 'I'…that region of felt proclivities and significant presences' (Wood, 1995).

Theological aesthetics: an understanding of the experience of God (Creator-Giver) mediated through the creation in a reciprocal relationship wherein the receiver freely accepts the gift of God's revelation and love (Garcia-Rivera, 1999).

Aesthetic theology: a didactic relationship between art and theology wherein the art become a means of explaining and/or illustrating a religious concept or viewpoint (Weakland, 1997, pp. 326-329).

Spirituality: connectedness, which often expressed itself as an emotional relationship with an invisible sacred presence. To those who experienced this relationship it was real, transformative and complete (Tacey, 2000, p. 17).

Christian spirituality: had to do with the way of being Christian, in a response to the call of God, issued through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit…It was also visionary, sacramental, relational, and transformational…Christian spirituality was transformational... requiring that the spirit was allowed to work so that through the instrumentality of the

individual and of the Church the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God might continue to occur (McBrien, 1994, pp. 1057-58).

Spiritual experience: referred to the capacity of the person to transcend herself or himself through knowledge and love in relation to self, others, the world and the Transcendent, this last term referred to God (Schneiders, 2000).

Transcendence: was a matter of 'aesthetics' (appreciation of beauty) before 'ethics' (behaviour). It was concerned with the way a person engaged the creation. It was always preceded by a response to the gift of self-communication or love of the Creator which drew that person out of her/himself. It had the capacity for occurring all the time, in every place, and in relation to every thing and every circumstance of life (Schindler, 1999).

Self-transcendence: was not the achievement of the self, but the effective presence of the creation in the self. It was the creation as inherently meaningful and loveable that drew the person beyond the self (Schindler, 1999).

Religion: Paul Tillich (1956) in his two-fold explanation of religion nominated it in the broad sense as the impulse toward ultimate concern and meaning; in the narrower sense, within the context of a particular orthodoxy and doctrinal organisation.

Revelation: the understanding according to which the invisible God, from the fullness of God's love, addressed God's friends, and moved among them in order to invite and receive them into God's own company…God, who created and conserved all things by God's Word, provided people with constant evidence of God's self in created realities (Flannery, 1984, pp. 750-52).

Mystery: in Christian terms "a hidden, unseen, profound presence that became visible and tangible in persons, in events, and in things" (Harris & Moran, 1991, p. 15).

Numinous: this referred to an experience that may be transitory and unpredictable, that could be described as awe-inspiring and which indicated the presence of divinity (Harris, 1991, p. 15).

Mystical: the sense, belief and awareness that at some fundamental level, everyone and everything was related to everyone and everything else; the human sense of connectedness (Harris & Moran, 1991, p. 15).

Cognitive Domain: defined here, the cognitive domain involved knowledge: as the result of specifics and universals; the recall of methods and processes; or the recall of a pattern, structure or setting (Bloom, 1956, pp. 201-207).

Affective Domain: defined here, the affective domain was concerned with the level of a person's attending to or receiving meaning. In this regard affective learning was concerned with the sensitivity of the learner to the existence of certain phenomena and stimuli — and the willingness of the learner to be engaged by them. Affective learning followed a continuum. It began with a passive position or role on the part of the learner and proceeded to a point at which the learner directed her/his attention towards the preferred stimuli (Krathwohl et al., 1964, pp. 176-185). Appendix D provides a brief summary of levels of affective learning as indicators for the affective learning of participants in this research study.

School: referred generally to both primary and secondary sectors of education in Victoria.

College: referred specifically to the secondary sector of education in Victoria.

In drawing to conclusion this introductory chapter with its description of the context and approach for this research study, the ground has been laid for subsequent chapters to address the literature — theological as well as educational — which underpin the research study. Accordingly, Chapter Two will address the theological aesthetics and its

relationship with religious experience in order to provide a means for interpreting a

religious experience of God's self-communication mediated by art as well as the

implications of such a provision for Religious Education.

Chapter 2

THE THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Theological Aesthetics

The theoretical framework for this research study emerged from two areas of investigation: the first related to the theological aesthetics and its relationship with religious experience; the second focused on concepts that are foundational to different approaches and practices in Religious Education. This chapter presents a review of the literature that discusses the theological aesthetics and its relationship with religious experience and its implications for Religious Education.

The relevance of the theological aesthetics for the twenty-first century religious education classroom resides in its association with aesthetic and religious experience. This association is concerned with "an expression of communion with that which doctrine explores" (Durka & Smith, 1979, p. xii) not with an illustration of doctrine. In other words, the theological aesthetics and the aesthetic dimension of religious experience provide for the *event* of the person's being captured in the love of God. Such an event cannot be calculated or prepared for and classroom teaching cannot orchestrate it.

Aesthetic experience "seeks the spirit in the depths of matter" (Durka & Smith, 1979, p. 3), its concern is with creation and the concrete matter of this world beyond the level of surface appearances. Religious experience linked with the aesthetic is similarly lodged with creation and the disclosure of beauty at levels of deep significance. For students, the

relevance of the aesthetic dimension and religious experience resides in both its accessibility via artworks and its initiation via experience. With this understanding, religious experience linked with the aesthetic and mediated by art could be encountered unexpectedly and in ways similar to those described by Tillich's (1989) recounting of his response to Botticelli's *Madonna with Singing Angels* and Tracy's (1981) response to 'the work of art' respectively:

> As I stood there, bathed in the beauty its painter had envisioned so long ago, something of the divine source of all things came through to me. I turned away shaken. That moment has affected my whole life, given me the keys for the interpretation of human existence, brought vital joy and spiritual truth. I compare it with what is usually called revelation (Tillich, 1989, p. 234-235).

> The work of art encounters me with the surprise, impact, even shock of reality itself. In experiencing art, I recognise a truth I somehow know but know I did not really know except through the experience of recognition of the essential compelled by the work of art. I am transformed by its truth when I return to the everyday, to the whole of what I ordinarily call reality, and discover new affinities, new sensibilities for the everyday (Tracy, 1981, pp. 111-112).

Religious experience linked with the aesthetic could also be comprehended in ways less dramatic than those described by Tillich (1989) and Tracy (1981)! Interpreted thus, art as a carrier of religious meaning linked to religious experience could be a catalyst for positive change in a person's gradual appropriation of a spirituality grounded in a religious tradition. In order to apply this understanding to religious education curriculum, the provision of a structure or format for students to access such experience is required. The following review investigates the literature that provided the theological perspective to underpin the curriculum design and classroom practice that is being investigated in this research study.

The theological lens for interpreting religious experience mediated via artworks is the seminal work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A theological aesthetics*.

The intention was to relate fundamental understandings from von Balthasar to the religious education classroom in an integration of theological understandings and religious education pedagogy. The hope was that such integration would inform an interpretation of a student's experience of artworks in the religious sense and contribute to further development of curriculum for the religious education classroom.

von Balthasar's theology could almost be understood as paradoxical. On the one hand, it is thought by many as extremely conservative regarding Catholic dogma and, on the other hand, many recognise its vast capacity for an integrative breadth and penetrating, meditative depth which breaks free of convention and the predictable, unexpectedly capturing the imagination (Kehl & Löser, 1997, p. 6). The utility of this apparent paradox is that it allows an application of von Balthasar's theology to provide for a 'safe ground' of theological understanding for Religious Education and programs but with a horizon of unlimited possibility. von Balthasar's theological aesthetics provides a way for understanding the experience of artworks as mediators of the divine with solid grounding in authentic Catholic teaching. The nature of aesthetic and religious experience however, frees or liberates students to explore such experiences without the perception of imposed belief from either the teacher or the religious institution which the teacher represents.

A discussion of von Balthasar's theological enterprise with the dimensions of the theological aesthetics (beauty), the theological dramatic (goodness), and the theological logic (truth) is well beyond the capacities of this research study. What is presented, however, is a skeleton of meaning specifically related to this research study, the bones of which emerge from an interpretation of fundamental understandings from the first volume

of von Balthasar's *The glory of the Lord: A theological aesthetics. Vol. 1. Seeing the form* (1989b), under the section headings:

The beckoning: beholding the form; and

The answering: accepting the invitation.

An Interpretation of the Theological Aesthetics for the Religious Education Classroom

The beckoning: beholding the form

Arguably, all Christian theology relates to human existence and human beings are characterised by a desire to know and understand; this has been identified in *Awakenings* (2005), the core document for Religious Education in the Diocese of Ballarat:

> We seek to make meaning of things we see, hear, touch, taste and smell; of other people and our relations with them; of the universe of created things. We also desire to make meaning of things we cannot know through the senses: of love and hate, joy and sorrow, peace and turmoil. Our quest for knowledge reaches beyond the material order, extending to the limits of our capacity to understand.
> Unique among creatures, human beings seek to know and to make meaning of the vast array of experiences arising from our own existence…We have a capacity for self-reflective knowledge, and learning to exercise this capacity contributes to our sense of happiness and purpose in living.
>
> Thus, human experience is recognised as a privileged locus of God's constant self-revelation. It is possible to reflect on all human experiences in a way which draws us into a larger reality of God's creative action (*Awakenings*, 2005, p. 99)

The identification in *Awakenings* (2005) of humans making meaning from their experiences resonated with the aim of the religious education curriculum under investigation in this research study. Similarly, von Balthasar's theological aesthetics was concerned with human experience in relation to God's beckoning. The essential inference was that God's self-revelation — God's beckoning — is offered to the person in such a way that it can be seen (von Balthasar, 1989b, pp. 113-114, cf. Jn 1:39). This 'seeing of God' is through Christ, through whom God addresses all people with the free call of God's

love (cf. Waldstein, 1987, p. 13). von Balthasar's conviction was that the "luminous form of the beautiful" at the centre of Christian theology is Jesus Christ, the Word of God become Flesh:

> The beautiful is above all a *form,* and the light does not fall on this form from above and from outside, rather it breaks forth from the form's interior…The content [Gehalt] does not lie behind the form [Gestalt] but within it…In the luminous form of the beautiful the being of the existent becomes perceivable as nowhere else, and this is why an aesthetic element must be associated with all spiritual perception as with all spiritual striving (von Balthasar, 1989b, pp. 151, 153).

In its entirety, von Balthasar's theological framework can be understood as an unfolding of the form's interior described in the preceding quote, because this concept of the form — of the self-communicating object that breaks into human existence and is seen — provides for both the radiant genesis and the shape of the theological aesthetics.

An inference from this concept for the religious education classroom was that God's love, made distinctively apparent and intelligible in Christ, could also find expression in art. In other words, the beckoning of God and the beholding of the Christ form could be imagined and accessed by the human agent — the student — via an experience of artworks disclosing beauty from beneath surface appearance at levels of deep significance.

Theological aesthetics was therefore, concerned neither with a visual illustration of Christology through the arts, nor with a subjective aesthetics with human initiatives and determination. Its concern was with God's gracious self-revelation offered in love, wherein, the "light of beauty" broke forth from the form itself and not from the person's perception of it (von Balthasar, 1986, p. 32). This meant that the particular artistic tastes or preferences of individuals were not relevant and beauty's mediation in an otherwise overlooked artwork was possible. In von Balthasar's theological approach, the revelation of God's beauty set its standard and objectivity in the revelatory form of Jesus Christ (von

Balthasar, 1968, p. 9). In human terms this understanding inferred a restoration of the connection between Beauty and the beautiful (the creator and the created), between Beauty's divine origins and its appropriation by the human heart. The first concern was with the apprehension of God's self-revelation, "the self-authenticating glory of God's utterly free gift of love" (von Balthasar, 1968), in order to reveal God's-self in the glory of the eternal triune love. In this way God's manifestation in, and through Christ could be understood primarily as love for love's sake, the nature of which is a genuine love shared with genuine beauty (cf. Edwards cited in Lane, 2004, p. 47).

It was in this initial engagement of the human heart with the revelation of divine beauty that particular meaning was located for this research study. Because of the interconnectedness of the theological aesthetics with the concrete reality of creation, it could be argued that any seeking, any movement towards the divine mystery, rested in human anthropology and the sensory potential of the human agent, the student, to perceive God's call and, analogously, to 'see' God. Seeing here inferred having something to see, to look at, but more than that, *perceiving,* or looking beyond the level of surface appearances in order to see more deeply and so experience a revealed truth. von Balthasar's theological aesthetics began where learning ought to begin, that is, within the realm of human experience

This is significant for students in Religious Education because of von Balthasar's identification of a human capacity and potential to receive a gratuitous offering of God's love. This concept permeates Catholic thinking about the invitational nature of God's love, which is extended to all, whether or not they choose to accept. The understanding of the free offer of God's love marks the appropriateness of the theological aesthetics for the

religious education classroom where an organisational framework may be developed to accommodate its potential. In accord with this overview, the discussion that follows addresses particular terms and concepts associated with the theological aesthetics including: Gestalt, beauty and love.

Jesus Christ as Gestalt

  von Balthasar proposed that through Christ, God addresses humanity with the free call of God's love in such a way that it can be seen (von Balthasar, 1989b, pp. 113-14). From von Balthasar's perspective, the Gestalt[1] Christi disclosed an inner radiance which shaped and characterized the medium—the skin and bones of Christ, his outward figure—into a unified, intelligible 'see-able' whole. von Balthasar's perception of the figure (Gestalt) of Christ as a form (Gestalt) extended to include the Church[2]. The appeal of this analogy for von Balthasar was that a figure could be walked around and looked at from all angles, and no matter the view-point, the figure remained the same. In this visualization 'catholicity' was captured for von Balthasar, and together with his insistence for the primacy of an 'objective' metaphysics, gave rise to the particularity of the form. This meant that unlike other forms (Gestalt) with limits imposed upon them by human perception and subjectivity, the beauty of the supreme Gestalt Christi determined its own standard and objectivity (von Balthasar, 1986, p. 32) and provided the willing person with a means for identifying it.

Two points emerge from this discussion. Firstly, the analogy[3] established between the Christ form and the Church enabled the possibility for further analogies between the revelatory nature of the Christ form and creation — including artworks. Secondly, the theological aesthetics has a particular grounding in Catholicism. Together these inferences

support the integrity and relevance of curriculum in Religious Education developed from the perspective of the theological aesthetics.

The Gestalt and Beauty

Beauty for von Balthasar was not concerned with either 'the fashion of the day' or the tastes of days past. It was not identified with attractive decoration, resisted the tag of 'being only skin deep', and was not limited to how a person was 'on the inside'. Beauty's meaning captured by the theological aesthetics was infinitely richer; perhaps something of it was intuited with the simile of the eyes as a window to the soul.

Given this insight, beauty was concerned with and related to a gracious disclosure — a gift — of a serious reality; and the serious reality with its sensible outer appearance — its form — was loaded with meaning. This was because the form illuminated something of its own deeper inner reality, in other words, its mystery or spirituality. At the moment of encounter with beauty and God's gifting of self, a paradox of intimate and yet distant recognition emerged. This paradox was described by Garcia-Rivera (1999) in the following way:

> von Balthasar meant this form of revelation as divine self-revelation, at one time intimate and yet ungraspable, meant to move the human heart into union with the divine self even as it reveals that this cannot be done by the human heart alone…von Balthasar transformed the abyss between Creator and creature into the theological aesthetics of 'seeing the form' (Garcia-Rivera, 1999, pp. 14-15).

The understanding expressed by Garcia-Rivera relates to the religious education classroom. The possibility for students to be stirred by a religious experience that invites them, by choice, into God's embrace is inferred. Garcia-Rivera (1999) refers to the heart being moved (and it certainly could be argued that human hearts are moved by experiences) which in this context relates to God's loving self-revelation mediated via art.

This interpretation and application of the theological aesthetics offers a liberating approach to a religious education curriculum, often perceived as didactic and bounded within the expectation of belief.

von Balthasar's instinct for the Christian revelation was that it led to the assertion that God is love, freely offered: the Trinitarian love of the Father and Son in the Holy Spirit. The fundamental analogue in human experience for the illumination of God was achieved by means of the sense of 'God present to me' — as love present to me — and, analogously, as the self-revelation of God in Christ. Inspired by Johannine theology (Jn 3:16) von Balthasar's position held that the procession of the Son from the Father was, in the first instance, a procession of love: "God's self-abandonment in the Incarnation has its ontic ground of possibility in God's eternal self-abandonment, his three-fold personal gift as self" (von Balthasar, 1990, p. 147). The Son, as the perfect expression of and response to the Father, was an image of the Father, realised initially in terms of Trinitarian immanence and also in God's saving plan for humanity revealed through the Creation and the redemption effected in Christ (O'Donnell, 2000, pp. 142-144). Again, the mystery of Christian Faith according to von Balthasar was that God, who was beauty, had become visible to us in Christ (O'Donnell, 1992, p. 18), God with skin! (John 1:1-4; cf. Romans: 8:30). Understood in this way, God's love as gift, minus necessity, provided for a Christian distinction and the replacement of a self-oriented, self-seeking, worldly love with a redemptive love out-poured for others and realized in the life of the Jesus of history:

> Although God does not need the form of Jesus Christ in order to be the perfect triune God in himself (sic), and thus does not achieve his own full reality throughout the world, there is nothing accidental attached to his act of making himself known in Jesus Christ: what seems to be 'the accidental truth of history' is the revelation of his absolute freedom, as this is *in God himself,* the freedom of eternal self-giving out of unfathomable love. This absolute love is not determined in advance by any 'nature' in the eternal Father which would 'make it necessary' for him to beget the eternal Son …this absolute freedom of the love

within the Godhead is poured out over the entire form of revelation, giving it its being and structure and is present in it…indeed, in reality we may sense for the first time, after all our preliminary labours, what ultimately the divine glory is, what 'the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' is (von Balthasar, 1989a, pp. 17-18).

In was in this gratuitous self-revelation of God in Christ, with no apparent basis in necessity, that beauty for von Balthasar was most profoundly identified.

The cogency of von Balthasar's theological framework was indicated here within the analogue of love and Christ. Through him the confluent event of heavenly and worldly love occurred wherein 'seeing difference' in the Gestalt Christi meant seeing difference over identity as a moment of revelation rather than observation: "the incarnation suggests that all 'difference' is a gracious epiphany, a loving revelation" (Garcia-Rivera, 1999, p. 73). Even so, a value of the aesthetic dimension of von Balthasar's theology was that it demonstrated both his recognition of and respect for the natural structures of the human person. If the self-revelation of God's beauty was to be received at all, it could only be via human existence and human means of recognition.

The implication of this discussion for this research study was the significance and value of learning in the affective domain which required a 'willingness' that is, attitude or disposition. This made its application for senior secondary Religious Education, particularly on the part of the student, important.

The senior secondary school years, recognised as post-compulsory schooling, are generally accepted as the stage when learning in the cognitive domain is most emphasised and prized. High university entry scores become the 'carrot' dangled in front of students to promote hard work. Incorporation of the theological aesthetics for Religious Education at

this post-compulsory stage of schooling allowed a perceived imbalance and emphasis on cognitive learning to be redressed. It did not mean that thinking stopped! Rather, another approach to teaching and learning was sought — one that is, potentially more life-giving. Curriculum grounded in an application of the theological aesthetics began with the students' experience of art and 'seeing the form'. This religious experience, previously described as a shifting of the human heart (Garcia-Rivera, 1999) potentially involved an emotional response which in turn promoted understanding of the perception of God's beauty in human existence. It also affected behaviours. The possible transformative nature of the religious experience meant that the students in the Catholic school could display altered attitudes that could affect consequent behaviours and, in accord with von Balthasar's theology, could align the students more closely with Christ.

The Human Agent's Access to the Gestalt Christi

Following on from the preceding discussion and the potential for students, via religious experience, to move towards God's offer of love in Christ, Gleeson (2003) has offered a way to understand the students' initial capacity to recognise God's beckoning.

> Our reflections begin with the 'phenomena' of personal life, the distinctive characteristics of our *experience* as human persons…so an understanding of human persons should not be divorced from an understanding of our physical nature… (Gleeson, 2003, p. 19)

Thus, Gleeson's (2003) statement pointed to the physical nature of human anthropology essential to the sensory dimension of the theological aesthetics. Allied with this physical, sensory dimension, part of human experience and understanding has long held the existence of values, presences and realities that transcend time and space. Theologians and philosophers alike have referred to them as 'transcendentals' (Komonchak, Collins, & Lane, 1987, p. 1043). von Balthasar described the transcendentals of Being, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful in this way:

> The infant is brought to consciousness of himself *[sic]* only by love, the smile of his mother. In that encounter, the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him: (1) that he is one in love with the mother, even in being other that his mother, therefore all being is one; (2) that love is good, therefore all Being is good; (3) that that love is true, therefore all Being is true; and (4) that that love evokes joy, therefore all Being is beautiful (von Balthasar, 1993, p. 114).

Thus, the transcendentals were named because they were coextensive with Being even as they transcended any one creature: in other words, they represented qualities shared and yet distinct. This understanding was consistent with von Balthasar's theological understanding that by nature, human beings were, in the first instance, relational. The mother was inexorably connected with the womb-child in a relationship described aesthetically, and which alluded to the communal before the individual life. von Balthasar proposed that analogously, the visualisation of the love between mother and womb-child pertained to God and the person. God's self-revelation in the Gestalt Christi was also understood in terms of beauty and love. Accordingly, an experience of beauty and love of this nature could be analogous with an experience of God. By acknowledging and valuing human anthropology and human experience, von Balthasar's theological approach again connects with the students and their learning derived from experience.

von Balthasar's argument prioritised the beautiful as God's first way of attracting and convincing a person, in this case the student, of the love of Jesus Christ. This was consistent with his inspiration of the procession of the Word as a procession of love (Jn 3:16) which occurred in the manner of an image. Understood thus, von Balthasar's approach was reflective rather than critical "The intellectual rigor of his work is joined to the fact that his is self-confessedly a theology done 'kneeling', a theology with its roots in meditation and prayer" (Laubach, 1964, pp. 146-7). Meditation and prayer opened a way to mystery and a deeper, inner, spiritual reality for a person. Given the context of this

research study and its location in an all boys' college, the attendant requirement of the theological aesthetics for meditation upon an artwork and prayer provided an often cited 'missing ingredient' in boys' education, alluded to by Tacey (1997; 2004) and Kelly (1988; 2004b). The implication from this for curriculum was to provide opportunities and means for students, particularly boys, to develop and access these prayerful and meditative skills in relation to art as a carrier of religious meaning.

Aligned with prayer and meditation, von Balthasar valued art as a vehicle for human self-interpretation to the degree that it expressed meaning which transcended its own particularity and was Christological. In view of this emphasis upon the object (Riches, 1986, p. 181), von Balthasar's own aesthetic starting point resisted any call for religion to be able to justify itself before 'reason alone', instead, he sought to give creative, imaginative expression to Christian truth — pre-empted in the revelatory experience of beauty (Oakes, 2003, p. 184). Application of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics meant that artworks could be incorporated into religious education affective learning as mediators of religious experience, thus resisting *any call for religion to be able to justify itself before 'reason alone'*.

Mystery and the imprint of the Gestalt Christi

From the previous discussions it could be argued that von Balthasar's theological aesthetics and the experience of beholding the Lord was less concerned with the associated light in the mind (truth) and more concerned with the fire in the heart (love) expressed through the transcendental of beauty. In other words, at the moment of "intimate connection" (von Balthasar, 1989b, p. 143) with God's self-revealing love, the person was overwhelmed — for even the tiniest moment — by the experience alone. In relation to this

tiniest of moments, von Balthasar (1989b, pp. 141-143) posits a unity between seeing and believing. He also acknowledges the impossibility of analysing or quantifying faith, which points to the improbability of identifying the exact moment of faith.

The significance of this understanding for students is that a religious experience could be understood as either conversionary or initiatory insofar as it could set a student upon a path of inquiry about God — without that student having to claim a faith stance. In light of this interpretation, the theological aesthetics also accommodated a mystical dimension that differentiated it from aesthetic theology.

Aesthetic theology recognises that art may be used to illuminate knowledge and understanding of religious dogma. Theological aesthetics however, is concerned with the *experience* of God's love and the possibility of being 'swept off your feet' in a revelatory instant, before any conscious thought can explain how or why. Analogously, O'Donaghue (1986) explored this dimension of mystery and the theological aesthetics in the poem *On a Dark Night* by St. John of the Cross:

> a poem describing a journey made in deepest darkness that is without light, a journey guided entirely by 'the fire that burns in the heart'. This fire is enkindled by the encounter with the beloved *as* beloved, by the God of love *as* love…But it must be said again that the fire in the heart is the result of an *encounter,* the encounter with God in the call and enchantment of his *[sic]* absolute beauty (O'Donaghue, 1986, p. 9).

In von Balthasar's opinion innate longing and desire best expressed the human experience *apart* from the truth of Christ's revelatory light (O'Donnell, 2000, pp. 60-62). Human longing of this nature (and its mystical dimension) was particularly attributable to those senior students about to embark on life and who sought to make meaning of things seen, heard, touched…of the universe of created things, as well as to make meaning of those unknowable things including love and joy (cf. *Awakenings*, 2005). Tacey (2003) has

identified the contemporary experience of the 'spirituality explosion' as recapturing and expressing this same human longing and desire for communication with God.

For many post-compulsory students in their final year at school, school-based relationships and loyalties to one another may be deepened. These qualities combined with an emerging maturity of the senior student body, in general, paves the way for a respectful, meditative approach to the curriculum designed for this research study.

The discussion, so far, has focussed on von Balthasar's theological aesthetics in relation to the Gestalt Christi as the revelatory form, the beckoning. In the following section the implications of a person's 'yes' to the 'will you' of God's invitation is examined, the answering.

The Answering: Accepting the Invitation

von Balthasar's theological aesthetics allows for a student who was respectfully, if not devotedly, engaged with Religious Education, to access something of the divine mediated via an artwork. This was discussed in the previous section, wherein mystery and the indefinable moment of separation between an experience of God's self-revelatory love and the perception which followed, was identified. In addition, von Balthasar's theological framework provided that the 'yes' of a person to the 'will you' of God's invitation inscribed the person with the Christ form. In other words, the revelatory experience was understood to impact upon the person in such a way that a 'Christ-likeness' re-imaged and re-directed their life in fidelity to 'the Catholic One'.

von Balthasar's claim for Jesus as the 'Catholic One' referred to Jesus' own exploration of the personal and social dimensions of human existence which were re-ordered and re-established out of his own lived experience, and which revealed the universal meaning of Being (von Balthasar, 1986, p. 228). It was from this orientation, that in the revelatory moment, a person's desire to re-establish his or her own life experience in accord with the Gestalt Christi could be understood to begin. Founded in the eschatological identification of Jesus Christ as the ultimate and therefore the last person 'the freely judging measure and norm' (von Balthasar, 1986, p. 204), this interpretation of the impact or the mark of the revelatory experience, ultimately protected the identity and consciousness of the specifically Christian call and witness.

This 'imprint' of the Gestalt Christi did not mean that following the revelatory moment students were 'changed' into model Catholics! A suggestion of that type would, at the very least, negate free will and represent faith as "the death of all logic" (von Balthasar, 1989b, p. 143). On the contrary, the revelatory moment could be understood as a catalyst for a life-long seeking and longing to understand the experience of God's love. The recognition, therein, of human freedom and human longing for God (cf. Flannery, 1996, GS n.21), resonated in von Balthasar's perception both of the person and of the Triune God as love. He argued that the freedom of the creative event demonstrated the divine life as infinitely free self-giving and that the freedom of the creative event facilitated the possibility of a free creation. In von Balthasar's judgement the setting free of the person was the goal of the Triune God's dramatic action and enabled the autonomy of the person (O'Donnell, 2000, pp. 65-77).

In relation to students in the religious education classroom, this inferred a respect for their religious freedom, to believe or not. Respect for Catholic identity and some Catholic educational styles, insofar as the theological aesthetics promoted fidelity to the Tradition was also inferred. Finally, the possibility of a student's religious experience within the context of Religious Education placed responsibility upon the college to promote an ethos or environment to nurture anyone who chose to pursue a personal or deeper relationship with Christ.

Story, Picture and Imagination

von Balthasar's fidelity to the Catholic tradition (identified in the previous section) aligned his theological aesthetics with a distinctive Christian story. The particularities of that story, conceived as a vehicle for human self-understanding, were drawn from the concrete, particularities of Jesus Christ: his life and teachings. From this story emerged the shape and teachings of the Catholic Church and thus its history and community:

> Authentic Catholicity is so urgent for the Catholic that he *[sic]* must acquire it before he can afford to engage in dialogue with other confessions or visions of the world. Otherwise he runs the risk of his Catholicism being considered as one 'confession' among others and then of attempting, together with these other confessions, a higher synthesis — this is the delusion with which 'ecumenical dialogue' is often encumbered today. Precisely because this dialogue is nowadays not only important but indispensable, the Catholic must first of all be prepared for it. He cannot enter and take part in it with a purely empirical and theologically dilettante awareness of what Catholicity and the Catholic Church in general are (von Balthasar, 1986, p. 229).

The social and cultural implications in von Balthasar's words were various, not least among them, the perception of a certain Catholic arrogance — not only in the purview of other religious traditions but in the view of a world conceptualised as being increasingly secular and for many, post-modern in its relativism. His position disallowed the conception of the believer's life as one of isolation, of relationship between 'an alone and an Alone'. It

also placed insistence upon the reality of a whole that exceeded human comprehension wherein the particularity of revealed love in Christ was identifiable and nourished in the characteristic form of the Catholic Church and its community. The identification of this characteristic form in 'loves response to love' was not to force theology back into a narrow, exclusive ecclesiology (von Balthasar, 1975, pp. 17-18), but to advance the characteristic form of reasoning and behaving in the world in conformity with Christ's own lived existence (cf. Acts 2:33), only verified or made genuine, by means of an existential disposition in favour of those in need. Given this slant on von Balthasar's theological approach, Christian engagement was always initiated with a persistent preference for places where, humanly speaking and from this world's perspective, suffering occurred (Williams, 1986, p. 13). von Balthasar's theology, framed within the characteristic form of the Church, required that Christian action was significant action. This significant action arose from the catalyst of experience, in response to a fundamental event of beckoning, was interpreted, and required a normative and generative focus. von Balthasar described the Church as a living organism in which a spiritual soul manifested itself "and *must* manifest itself corporeally in order to be itself" (von Balthasar, 1986, pp. 229-31).

From these perspectives von Balthasar resisted any "dilettante awareness" of Catholicity and the Church (von Balthasar, 1986, p. 229) — which raised several implications for the Catholic school and the religious education classroom. Firstly, if the religious education curriculum was structured to accommodate the theological aesthetics with both its classroom application and its relevance for Catholic identity (von Balthasar, 1986, p. 228), then Catholic schools were ethically bound to strive to develop a community and ethos committed to the Tradition — at least professionally. Inferred from this for teachers, parents and students was a requirement for conscious commitment to the Catholic

educational style with all the restraints and possibilities of its lived reality (cf. *Awakenings*, 2005, p. 18ff.). Secondly, von Balthasar's identification of a Christian preference for the disadvantaged or those suffering befits the outlook of most Catholic secondary colleges for whom Christian Outreach is a distinctive characteristic. A related challenge for colleges included a raised consciousness identifying the disadvantaged of the twenty-first century with spiritual as well as economic and social impoverishment as valid concerns. Thirdly, the promotion of a distinctive Christian story which facilitated the theological aesthetics in the religious education classroom also meant 'starting with aesthetics' and 'letting be' God's self-revelation.

Starting with aesthetics involved seeking the spirit in the depths of created matter and Harris (1991) suggested that it was the religious imagination which facilitated the appreciation of experiences concerned with depth, ultimacy and meaning. For this research study, one means for understanding each student's potential for a religious imagination resided in the distinctiveness of a Catholic educational style attentive to the religious dimension of life. Taken from the Latin 'religare' meaning to re-bind or to strengthen a bond, this religious dimension both articulated and celebrated the bonds of connectedness within all reality, human, non-human and divine, and engaged the human person in that network of relationships (*Awakenings*, 2005, p. 18). Thus understood a student's reading of the religious dimension engaged the religious imagination in a perception of matter beyond the level of surface appearances.

On a related but different level, religious also emerged from the stem 'relegere'. In this case religious referred to a particular interpretation - that of both the personal and the collective experience from the narrative perspective of the Judeo-Christian worldview. An

orientation of the religious imagination from this viewpoint, which Greeley (2000) called the "Catholic imagination" accorded with von Balthasar's authentic Catholicity. Understood in this way, the Catholic imagination 'saw' the Holy in the ordinary, insofar as objects, events and persons of daily life were perceived as revelations of God's self-communication (Greeley, 2000, p. 1). Given either of these orientations — 'religare' or 'relegere' — the religious imagination provided a lens for a student's perception of creation and so shaped perceptions of human life.

In light of this discussion, Harris (1991) provided a teaching and learning strategy for accessing, promoting and developing the religious imagination. The dimensions of the religious imagination according to Harris (1991, p. 67) included the contemplative, the ascetic, the creative and the sacramental. Harris' (1991) application of the term *religious* to *imagination* provided a perspective, a language and a teaching and learning strategy that was specific, focused and meaningful for the theological aesthetics and the religious education classroom. In terms of classroom dynamics, the application of the contemplative imagination for this research study allowed that the student was totally present to the artwork in an intense way: attending, listening, being with it and reverencing it as unique. Responsible choice was demanded of the student during this period of contemplation; that is, whether to remain with or disengage with the artwork. The ascetic operation of the imagination referred to its potential for objectivity. Most often achieved through the perspective of style, its facilitation obliged the student to respect and reflect upon the integrity of the artwork. The creative work of the imagination allowed for mysticism (a sense of connectedness in creation), originality and receptivity to the mystery of creation with its potential to mediate meaning (cf. The Doctrine of the Spiritual Senses). Finally, the sacramental imagination facilitated the perception of a universal significance in the

artwork because, as Harris (1991) said, "whatever is seen, although it remains itself, can also be an eminent instance of something else" (p. 19). This aspect of the imagination potentially revealed the holy, the divine.

In conclusion, although Harris' elucidation of the religious imagination contributed to a teaching and learning strategy conducive to von Balthasar's theological aesthetics, it would be both inappropriate as well as unrealistic to suggest that the theological aesthetics could, on any level, be directly 'deposited' into religious education curriculum. Even so, points of connection between Religious Education and the theological aesthetics have been made, with the following inferences being drawn:

❖ In the post-compulsory setting, students' responses to issues of religion, faith and spirituality range from questioning, challenging, believing, denying and apathy, to every point in between. Given this understanding, the significance in the broader application of the special category of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics for this research study resided in its explicit identification of a human potential to receive the gratuitous offering of God's love in a shift of the human heart towards God. An experience of this type, even without a prior claim to faith and associated tradition could provide a catalyst for a student's personal transformation towards a 'Christ-likeness'. In fact, the novel approach of this curriculum design and its breaking with the normative pattern of religious education classes might unexpectedly engage students before any negative or ambivalent preconceptions prejudiced their participation.

❖ In accord, and in relation to the mystery of love's encounter, the curriculum designed for this research study provided senior students with the time, space and opportunity to reflect deeply upon artworks.

❖ From the perspective of the Catholic tradition, an understanding of life's journey made 'without light' could refer to an initial disposition of many students whose attitude towards Religious Education reflected scepticism. Of particular interest for this research study was the capacity of the theological aesthetics to accommodate such a disposition. Significantly, the theological aesthetics with its possibility for scope in a human response to the offer of God's love, also allowed that respect was afforded students and their developing autonomy as persons. The nature of this respect went straight to the heart of an issue for senior students of Religious Education and their resistance to any perception of being told what to think and what to believe.

❖ Described in the opening of this chapter was a possibility for students to be 'captured' by the experience of art in a revelatory moment regardless of a claim to a prior faith or not, and that the event itself could be the catalyst for evangelization. The Christian faith is conversion to Jesus Christ[4] but such a faith cannot be claimed prior to the conversionary moment. With respect to the context of this research study therefore, the primary proclamation inherent in the experience of beauty, via the theological aesthetics, would be addressed to non-believers and those living in religious indifference, as well as believers in the religious education classroom. In relation to this understanding and of particular significance, the 'Catholicity' of von Balthasar's theology signalled the need for a teaching community committed, at least professionally, to the promotion of the Tradition. Only within such a framework would 'intellectual conversion'[5] nurtured via the group dynamic and heuristic learning, be trusted. The students were invited into the process of this curriculum design for the purpose of constructing meaning for their lives; not idiosyncratic, relativist

meaning but meaning located within the bigger picture or narrative of Catholicism. Such an orientation or frame of reference was essential.

❖ In accord with this understanding and in the present context, teaching, understood to have moved beyond acts of transmission and interpretation, is also concerned with creating environments for the nurture of students' imaginations integral to collaborative efforts in constructing knowledge (Mercer & Foster, 2001). Consequently, the interrelatedness of the theological aesthetics and Religious Education offered hope for the creation of such an environment specific to the Catholic school.

❖ Provision for the development of religious literacy in order to extend the students' capacities to articulate and communicate something of the nature of religious experience would be beneficial. Identifiable means for managing this requirement could include locating the curriculum designed for this research study within a whole school religious education program so that from Year 7 to Year 12 religious literacy was consciously promoted and developed. In addition, students' experiences of films and concerts for instance, together with the literacy skills developed in all Domains (VCAA, 2004b), contribute to their capacity to penetrate beyond the surface of images and to dialogue over deeper levels of meaning bound with experience.

❖ Since Religious Education aimed not only at teaching and learning but also at developing attitudes, values, feelings and emotions (Macdonald, 1990, 1995) then affective learning, via the theological aesthetics, by virtue of professional accountability, obliges teachers to provide for assessment and reporting in this domain. Although contentious, assessment and reporting of affective objectives would provide useful data for curriculum evaluation purposes and would not

identify and assess individual students and their personal responses involving faith, beliefs and practices. Further, Macdonald (1988) suggested that self-assessment techniques were the most appropriate strategies to use for this kind of assessment. In support of Macdonald's proposal, the theological aesthetics' dimension of 'mystery' and in particular, mystery's 'ungraspable' nature, point to the limitations of approaches that focus on cognitive assessment. Indeed, the categories of transcendental association incline it towards assessment for affective learning. For the purpose of this research study, art was understood to express and evoke multiplicity in response therefore it resisted any efforts to contain it to a singular expression or interpretation. It also allowed for a personal and diverse response, in freedom, from the students engaged. In providing a process, the curriculum sourced in the theological aesthetics for this research study intended to raise students' consciousness of the significant dimensions of their lives, that is, ultimate meaning, initiated via their sensory, imaginative experiences. For the participant it could mean that everything was on the cusp in the sense of 'about to happen' and provided for a mystical connectedness with the inner-life or spiritual dimension.

In summary, if classroom Religious Education had not engaged students, or if their personal stage of maturation mitigated inquiry or respect for the Tradition; or if previous experience had caused rejection; or if the classroom was the only place of contact with any dimension of Religious Education; or if mixed messages operated between the home and school; or if role models for these students expressed little or nothing of an explicit faith; then this curriculum design offered them an opportunity to 'roam freely' with the safety-net of this Catholic educational style.

Chapter Two has addressed the theological underpinning, provided by von Balthasar's theological aesthetics, for a particular approach to curriculum for Religious Education. Chapter Three will examine approaches to Religious Education, which provide the context for the religious education curriculum being proposed in this research study.

Chapter 3

APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WHICH PROVIDE THE CONTEXT FOR THIS RESEARCH STUDY

The previous chapter discussed relevant literature which focused on the theological aesthetics and was foundational to the religious education curriculum examined in this research study. This chapter will address the concepts underlying current thinking about and approaches to Religious Education. Discussion will be in two sections which: firstly, outline the recent understandings that provide a foundational framework for Religious Education in Catholic schools and secondly, explain the current framework for Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in the Diocese of Ballarat.

Recent Understandings in the Developmental Framework for Religious Education in Catholic Schools

A pre-Vatican II approach to Religious Education

In her summary of the development of Religious Education in Australian Catholic schools, de Souza (1999, p. 9) identified two distinct phases. The first covered the period before Vatican II when the historical context provided was steeped in European tradition. The second phase, known as post-Vatican II, was a time of renewed interest and activity that aimed to develop more effective approaches to learning in Religious Education.

The pre-Vatican II approach, an education in faith, assumed that knowledge of 'the faith' together with regular attendance at church were indicators of personal faith, an assumption that, arguably, was quite problematic since both these could be expressions of expected

behavioural patterns that may have had little to do with a genuine faith. The Objectives model of education (Tyler, 1949) which located authority and control with the teacher as the source of wisdom was well suited to the prescriptive nature of such a religious education program. The Objectives model was similarly suited to other disciplines at that time which adopted a teaching approach of information-giving and rote-learning wherein the teacher, as an authority, passed on essential truths to subjects, from one generation to the next. In following the model the teacher focused on setting specific, behavioural objectives which became the focus for student performance and evaluation. The educational objectives became the

> …criteria by which materials are selected, content is outlined, instructional procedures are developed and tests and examinations prepared. All aspects of the educational program are really means to accomplish basic educational purposes…[This theory of learning] does mean that the teacher's method of controlling the learning experience is through the manipulation of the environment in such a way as to set up stimulating situations – situations that will evoke the kind of behaviour desired (Tyler, 1949, p. 3).

This Objectives model assumed that behavioural performance (such as reciting the Lord's Prayer) was related to the development of personal faith. Therein lies the problem alluded to earlier since these behaviours could be learnt and produced when required without any accompanying depth of belief. Unfortunately with its teacher-centeredness, the method tended to minimize student enquiry (Lovat, 2002, p. 8) and students' doubts and/or questions frequently remained unanswered.

Vatican II and Religious Education

In 1966, the major shift in how Religious Education was being interpreted and taught received further impetus after the Second Vatican Council re-defined the place of the Church as being in the modern world. It stated that

> the Second Vatican council has studied the mystery of the church more deeply, it addresses not only the daughters and sons of the church and all who call upon the name

of Christ, but the whole of humanity as well, and it wishes to set down how it understands the presence and function of the church in the world today (Flannery, 1996, p. 163, GS, n.2)

In relation to Religious Education, this proclamation of Vatican II indicated a broadening of the Church's self-understanding to include presence and participation in the daily realities of life for both the baptised and the un-baptised. This affected the delivery of Religious Education in the classroom, because implications inherent in the proclamation indicated educators would need to find ways to address the inclusive enrolment of students in Catholic schools. It pointed as well towards the beginning of a new era of Church history (Rahner, 1979), an era in which the diversity of ways for people to be Catholic within their own cultures, had to be acknowledged and managed. Ryan highlighted this when he referred to the

> …profound change (that) was the spirit of freedom which permeated the Church in the wake of the council. From a time of constraint upon personal decision-making and conformity to the dictates of authority, Catholics were introduced to a new way of life…with a new found freedom came plurality…A wider number of options presented themselves to Catholics as they came to terms with the demands of living in specific cultures (Ryan, 1997, p. 46) .

Another key document to emerge from the Second Vatican Council and influence Religious Education was The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum.* *Dei Verbum* presented a new understanding of Revelation that understood Jesus Christ as the heart, and proclaimed him to be the one source of all Revelation:

> It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will, which was that people can draw near to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh (Flannery, 1996, p.97, DV, N.2)

Thus Christ was named and proclaimed before Scripture and Tradition, although Scripture and Tradition were identified as inexorably woven and "flowing from the same divine wellspring" (Flannery, 1996, p.102, DV, n.9). Also of importance here, Creation, as the *locus* of Revelation, was acknowledged in the way that "God who creates and

conserves all things by his Word provides constant evidence of himself in created realities"
(Flannery, 1996, p.98, DV, n.3). This understanding is particularly relevant to this research
study because it explores artwork as a medium for revelatory experience for students.

Subsequent documents from the Second Vatican Council, with particular meaning for
this research study, included The Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*
and The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra
Aetate*. The implications of these three documents are discussed below.

Initially, the transformative nature of the concepts inherent in these documents had
implications for the religious education programs in Catholic schools as educators
endeavoured to understand and implement the changed understandings in effective
classroom programs (cf. Kelly, 2004b, pp. 121-123). In this regard, the developed
understanding of revelation as God's self-communication through Jesus Christ, could be
expressed in terms of God entering into conversation with the human person — understood
in other words as God's invitation to friendship, wherein human beings were recognised as
a locus of revelation. Theologically speaking, this shift favoured an understanding of a
more personal relationship between God and the individual. An implication for Religious
Education was that the student in the religious education classroom was no longer
conceptualised as an empty vessel to be filled with the knowledge of God, but as one open
to the transformative nature of the Spirit in relationship with God. According to Gleeson
(2003) an understanding of this nature gave rise to a nuanced understanding of the
development of the human person from within:

> In former times, religion provided the ultimate truths that gave meaning to
> human existence. Now, by contrast, it is widely assumed that traditional sources
> of meaning are no longer reliable, and that spirituality is a value that need not be

aligned with "institutional' religion. These assumptions mark a significant shift in our culture (Gleeson, 2003, p. 2).

Implications drawn from the Vatican documents, The Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae* and The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate* were just as significant in changing the understandings, influences and practices of the pre-Vatican Church. The Church's recognition of religious liberty together with the admission that other religious traditions contributed wisdom challenged the previously closed world of many Catholics including religious education teachers. Kelly (2004) identified something of the nature of the altered patterns of thinking:

> In every response of faith, there is also a history of bias and sin. In practical terms, tradition must include an impetus to conversion and repentance, and the humility to admit that one's own age in the history of Catholic tradition may have been infected by the kind of cultural bias and social prejudice that the future does not need. In this sense, the great theological tradition, centred on Christ, reflecting on Scripture, praying the liturgy and living in the dimensions of authentic catholicity, relates critically to particular traditions associated with particular people and places and times (Kelly, 2004a, p. 129).

Religious education, as a process, had to find a way to accommodate these altered understandings as they affected attitudes and content in religious education classrooms. The normative 'enfaithing' models referred to by Lovat (2002, p. 1) that intended to 'convince, convert or strengthen' commitment to a particular faith tradition were challenged. The selective content and narrow focus of enfaithing models, such as Dogmatic Catechesis, had suited Christianity's, and more specifically Catholicism's self-held belief as God's chosen means of salvation. Kelly's (2004) comments not only pointed to the modern, multi-faith nature of society but to a perception of Catholicism's error in its assumed self-righteousness. The Second Vatican Council's acknowledgement of religious pluralism (Flannery, 1996, p.570, NA, #2) called into question some basic assumptions

held by many Catholics, for instance, that salvation was to be found in the Church alone. The contemporary inclusive approach to religions contrasted with the traditional Christian exclusive understanding that had been drawn, in part, from John's Gospel: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn.14:6). Furthermore, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG) allowed that,

> those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation (Flannery, 1996, p. 22, LG, #16)

The insight expressed in this declaration continues to hold relevance for the contemporary religious education classroom and the various belief stances of its student population. Also of relevance, and not to be underestimated here, was the discord experienced in Church and Catholic education circles alike because of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Religious Education in Catholic schools became the location of dispute between those who supported the direction of Vatican II and those who disputed it. For educationalists who sought a balanced understanding of the meaning of Religious Education, the issues revolved around an approach that was to be about knowledge and understanding of the Christian way, and an approach that offered nurture and enculturation into the Christian way of life. Still another group could be described as being threatened by a perceived watering down of the faith — those who argued that if redemption was no longer an exclusive feature of Catholicism, there was little to distinguish it from other faith traditions.

The Relevance of the Second Vatican Council to Students Today

Although the Second Vatican Council was convened in the 1960s, and the associated issues described here might be understood as belonging to a recent past, the opposite is in fact true. Many of the problems remain relevant to this research study and they are partly exacerbated by the impact of the globalised world which provides the wider context of today's students. Globalisation has profoundly restructured the ways in which people live. At the very least, it has encompassed science, technology and world economies. Because of its range of influence, globalization has affected not only events happening on a world scale but also the everyday lives of people by means of the stresses and strains it has exerted upon traditional cultures and mores across the planet. One small yet significant example is the threat it has posed for traditional family structures. Giddens (2000) indicated that other traditional structures, such as those connected with religion, also face parallel transformations. More importantly, he attributes the rise of fundamentalism to globalisation since it has emerged from a world of crumbling traditions:

> The battleground of the twenty-first century will pit fundamentalism against cosmopolitan tolerance. In a globalised world, where information and images are routinely transmitted across the globe, we are all regularly in contact with others who think differently, and live differently from ourselves. Cosmopolitans welcome and embrace cultural complexity. Fundamentalists find it disturbing and dangerous. Whether in the areas of religion, ethnic identity or nationalism, they take refuge in a renewed and purified tradition – and, quite often, violence (Giddens, 2000, p. 5).

Coinciding with Gidden's observations, a statement issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled *Dominus Iesus* (2000) was popularly reported to have inferred the superiority of the Catholic faith over and against other religions described as gravely deficient:

> Therefore, the theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions, is contrary to the Church's faith (*Dominus Iesus*, 2000, #6)

>The hypothesis of the inspired value of the sacred writings of other religions is also put forward. Certainly it must be recognized that there are some elements in these texts which may be *de facto* instruments by which countless people throughout the centuries have been and still are able today to nourish and maintain their life relationships with God. Thus…the Second Vatican Council, in considering the customs, precepts, and teachings of other religions, teaches that 'although differing in many ways from her own teaching, these nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men *[sic]'*.

>The Church's tradition, however, reserves the designation of *inspired texts* to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments since these are inspired by the Holy Spirit (*Dominus Iesus*, 2000, # 8)

Emerging 40 years after Vatican II, *Dominus Iesus* and reports made about it reflected one of Gidden's themes. While not identified as a fundamentalist document, for many *Dominus Iesus* captured a commonly held perception of a shift by the Catholic Church towards a conservative ideology. Indicators of this shift towards conservatism included the Church's continued refusal of scientific means of contraception in light of the massive spread of HIV Aids in Third World Countries, the continued rejection of the gay community and a sense of alienation generated amongst many young people and women of all ages (cf. Desmarchelier, 2004, p. 74; Macdonald, 1999, p. 394). Taken together these indicators suggested that to various degrees, the institution of the Church had not faced issues of the times, was not being deeply attentive to them, was not understanding their implications and was not being critically responsive. Such a position evidenced for many the current Magisterium's turning away from the spirit of teachings of Vatican II with its undesirable 'culture reversal' in terms of the Catholic Church's self-understanding (Arbuckle, 1993, p. 41 ff.).

The impact of this perceived narrowing in outlook would hardly go unnoticed by students in a twenty-first century religious education classroom and, for many, it will prove alienating. Influenced by family, peers, technologies and media, school, religious

experience and the church, global society, employment, and recreation, students are more sophisticated today. They are generally more financially independent and more exposed to the relentless bombardment of information than previous generations (*Awakenings*, 2005, pp. 63-66). By these means the ideas, images and possibilities posited by a globalised worldview impact on the local world of the student. If the Church fails to recognise and address the impact of the world — both global and local — on the values, beliefs and behaviours of students, any subsequent attempt to prescribe or direct their thinking through a 'tunnel vision' approach of the past could have them seeking meaning elsewhere.

With these comments in mind, it is worth noting that this research study intends to develop curriculum for Religious Education which will provide for, as well as contribute to, the development of fully integrated human persons (cf. TCS, 1979, n. 29) — students — in their intellectual, ethical and spiritual dimensions. In other words to equip them so they are able to: manage themselves and their relations with others; understand the world; and act effectively in that world (*Awakenings*, 2005, p. 44; VCAA, 2004b). The need for synchronicity in the development of these dimensions, and the 'flourishing' of persons, resists any naively dualistic 'either/or' approach to life, exemplified for instance, in the prioritising of a traditionally cognitive approach to learning — yet this describes a dilemma experienced by many religious education teachers. They are caught in a post Vatican II self-understanding of Catholicism that oscillates between a liberal and a conservative orientation. In order to address this issue, an endeavour of this research study is to provide curriculum that is faithful to the Tradition and affords due respect to young people. As well, in light of Christ's teachings, it critically explores what it means to be a fully developed human person in a pluralist, globalised society.

Vatican II and Religious Education on 'Home-ground'

In terms of local regions across Australia, a further indication of the changed self-understanding of the Church since Vatican II has been the emphasis placed on Church communities, under the direction of Bishops, to develop national and diocesan approaches to Religious Education:

> While there were broad universal principles relating to Religious Education the notion that these needed to be grounded in local realities and respond to local needs was expected (Ryan, 2001, p. 105).

A consequence of this approach was that the various documents developed in relation to Religious Education presented neither a consistent direction nor a unified viewpoint. In terms of this research study two relevant streams of documentation emerged and they will be briefly addressed here. These include the catechetical documentation of the Catholic Church and documentation related to Religious Education in a Catholic school. Ryan (1997) pointed to the differences between the two streams of documentation in terms of intention and foundation. The catechetical stream he refers to focused upon a particular form and ministry of the Church — pastoral ministry — one which was located primarily in the family and the parish and was founded on scripture, particularly the gospels. The other stream for Religious Education informed primarily by theology, Neo-Scholastic philosophy, educational theory and the social sciences, emphasised the intellectual and critical components of learning. Generally speaking, the documents for Religious Education leaned towards creating a bridge between religious formation and social, cultural and intellectual development.

Catechetically Based Documents

A brief discussion of the catechetical stream of documentation relevant to this research study and therefore Religious Education begins with catechetical renewal. Catechetical

renewal was enhanced in 1970 by *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* (REF, 1970) authored by the Australian Episcopal Conference. This foundational catechetical document provided the basis for the formation of catechists and catechetical programs from a life experience perspective. In the way that the REF addressed a need for documentation and also imaged the believer as one on a journey of faith (REF, 1970, #30) the REF was, generally speaking, both valued and supported. However, two sources of criticism of the document arose from those who opposed the new catechetical trends and those who recognized contextual limitations to the publication of the REF (1970) in terms of a restricted Australian 'flavour'. The latter criticism applied by Rummery states that

> [a] token appendix on the Australian scene as such, and the enormous difference between the minority Catholic populations of Australia, tended to impose principles from outside rather than research them from inside the experience of the local Church   (cf. REF, 1970, p. 167; Rummery, 1981, p. 14).

Implicit in Rummery's criticism is the belief that the REF was understood primarily as a Roman document with only an Australian rubber stamp of approval. His reference to imposed principles resonated with debates that considered issues ranging from Magisterial authority to subsidiarity within the Church. In relation to those debates and of importance is the 1971 publication of the *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD, 1971) by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. The GCD with its rationale, guidelines and directives associated with the Catechetical renewal aimed to provide direction and order for catechesis in terms of both theory and practice. It stated that the "essential mission of the Church is to proclaim and promote the faith in contemporary human society" (GCD, 1971, #1). In this way the document expressed its concern with a living Christian faith both active and conscious in nature requiring both the informed and intelligent engagement of the human person. Essentially understood in terms of adult reception, the GCD named catechesis as that form of Church activity "which leads both communities and individual members of the faithful to maturity of faith" (GCD, 1971, #21). From such a perspective

catechesis was not identified, at least primarily, with children and adolescents in the education sphere of the Church (schools), but was identified as essentially within the pastoral ministry of the Church. Together with the REF these understandings from the GCD theoretically underpinned curriculum development of the time and a trend away from the catechetical classroom.

The final document to be identified in this section is *Catechesi Tradendae*, an apostolic exhortation which defines catechesis as the

> education of children, young people and adults in faith, which includes especially the teaching of Catholic doctrine, imparted…in an organic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life *(Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979, #18).

The importance of the understanding expressed here is its attempt to balance the life experience and cultural context of the person with the content of the Catholic Tradition. Therefore the systematic approach of the document allowed that catechesis

> must be programmed to reach a precise goal, not merely improvised; it must deal with essentials and not claim to deal with all disputed questions; it must be sufficiently complete and extend beyond an initial proclamation of the Christian message; and it should aim to initiate the learner into the fullness of Christian life (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979, #21).

Catechesi Tradendae brought both rigor and cogency to catechetical programs and established both the family and the parish as proper points of location for catechetical educators. In doing so, it extended responsibility for catechesis to the broader Catholic community rather than situating it specifically within schools. While it acknowledged the importance of the role of the school in its contribution to religious formation, a significant point of understanding in the document was that student's readiness for catechesis had to be considered with particular regard to the individual's freedom of conscience (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979, #39). The movement away from the catechetical classroom described in

this section has opened the way for discussions around an educational approach to Religious Education. An outline of the key Church documents which underpinned this approach now follows.

Documents for Religious Education and Religious Education in a Catholic School

Other Church documents relevant to this discussion of Religious Education include: *The Catholic School* (TCS, 1979) and *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (LCSWF, 1990), first published in 1982 — both authored by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education — and the 1988 document titled *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (RDECS, 1988), authored by the Congregation for Catholic Education. Although primarily concerned with the educational sphere each of these documents were informed by, and incorporated understandings from, the catechetical documents of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic School (TCS, 1979) emphasised the role of the school as a 'privileged place in which, through a living encounter with a cultural inheritance, integral formation occurs' (TCS, #26). The intention to foster the intelligent synthesis of culture and faith, and faith and life (TCS, 1979, #37) was bound into this expressed understanding. The document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (LCSWF, 1990) acknowledged the educational intention of *The Catholic School* with a view to the pluralist nature of the teaching population itself. It recognized that the ethos of a Catholic school rested predominantly in the hands of teachers — believers or not — and called for the ongoing professional development of teachers as a means for incorporating them into the mission of the Church (LCSWF, 1990, pp. 7-8; 61). The acknowledgment of a changing school culture and

context touched upon in *The Catholic School*, was developed in the final document noted here: *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (RDECS, 1988).

As previously stated, there was an understanding in the past that, prior to Vatican II, Catholicism tended to operate out of a European hierarchical model of organisation. In Australia, one example of that model was mirrored in the religious education classroom wherein authority resided in the teacher who transmitted irrevocable religious truths for the purpose of transformation and continuity in the Tradition. Located in self-understanding, which could be described as that of a Catholic enclave in a hostile world, the intention was to provide a Catholic system of education to facilitate the passing on of the faith together with improved socio-economic mobility in order to spread the faith. However, a new context emerged by the 1970s and 1980s. Australian society, less easily perceived as either dominantly Christian or even religious, freed a new generation of Catholics for an approach to Religious Education from a positive perspective. Consequently, Religious Education was intentionally orientated to increase knowledge, understanding and practice of the faith tradition with a desire to promote personal faith development. This reorientation of Religious Education was described in the RDECS document:

> [the Catholic school's] specific pastoral service consists in mediating between faith and culture: being faithful to the newness of the Gospel while at the same time respecting the autonomy and the methods proper to human knowledge (RDECS, 1988, #31).

In terms of the interconnectedness of catechesis and Religious Education the role of the Catholic school, as described above, was further underlined when the RDECS document identified "a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction and catechesis, or the handing on of the gospel message" (RDECS, 1988, #69-70). However, these seeds had been sown earlier in the GCD, in 1971.

The understanding implicit in these statements was that although the Catholic school was still obliged to play a particular role in catechesis (RDECS, 1988, #69), it no longer underpinned the basic function of the religious education classroom. Further, RDECS (1988) advocated that most effective teaching and learning practice for classroom Religious Education should locate it beside other Key Learning Areas, without a presumption of faith for its students:

> A school has as its purpose the students' integral formation. Religious instruction, therefore should be integrated into the objectives and criteria which characterise a modern school'…[religious instruction] should have its own syllabus…seek appropriate interdisciplinary links…so that there is a coordination between human learning and religious awareness…it should promote culture…it should make use of best educational methods available to schools today…With kindness and understanding, they [teachers] will accept the students as they are, helping them to see that doubt and indifference are common phenomena, and that the reasons for this are readily understandable. But they will invite students in a friendly manner to seek and discover together the message of the Gospel, the source of joy and hope (RDECS, 1988, #70-71).

RDECS (1988) contributed to the desire for cohesion between the content of the Christian tradition and the contemporary relevance and meaning given to personal experience within the educational enterprise. Finally, the framework of understanding presented in RDECS allowed that the different approaches, in terms of content and method, to Religious Education were drawn from the categories of:

- ❖ Religious Education from a faith perspective (RDECS, 1988, #51-53);

- ❖ Religious Education from an educational perspective (RDECS, 1988, #49-50); and

- ❖ Religious Education from the perspective of education for personal development (RDECS, #55).

The issues discussed so far have been concerned with a trend in Catholic education since Vatican II towards an educational model of Religious Education. As previously explained, the emergence of different approaches to Religious Education indicated a 'broadening' in a gradual and often contentious shift away from an exclusively faith based model of Religious Education.

Of interest and relevance for the contemporary religious education classroom, the emergence of this educational model for Religious Education prefigured the Catholic Educational Style of this research study. In order to be meaningful, it recognised a classroom which had evolved from one of students all of whom were presumed Catholics to one where students of diverse faith stances now existed.

The following discussion briefly identifies approaches to Religious Education that provide a general understanding of the background and perceived religious education needs for Catholic secondary schools in the Victorian Diocese concerned, and have given rise to this research study.

Enfaithing and Interfaithing Models of Religious Education

Generally speaking, Lovat has provided two categories to describe approaches to Religious Education. The first category Enfaithing models, were oriented towards convincing, converting or strengthening commitment to a particular faith tradition (Lovat, 2002, p. 1). As a model of Religious Education it was, according to Lovat, highly selective in its choice of content and fairly narrow in its focus. On the other hand, the second category, which included Interfaith models deliberately excluded the evangelising dimension of the former: "This approach was one which should have as its unqualified

intention the furtherance of broad religious literacy and cross-cultural understanding"
(Lovat, 2002, p. 33).

Given the context of the discussion leading to this point, it would seem reasonable to appreciate the appropriateness of the Enfaithing model for a pre-Vatican II sensibility as well as to appreciate the Interfaith model as more suited to the current cultural context. In life however, there are arguably few situations, if any, which provide such a black and white outlook. Given the pluralist nature of the religious education classroom, the school and the community at large, both approaches, in varying degrees and for various applications continue to operate. The trend towards a generally accepted educational approach to Religious Education has been gradual and many teachers and school communities remain in conflict over a perceived loss in the faith dimension of Religious Education suggesting that an approach to Religious Education that is too academic will be to the detriment of the 'mysterious heart' of belief.

Several models for Religious Education under Lovat's (2002) umbrella heading of Enfaithing models have emerged including the Shared Christian Praxis model. The Shared Christian Praxis model is of particular importance, for it forms the basis of the approach adopted in the current development of religious education guidelines in the Victorian Diocese nominated for this research study. Shared Christian Praxis will be the focus of further discussion.

Shared Christian Praxis

The Shared Christian Praxis model as developed by Thomas Groome (1981), is based upon philosophical and theoretical principles. It has evolved from an understanding of the

critical theory of Habermas (1974), linked to the 'ways of knowing'. According to Habermas, three distinctive types of knowing urged by a cognitive focus can be identified for any area of study. The first type of knowing relates to technical control which leads to an empirical, analytic type of knowing. With this type of knowing, the learner is preoccupied with the rules and laws which govern a particular field of study. The second type of knowing is associated with the inherent aspects of the field of study which leads to an historical, interpretative (hermeneutic) type of knowing. In relation to this third type of knowing, the learner is preoccupied with understanding and making connections such as the meaning of a specific religion for believers. This type of knowing is particularly associated with emancipation where the learner seeks freedom to form her or his own opinion. According to Habermas' theory, without the emancipatory element learners are bound by those aspects of history dictated by the winners and the powerbrokers in a given society. Habermas' theory therefore argues that

> the only knowledge that can truly orient action is knowledge that frees itself from mere human interests and is based on Ideas — in other words, knowledge that has a theoretical attitude (Habermas, 1981, p. 301).

Lovat (2002) described the way of knowing which served Habermas' emancipatory interest as a critical or self-reflective one in the sense that

> the learner wants to ensure that…knowledge received is true, uncontaminated and of value…that the learning process is not contrived nor the learner being manipulated…for Habermas, most education leads to submission and acceptance, whereas critical education leads to liberation and change (Lovat, 2002, p.22).

The liberation and change resulting from the critical reflection inherent in Habermas' theory was best captured by the term 'praxis' (cf. Habermas, 1981, pp. 262-264) which is understood here as the unity of theory and practice with a view to change. Groome (1981, 1991) harnessed the impact of critical theory in the development of his own theory for Shared Christian Praxis. In *Christian Religious Education* (1981) Groome presented a

philosophical basis for a meta-approach which was aimed towards critical consciousness and intentionality in Religious Education. In *Sharing Faith* (1991) Groome again engaged with the participative pedagogy of Christian praxis which he defined as

> …a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their own historical agency in time and place and on their socio-cultural reality, have access together to Christian Story/Vision, and personally appropriate in community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in Christian faith towards God's reign for all creation (Groome, 1991, p. 135).

The five movements inherent in Groome's Shared Christian Praxis can be outlined in the following way[6]:

Focusing activity

1. Naming present action

2. The participants' stories and visions

3. The Christian story and vision

4. Dialogue between the inspirational story and participants' stories

5. A decision for future action

Groome's description of the movements of Shared Christian Praxis (1991, pp. 146-148) with their continuity and evolution, addressed the ongoing epistemological debate in the philosophy and practice of education, about what it meant to know, and whether the emphasis belonged to the transmission of historical knowledge, the experiential knowledge of the learner, or society's needs (Welbourne, 1997). This is a tension that continues in Religious Education practice today. The capacity of his approach to bring about a balance between past knowledge and present experience addressed that tension. Welbourne (1997) summarised Groome's approach in the following way:

> His [Groome's] claim was that a memory of the rituals, symbols and texts of the past tradition of a Christian people, must be critically remembered and constantly made present, recreated and developed in, and by, present experience

to cause it to look forward to, and be creative of, the future. By using a framework built on what he called a **present dialectical hermeneutics** Groome claimed a balance could be achieved between past knowledge of the tradition and present experience (Welbourne, 1997, p. 1).

Even with an intention to achieve a balance between past knowledge of the tradition and present experience however, a general critical appraisal of Shared Christian Praxis by Lovat (2002, 1995) identified a deficit. Lovat was concerned that a self-reflective, critical approach to education must include the capacity for the person to see through her or his own social conditioning and theoretical assumptions. Lovat cited a need for students to step outside the boundaries and so un-mask the effects of their social conditioning and theoretical assumptions. Groome's approach, in Lovat's opinion, failed to allow for such external critique:

> …[Groome] leaves little room for genuine critical appraisal of the Gospels or scripture which make up what he calls the inspirational story which stands, in his scheme, as the paradigm for critical thought and action (Lovat, 1995, p. 184).

Allied with this concern of Lovat's was the imposed limitation of accessing only the Catholic Tradition in the movements of Shared Christian Praxis. Lovat considered there to be sound sociological as well as theological reasons for the development of broad religious literacy in any religious education course. The need for a broader religious literacy would be particularly relevant in pluralist contemporary Australian classrooms. Compounding Lovat's criticism of Shared Christian Praxis and its restricted emphasis upon the Christian Tradition has been its link with the often cited criticism of the compulsory nature of the religious education classroom.

This last point is one most often criticised by senior secondary students (de Souza, 1999) and sometimes by their parents. Their objection is that the time given to Religious Education could be more productively utilized for additional study time in other Domains

(VCAA, 2006). A point of view expressed in support of the compulsory religious education classroom however, was presented by Barnes (2004) during the recent conference for the Australian Association for Religious Education (AARE, 2004). Barnes discussed the difference between schools whose educational intentions were confessional rather than indoctrinatory, claiming that it seemed reasonable for the Church-as sponsor of an educational institution — to proclaim its foundational belief in a confessional sense, via the educational institution concerned. By confessional, Barnes inferred a formal declaration of doctrine or religious principles formulated as a public testimony (cf. Barnes, 2001, pp. 580-81). The term confessional, used here, allowed that religious bodies, even those devoted to promoting educational approaches in Religious Education were *per se*, confessional (Sutcliffe, 1984).

According to Barnes, a valid expectation was that teachers choosing to work in such schools, parents choosing to enrol their children in such schools and the students themselves should be respectful of the religious tradition of the school concerned. Barnes argued that an indoctrinatory element exists in all forms of early education in the way that certainty preceded doubt. His inference was that, generally speaking, a certain confidence underpins an individual's opinions until those opinions are challenged. From this perspective, and within the context of the religious education classroom, children are provided with convictions and beliefs which are then subject to scrutiny and critique (Cram, 2001, p. 165).

If one follows Barnes' line of argument it is reasonable to assume that people who attended faith-based schools are no less rationally autonomous than those who attend other schools, or that belief can be compelled by social pressure. In fact Barnes suggested that

often only a pretence of belief is demonstrated in Church sponsored schools. On issues of authenticity and autonomy there seems no advantage to the indoctrinatory approach. It could also be argued that religious institutions have not been the only ones to be accused of indoctrination. The claim could be levelled at any number of organizations, especially those that punished members or employees for criticism, and indeed citizenship education could also be described as a form of indoctrination. Barnes' proposition can arguably be understood to lend support to the Christian orientation of Groome's praxis approach, an approach which aims to re-conceptualise Religious Education within a specific faith tradition as a means of emancipated learning.

Following this, the curriculum designed for this research study claims that continuity needs to exist on an explicit level between the cognitive, affective and spiritual domains of learning linked to the religious education classroom. The curriculum developed for this research study, with its potential for personal spiritual development, allows that there is no discrete domain for the development of spirituality. Sheldrake (1999, p. 57), for instance, describes spirituality within a Christian context, as "the whole of life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and within the community of believers." While such a description allows that all forms of learning — intellectual and ethical, inter and intra-personal — pertain to spiritual development, its very breadth automatically exposes the term to suspicion with respect to the content or subject matter of spirituality. To a degree, suspicion of this type can be linked to the long held separation between the categories of theology and spirituality, the former believed to provide an intellectual and the latter a devotional dimension within Christian religions.[7] The current educational and social contexts however have called for a change in attitude. In contemporary terms spirituality is being taken seriously within the

scholarly domain (cf. de Souza, 2003; Tacey, 2004) "Spirituality seems to want to cross all kinds of disciplinary boundaries…it also seems to lay claim to almost unlimited resources for example, historical, theological, philosophical, psychological and anthropological" (Sheldrake, 1999, p. 58). Consequently, a key intention of this research study is to provide educational opportunities for explicitly privileging the spiritual and affective alongside the cognitive domain of learning in order to address a perceived imbalance in curriculum design for Religious Education.

In summary, this brief overview of recent understandings in the developmental framework for Religious Education in Catholic schools acknowledges the two streams of documentation — catechetical and educational which have ultimately informed classroom Religious Education; one stream asserted catechetical principles and practices as foundational to Religious Education and the other has allowed for interconnectedness yet distinction between a school's catechetical activities and teaching and learning in the religious education classroom. In view of this it is unfortunate, as Ryan (1997, p. 166) correctly observed, that many teachers lack knowledge of the key documents and the teachings which support them (cf. Malone, 1992, p. 6). Consequently, in many instances, ignorance, confusion and debate over intention continues in the various approaches to teaching and learning in Religious Education.

The discussion thus far has been important to this research study because it illuminates an understanding of the intentions behind Religious Education within the context of the 1970s and 1980s. It needs to be recognised that the same understandings contribute to the present context where similar debates and issues for Religious Education reign; the nexus between catechetical education and education in religion remains unclear and will echo in

the section to follow which focuses on Religious Education in a Victorian Diocese. Of particular importance will be a discussion of the Inter-diocesan project which promoted the development of new guidelines for Religious Education in the Diocese involved in this research study. The current understandings and particular interpretation of context with regard to Religious Education, which emerged from the aforementioned Inter-diocesan project, have been used to underpin the curriculum design for this research study.

The Recent Framework for Religious Education in the Diocese of Ballarat

Having offered a brief overview of two streams of documentation relevant to this research study — the Catechetical, and Religious Education in a Catholic school — it is now my intention to locate those traditions within the educational context of Augustine's, the school involved in this research study, with a view to identifying an educational need for the innovative nature of the curriculum designed for this research study.

Augustine's is a Catholic secondary school in a Victorian Diocese which until recently conformed to the catechetically-based, 1995 revised Guidelines for Religious Education for the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The implementation of the guidelines at Augustine's has been coloured by the attitudes of teachers, members of the school's founding religious order and parents — with their spread of opinions covering the divide between catechetical education and education in religion. In recent comments on Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools Graham English (2001) accounted for the spread of opinions in the following way:

> There is a crisis of meaning in the Australian Catholic Church following the changes in the Church and Australian culture since the 1960s, and this crisis has an effect on Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools…The result is that the organisation and the institution have different ways of addressing the crisis of meaning and different positions on how the crisis might be addressed. They have different hermeneutics (English, 2001, p. 40)

Allowing for English's comment, one intention behind the Diocesan adoption of the guidelines in 1995 was the need to provide scope for School Based Curriculum Development suited, in the first instance, to the needs of students and which attended as well to the crisis of meaning highlighted by English (2001). At a basic level, the approach involved a four point schema for planning classroom lessons: Experience Shared; Reflection Deepened; Faith Expressed; and Insights Reinforced. This life experience approach emphasised the students' own experiences and their incorporation into the catechetical dimension. In contrast with past practice, less emphasis was placed on the content of the Christian tradition under this approach, with more emphasis being given to the students' life experiences and their religious and personal development. Generally speaking, both positive and negative observations were drawn from this life experience, catechetical approach. The positives included the desire to bring young people into the church, the need for communities to maintain tradition and pass on beliefs, a new environment based around warm, positive relationships between teachers and students, and the teacher was perceived as a group leader rather than as part of the Church hierarchy.

The negatives included the fact that the approach was too inward looking with too little regard for the contributions of other traditions. It was assumed that there was a willingness of the students to be involved, the critical distance required for students to manage material presented was lessened, it encouraged conformity, knowledge as a personal possession was mainly limited to intellectual consent, the 'caring and sharing' title attributed to teachers could be interpreted as derogatory, and students could quickly learn to construct the right answers for the right questions in a discussion-oriented classroom. Given all these

considerations, even those who had initially supported the approach eventually became aware of its limitations. As Ryan (1997) correctly observed, the guidelines

> …provided extensive discussions about the catechetical rationale for the approach offered – discussions which were usually ignored by teachers in favour of material directly concerned with their classroom teaching role. In addition and to varying extents…a scope and sequence chart of topics to be taught along with some suggestions for teaching strategies and suggested resource materials were intended as sufficient guides for teachers to plan their religion classes. For many teachers with sufficient training and background knowledge, such an approach… was welcomed and successfully implemented. For the great majority of teachers without adequate academic preparation, School Based Curriculum Development had the opposite effect from that intended: it tended to de-skill teachers (Ryan, 1997, p. 119).

Ryan's description was appropriate for Augustine's and highlighted issues which continued to influence Religious Education at the school. These included the academic competency of even the most well-meaning teacher, the inconsistencies of the religious education program offered from class to class, and the devaluing of Religious Education as a subject beside other subjects. From the experience of this researcher, the range of skills and capacities of religious education teachers at Augustine's, together with their ability to develop sound content, influenced the students' experiences of the religious education classroom. The experiences of the students ranged from engagement and challenge, to disillusionment, confusion and boredom. In support of this contention Crawford and Rossiter (1988, p. 5) identified a requirement for teachers to be contemporary and competent in methodology as did de Souza (2001, p. 83) more recently. Also emerging from de Souza's (2001, pp. 73-80) research, was the finding that 52% of students surveyed indicated that religion was important in their lives as a result of their school's religious education program, 48% did not agree with the statement. de Souza observed that generally speaking many young people lived 'in a sort of vacuum' regarding religious identity which pointed to a need for religious education programs to provide students with content related to both the cognitive and affective domains that would contribute to their

understanding and possible appropriation of a tradition. de Souza's findings were echoed by Ranson (2004) who wrote of a perceived need for a more effective pattern of communication of religion that included transmission of the Tradition as well as an attentiveness to what he referred to throughout as the 'often-silent' cry in people's hearts. Certainly, Augustine's, in accord with other schools in the diocese, reflected those expressed needs.

A Different Approach to Religious Education for a Victorian Diocese

The Inter-diocesan Project

Given the preceding discussion, in 2001 when the Archdiocese of Melbourne replaced their guidelines with a series of texts: *To Know, Worship and Love*, an opportunity was provided for Dioceses in Victoria to address the local context with regard to Religious Education. In the absence of the Melbourne Guidelines, the country Dioceses of Victoria together with the Arch-Diocese of Hobart decided to form an Inter-diocesan project in order to develop together shared core documentation and a religious education curriculum framework. Towards the end of 2004, each of the dioceses involved in the Inter-diocesan project assumed individual management for their own religious education documentation and in doing so each graphically designed and named the Inter-diocesan project in accord with the particularities of their own people and place. In 2005, the distinctive Core Document of the Diocese involved in this research study, titled *Awakenings* (2005), was mandated by the Bishop of the Diocese. It was stated that full implementation of *Awakenings* would be gradual from 2005–2008. The key documents which underpinned the development of *Awakenings* (2005) included: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, *Catechism of the Catholic church*, 1994), the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC, 1997), and *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*

(CSTTM, 2002) . Whereas the GDC concentrated on the articulation of a rationale for modern catechesis and described its nature and purpose: the 'why', 'how' and 'who' of modern catechetical theory, the CCC explained the 'what' of catechesis that is, the message or content of catechetical activity. A contemporary context for the Catholic school was provided by the CSTTM.

The Rationale for and Development of Awakenings

Informed by the documents mentioned in the preceding section as well as by their reception, the rationale for *Awakenings* (2005) expressed the understanding that learning and teaching in Religious Education must respond to changing contexts and circumstances. These included:

- ❖ directions in Australian society;

- ❖ changes in Catholic community;

- ❖ changes in Catholic schools;

- ❖ directions in Church teaching on Catholic schools, and

- ❖ directions in the Australian educational context (*Awakenings*, 2005, pp. 19-21).

The particular curriculum features of *Awakenings* (2005) included content referenced by Sacred Scripture, the Catholic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium (GDC, 1997, n. 120) ― especially as expressed in the CCC. The reference points for methodology were to be found in the Church's documents on evangelisation in Catholic Education, catechesis and Religious Education, together with the commitment to a critical and creative adaptation of Shared Christian Praxis which incorporated current research on most effective teaching and learning.

Pedagogy for Awakenings and Shared Christian Praxis

With the adoption of shared Christian praxis as a teaching approach for the Inter-diocesan project, a comparison between Groome's movements of Shared Christian Praxis and the movements for *Awakenings* (2005) is outlined in Figure 1 below:

Shared Christian Praxis

Groome's approach (1991):

    Focusing activity

1. Naming/Expressing 'Present Praxis'
2. Critical Reflection on Present Action
3. Making Accessible Christian Story and Vision
4. Dialectical Hermeneutic to Appropriate Christian Story/Vision to Participants' Stories and Visions
5. Decision/Response for Lived Christian Faith

Shared Christian Praxis

Awakenings (2005):

    Focusing activity

1. Naming
2. Reflecting critically
3. Accessing the Tradition
4. Integrating and understanding
5. Responding

Figure 1: A comparison between Groome's movements of Shared Christian Praxis and the movements for Awakenings 2005.

For *Awakenings* (2005), the Focusing Activity introduced, orientated and engaged students with the study of the unit thus recognizing the contemporary inclusive nature of Catholic school enrolments. The Naming Movement engaged learners with the concepts of the topic from the experiences of their own life or from being stimulated by the experiences of others. The Reflecting Critically Movement intended that learners used their imaginations, memories and reasoning abilities to understand these experiences more deeply. Accessing the Christian Tradition Movement meant the religious educator used learning strategies which assisted students to access the Christian interpretation of the topic. Essentially and for the purposes of *Awakenings* (2005), this movement made no

assumptions about students and their knowledge of, or belief in the Tradition. The Integrating and Understanding Movement intended that learners related their own thinking and experience to the wider horizon of the Catholic vision, and the Responding Movement intended that learners were invited to make a cognitive, affective and behavioural response to the new understandings they had accessed.

Groome's (1991) five movement program preceded by the focusing activity was described in the following ways. The focusing activity aimed at effectively engaging participants with a generative theme suited to the teaching and learning event (Groome, 1991, p. 146). The first movement — Naming/Expressing 'Present Praxis' — called on participants to reflect on present events, in order to draw comparisons and contrasts between what was really happening and what should be happening according to the Catholic Tradition. The second movement — Critical Reflection on Present Action — was concerned with *why* questions and involved a shared reflection on all the underlying factors which entailed the deep-seated attitudes, interests and beliefs of the participants themselves. The focus was on the participants' own social conditioning and visions of the future incorporating reason, memory and the imagination. The third movement — Making Accessible Christian Story and Vision — provided enlightenment as the inspirational story was retold and remembered. Its Story symbolized the faith life of the Christian community and its Vision reflected the promises and demands arising from the Story (Groome, 1991, p. 147). Essentially and unlike the intentionality of the third movement for *Awakenings* (2005), Groome's movement here intended that participants respond to what they already knew. The fourth movement — Dialectical Hermeneutic to Appropriate Christian Story/Vision to Participants' Stories and Visions — intended that in the new light of remembering the inspirational story, present action was subject to critical scrutiny. The

dynamic of this movement had participants asking how the Christian Story/Vision affirmed, questioned and called them beyond present praxis and alternatively, how present praxis affirmed and critically appropriated the version of Story/Vision made accessible in the third movement of Groome's approach. The fifth movement - Decision/Response for Lived Christian Faith — was the point at which praxis — the drawing together of practice and theory — resulted in practical action and offered participants an explicit opportunity for deciding how to live in the world in accord with Christian faith. Unlike the fifth movement for *Awakenings* (2005) which resided in a hoped for response from students, Groome's objective was for a clearly defined response in future action which was informed by faith.

Generally speaking, the key differences between Groome's Shared Christian Praxis and its creative adaptation in *Awakenings* (2005) resided in context and intention. Groome's concept of Religious Education was to engage the participants in forming their individual destinies. This was achieved by means of critical self-reflection which affirmed what was true in present existence, recognized the inherent limitations of present existence and prompted the participants to engage with both personal and social responsibilities of Christian faith. Participants achieved this by concentrating on what could be changed in self and church for the sake of the future (Groome, 1991, p. 25). Recently, Groome further qualified this intention with the following statements:

> But, once and for all, let us reject Religious Education that pretends to teach objectively about religion, that is, Religious Education that does not engage and affect people's lives. Likewise, let us beware of catechesis that unreflectively socializes people into church membership without education in the spiritual wisdom of Christian Faith. Both Religious Education and catechesis are necessary for educating the Christian person and community (Groome, 2003, p. 1).

Groome (2003, p. 24) continued and identified a school which might engage his process as any church-sponsored school that educated in Christian faith. He referred to people as active learners, encouraging them to think for themselves, to understand their faith, to make it their own and to choose to live it (Groome, 2003, p. 7). Similarly, the concept of family as witness meant that the whole life of the home should be suffused with the values and perspectives of Christian faith (Groome, 2003, p. 21). The catechizing intention underpinning these statements, together with Groome's sweeping assumptions about students and their families, presumed faith, and that the religious education classroom could be understood as a 'community of faith' — as if baptism alone conferred a life-style and commitment to that life-style by virtue of the event of baptism (Groome, 2002). These considerations alone marked the points of differentiation separating Groome's context for Shared Christian Praxis from that of *Awakenings* (2005). In fact, Section 3 of *Awakenings'* (2005) core document identified the complexity of individuals comprising the contemporary religious education classroom including their pluralist and multi-faith backgrounds. In reality and in relation to this research study, the context of Augustine's was closer to Crawford and Rossiter's description that

> students can be expected to bring to the study of religion the same level of disinterest in religion that is common in contemporary society, usually the same level of disinterest show by their parents (Crawford & Rossiter, 2003, p. 10) .

In consideration of Crawford and Rossiter's statement, and the complexity of the contemporary religious education classroom, it can be said that while *Awakenings'* (2005) emphasis remained with a critical focus on the Catholic Tradition the unit coursework for *Awakenings* (2005) was not restricted to Catholicism to the exclusion of the comparative investigation of other traditions comprising the religions of modern societies. As such, outcomes derived from coursework were not limited to an exclusive exploration of the Catholic Tradition. In addition, in terms of classroom practice there was no intention to

name people's personal desires in faith, as part of the methodology, but to name an experience that operated for many and which could be referred to as the 'phenomenon of faith'. Consequently, the outcomes developed for *Awakenings* (2005) were knowledge based; they were not designed as trustful, loving outcomes located within the affective domain of learning.

The cognitive framework also addressed any catechetical implications which could be claimed for *Awakenings* (2005). The choice of Shared Christian Praxis for *Awakenings* (2005) acknowledged it as rich theory with the focus on the whole learner — one who thought, felt, evaluated, related and acted- who was making her or his own meaning in the context of a specific community of life and (for some) of faith. This bridging of relationship and knowledge offered all the possibilities of Religious Education without presumptions of faith — an orientation which differed from Groome's. As well, because of the relationship between Shared Christian Praxis and the Critical Theory of Habermas (1981), the methodology for *Awakenings* (2005) related to the methodologies of other key learning areas, this was because of the relevance and application of Critical Theory for all key learning areas. According to Habermas' theory (1981, pp. 175-6, 308-9), knowing was by human praxis, but the active moment in that praxis included the ways of knowing: instrumental, interpretative, and critical — see, judge, act — and these ways of knowing could be appropriated by any academic discipline. Consequently, the movements of Shared Christian Praxis located in   Habermas' theory provided a systematic process for knowing with an intended beginning and end point as well as a capacity for incorporation into the various Domains of learning. The quest for critical, self-reflective education provided by Groome's approach situated it as an integral part of the curriculum as a whole.

A Perception of Religious Education in Catholic Secondary Colleges

Without elaborating upon every feature of *Awakenings* (2005), one of its purposes was to attend to a perceived lack of academic standing of Religious Education and to re-establish it on the same footing as other Domains. In consideration of this purpose, *Awakenings* (2005) was informed by the Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper: A Framework of Essential Learning (VCAA, 2004b) with access to research and consultation regarding curriculum reform and best practice in teaching and learning (available online: www.vcaa.vic.edu.au). As noted, the cognitive framework of *Awakenings* emphasised content and outcomes-based education. It was designed in the light of the intended observable results of the students' learning. More recently the promotion of Generic Skills, Values and Attributes Education for Australian schools (Values Education Study, 2003; cf. Victorian Curriculum Reform 2004 Consultation Paper (VCR 2004) has been taken into account in the development of *Awakenings* (2005). It seemed that a common sense approach by *Awakenings'* (2005) stakeholders which incorporated critical appraisal of the VCR 2004 document could only benefit students. In light of this understanding, *Awakenings'* (2005) core documentation has identified both the content-specific nature of Religious Education and the religious dimension of the curriculum of the Catholic school.

> Every curriculum area or subject that is taught within a Catholic school has a religious dimension, a capacity to assist students to examine the world of human culture and the world of religious meaning, providing knowledge, skills, and fostering attitudes and values that are life-giving and that assist young people to search for meaning and truth (*Awakenings*, 2005, p. 57).

The latter, communicated to a school's community at least by means of the integrated curriculum, has, in *Awakenings'* (2005) design, drawn upon some of the language of the VCR document. In this way, *Awakenings* (2005) has provided a means for both informing and engaging with all those involved with the religious dimension of education in a Catholic school. As well as benefiting the students and their development, such an

approach has demonstrated respect for educators by virtue of an explicit invitation to share in the conversation of Religious Education. VELS: The Victorian Essential Learning Standards Document (VCAA, 2004a) has provided a summary of how this integrated curriculum design might look. Structurally, VELS is organized around three Strands: personal, physical and social learning; discipline-based learning; and inter-disciplinary learning. These strands in turn can be related to behaviour, knowledge and skills.

In its core documentation *Awakenings* (2005) identified the pre-existence in Catholic education, at least implicitly, of all three Strands, located in an intention of Catholic education to inform, form and transform the human person. Such an intention, at the very least, attends to the behaviour, knowledge and skills development of students, together with an essential provision for the spiritual dimension of learning. A significant contribution of VELS however has been to make the educational interactions of the strands explicit and to provide an inter-disciplinary language as a means for their communication, facilitation and development.

In light of the previous discussion, a framework for excellence in Religious Education has been provided via *Awakenings* (2005). It has recognised and made provision for the need to develop the capacities of teachers of Religious Education, and it has signalled the intention and provided a method for identifying and acknowledging the religious dimension of the curriculum in Catholic schools. It has also provided a scope and sequence from Preparatory Year to Year 12 that offers strong, challenging content with a requirement for critical engagement with such content through most effective teaching and learning. In addition, the adoption of Shared Christian Praxis as a practical classroom

approach to Religious Education has provided teachers with processes and strategies consistent for schools across the diocese without being overly prescriptive.

Given the preceding discussion, a critique of *Awakenings* (2005) in relation to Augustine's and from the perspective of this research study, follows. In light of current theory, it was the intention of the critique to identify a need for curriculum that explicitly recognised and privileged the spiritual and affective domains of learning alongside the cognitive which might enhance the possibility of religious experience.

Accordingly, the following concerns will be identified and discussed. The first, in light of *Awakenings* (2005), is the potential for Religious Education to be used as a marketing tool. The provision for individual learning in education and the broadening of such a provision to include learning theory has resulted in educational research specifically oriented towards understanding the way individuals learn and 'learning for meaning' (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2004, cf. Gaffney, 2003). Paradoxically perhaps, this trend has stood beside another stance more concerned with standards in education which can be achieved through "a controlling, rational and technical framework" (Stoll et al., 2004, p. xi). A criticism of the latter was located in its perceived overemphasis on measurable results evidenced through 'league tables' and performance management (Dwyer, 2001, p.117; Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 14-16, 108). Gilkey (2001), for instance, described knowledge as a "skill" with education as a "provider". A criticism implicit in such an understanding was that a "voracious" technical culture would "consume all non-technical aspects of culture by turning everything into a skill…a *means"* (Gilkey, 2001, p. 188). Similarly, Hill (2003) declared:

> Over the past decade there has been an enormous push to make schools more accountable for the core curriculum and to ensure that all students achieve high

standards of literacy and numeracy. We now treat performance in these core outcomes like GNP, having been persuaded that our competitiveness in the global economy is highly dependent upon the level of basic skills of the workforce. We measure them regularly at the state, national and international levels and use these measures in judging the performance of schools and systems (p. 3).

Impact of the type indicated by Gilkey (2001) and reinforced by Hill (2003) was understood to have been demonstrated in a general weakening of the humanities in education in the 1990s and a strengthening of instrumental or utilitarian subjects (Crotty & O'Grady, 1999, p. 5, cf. Colley, 2002).

Alternatively, research into the way people learn and learning for meaning (as opposed to learning for pragmatic content), has sought a way to sustain and deepen learning. An aim was to provide teachers and students with a framework for understanding how learning occurred in order for it to be better directed and managed. Subsequently, recognition of "the human-resource perspective" (Stoll et al., 2004, p. xi) was made, which, from an educational stance, created some tension between an outcomes driven curriculum understood to privilege content for the sake of pragmatism and a curriculum that was outcomes oriented but not at the cost of learning for meaning within the broader humanistic, liberal tradition. In the case of the former, education has always been understood as the servant of the future economic prosperity of the nation but most recently the Australian government has promoted such understanding in unequivocal terms (cf. Kosky, 2002, p.1). It is with the latter intention that *Awakenings* (2005) was fundamentally concerned (cf. Ryan 2002, pp. 1-3).

Even in taking up *Awakenings* (2005), a negative possibility for schools such as Augustine's, located in a market driven economy, would be to adhere to a 'league table'

mentality for Religious Education. From this viewpoint it could be understood to have an economic function oriented towards winning over clientele. Religious Education is after all conditioned by its national setting, in the case of Australia ─ secular and pluralist. The marketing of Religious Education in this context could appeal to those families who sought academic content minus a religious dimension, as well as those who sought the perceived values and pastoral care inherent to Religious Education.

Given this situation for greater and possibly over-emphasized demands for measurability in Religious Education, Sanguinetti (2004) in a recently published paper, described the development of generic skills as part of a move towards developing 'human capital' to meet the needs of the 'new knowledge economy'. Sanguinetti argued that the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) engaged the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to present a review framework to provide the basis for training development. The ACER framework was built around basic foundation skills, intellectual abilities and personal attributes with an obvious implication and realization for schools (cf. VCR 2004). At least one concern cited by Sanguinetti was that "the shift from 'skills for *employment'* to 'skills for *employability'* reflects neo-liberal ideology of individualism and the weakest go to the wall" (Sanguinetti, 2004, p. 2 of 12).

An alternative program outlined in the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development's (OECD) Definition and Selection of Competencies project (OECD, 2003), as yet only acknowledged by ACER, allowed for generic skills that would meet economic, productivity-related and social justice aims that included "critical thinking: ability to think through a problem or situation, distinguishing between facts and prejudices" and "a sense of service to the community, civic mindedness" (cited in Sanguinetti, 2004, p. 3).

Of particular relevance for this research study was that the generic skills framework proposed by the ACER together with those developed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI, 2003) ignored the critical thinking, citizenship, human development and equity aims of the OECD models. *Awakenings* (2005) would benefit from accessing the social justice imperative embedded within the DeSeCo Report (OECD, 2003) in the formal programming of any values based education. In this regard Sanguinetti's (2004) questions concerning the genesis and purpose of values education remain pertinent. Such questions impinge upon concerns for the dignity of the human person, development of the whole person and teaching for social justice ─ critical components of *Awakenings* (2005).

A second concern around *Awakenings* (2005) was with an apparent lack in unit outline design which explicitly privileged the affective domain of learning alongside the cognitive domain. While teachers can only gain insights into affective behaviours, and behaviour is only one indicator of such learning, student behaviour remains at least an observable means for inferring affective growth. Even though learning does not occur in isolated domains ─ cognitive, spiritual or affective ─ and affective behaviour has a cognitive behaviour counterpart and vice versa,[8] making affective aspects regularly planned and identified components of teaching and learning would address a perceived imbalance. Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (Krathwohl et al., 1964) identified the affective domain as the types of human reaction or response to the content, subject matter, problems, or areas of human experience; in turn, affective behaviour was understood as that displayed by students which indicated their response, attitude, value, belief or feeling towards the content or subject matter of Religious Education. If the promotion and development of a

value or virtue system is perceived as necessary for the religious dimension of teaching and learning in a Catholic school, then provision needs to be made for identifying and tracking observable development in those values and/or virtues, from Prep to Year 12. Such a provision identified as a 'scope and sequence' has been developed in *Awakenings* (2005) — but thus far with a cognitive learning focus.

The intention behind a classroom lesson will inform its design or plan and so affective domain teaching and learning may emphasise pedagogical components which differ markedly from those of the cognitive domain and which do not result in measurable outcomes. A focus of this research study has been to promote an understanding of a balanced curriculum design for Religious Education which respects the development of the whole person. As such it must do more than merely engage affective learning as a tokenistic adjunct for the 'real learning' of the classroom — in terms of the traditional academic content of coursework. Balance and interconnection are key words in such curriculum development and an attendant caution indicated by Hyde's research (2000) included

> that students, especially in Religious Education, will give only attitudinal responses which match what they believe the teacher will want to hear. One participant colourfully termed this 'RE Speak' (Hyde, 2000, p. 42).

The curriculum for this research study, in accord with Hyde's (2000) subsequent discussion and the need for teachers to probe for deeper and more appropriate responses from their students, was concerned with their revealing more about their values and attitudes. Consequently, a question in light of students' deeper responses was — what was it that was being acknowledged — students' affective learning or critical thinking? Hyde's findings were that in probing through the use of higher cognitive questions the teacher determines

whether or not a student is simply giving a surface response, or whether the student has a real feeling for, for example, the painting or piece of music, and whether the student is able to articulate those feelings through the response. Further discussion lead to the realization that students would use the same sorts of skills they might use in the cognitive domain, but, in responding to the teacher's probing, they are using these skills now in the affective domain (affecto-cognition)—'The processes that we use in thinking are the processes that we use in thinking!' (Hyde, 2000, pp. 42-43, cf. Crawford, 2003, p.2).

Hyde's (2000) reference to the 'affecto-cognition' domain was informative for this research study in terms of the interconnectedness of each of these dimensions for learning and also in terms of acknowledging the place of emphasis in classroom planning previously mentioned. The curriculum for this research study, however, went further than the premise of Hyde's research. It was also concerned with a potential for drawing students into a community of witness, if and when values and attitudes were identified and implemented, promoting in turn the interplay of a moral social imperative embedded in Religious Education.

The Relationship between Masculinity and Spirituality for Life at Augustine's

Tacey (2004, 2003, 1997) has written extensively about both masculinity and spirituality which has relevance for Augustine's and its culture. In relation to masculinity an understanding which emerged from *Remaking Men* (Tacey, 1997) was that the son must free himself from the mother as part of the natural course of life, but that the old ways of achieving this break were no longer desirable:

> If we believe that boys must still be 'initiated' into manhood, we must not be tempted to revert to these archaic practices and must work toward a post modern, not a pre-modern, understanding of ritual masculine process…I believe that a revival of an appropriate religious or spiritual attitude could produce the necessary 'authority' to facilitate transformational change from childhood to adulthood (Tacey, 1997, p. 101).

By means of religious education curriculum which called for a different order, that is the privileging of affective alongside cognitive learning, Tacey's call for transformational

change could be innovatively addressed. In relation to this research study, Tacey's reference to the revival of a spiritual attitude in concert with the initiation of boys into manhood meant inviting the boys to consider the reality of their internal selves by incorporating non-action and reflection into religious education classroom practice — because boys are very good with action and 'doing'. Augustine's has for example an active and enduring Chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and doing the work of that Society is more natural and manageable for them than, for example, reflecting on the deeper value of such work. The challenge has been to provide a means for them to reach an understanding of their experience of the various dimensions of life, that is, of created reality together with the spiritual and the emotional dimensions of life. Consequently, attention could be given to the archetypal masculine with its inward need for discrimination, judgment and self-criticism (Tacey, 1997, p. 90), over the stereotyped masculine with its outward expression of aggressive and troubled behaviours alluded to in the following statement by Keating (1999):

> Young males, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, are suffering through the current schooling processes across Australia. There is ample evidence that demonstrates how boys' achievement rates are lowering…Figures from across Australia were presented at a recent conference on Boys and Schooling. These include: 10% fewer boys complete Year 12; 75% of suspensions are boys; 60% of school counsellor referrals are boys; nine times as many boys are in special classes for emotional and behavioural disturbance…There is concern across all sectors of schooling about boys and literacy development…Adult male involvement in formal religion is declining, the majority of primary religious education teachers are female, Religious Education is often taught as a highly literary subject… (Keating & Brennan, 1999, p. 44).

Taking into account both Tacey's (1997) and Keating's (1999) comments, interconnected influences on the attitude towards Religious Education at Augustine's were identifiable. A brief discussion of those influences, to follow, offered justification for the alternative curriculum approach of this research study.

Contributing Factors to the Perception and Reception of Religious Education at Augustine's

An influence on the reception of Religious Education at Augustine's related to the general issue of relevance and effectiveness provided by institutional religion (Schneiders, 2000, p. 1; cf. Tacey, 2003, pp. 155-6). Tacey (2003, pp. 12, 24-25) identified this issue when he acknowledged a human yearning and deep desire for God (cf. Fides et Ratio, 1998, n. 24), imprinted on the human psyche and left wanting in the face of traditional religious institutions (Tacey, 2003, pp. 16-21, 72; cf. Giddens, 2000, p. 34). In spite of this perceived lack in traditional religious institutions, the identified and generally accepted human need for a mystical dimension contributed to a 'post-modern spirituality phenomenon'. In the resultant cultural shift, religion and spirituality were no longer necessarily considered as coextensive and the issue of relevance for institutional religion was confirmed. Cram (2001) expressed the same idea in the following way:

> The declining social position in the West of formal religious denominational institutions does not diminish the innate human need and ability to experience self-transcendence; it simply places that experience more and more in the individual human mind rather than focusing upon the communal social context of religious life as the place where the creative self makes sense out of life (Cram, 2001, p. 166).

The world view described by Cram (2001) coincided with the understanding of many at Augustine's and helped explain a decline in student interest in formal religious understanding and practice. This was evidenced in a focus group comment for this research study:

> You often say to people 'oh, I didn't know you were religious' and they say 'oh I'm not' and they've got a crucifix around their neck and it's just become a shape that's manufactured. (Appendix C, p. 240).

The same focus group discussions also supported the spirituality phenomenon:

> …there wasn't much in it but I felt that with the gold colours, you could barely distinguish it but there was that little glow, like a spirit coming through it, almost

like something coming at you. It was almost haunting in a way like something coming out of a wall and observing you…You know when they say God's all around you and that sort of thing (Appendix C, p. 239).

The understandings and perceptions described above supported a need for teaching and learning in Religious Education at Augustine's which explicitly promoted spirituality and affective learning. In terms of the interrelatedness of spirituality, meaning and identity (Crawford, 2003; de Souza, 2003) a conscious development of this spiritual dimension in Religious Education could assist boy's schooling and their initiation into manhood. Research has pointed to the sense of such an approach:

> …a spiritual education, if it is to enhance the personal development of individuals and be of wider benefit in the community, has to do more than meet the needs of those who are active members of a local religious group. This applies particularly to young people, many of whom construct a spirituality without much reference to organised religion. While young people are not so likely to use the word spirituality with reference to their aspirations in life, they tend to have more affinity with the word 'spiritual' than with 'religion' (Crawford & Rossiter, 2003, p. 5; cf. Gleeson, 2003, p. 2).

As well, 1998 research consulting young people in Australia identified their three major concerns: unemployment; drug and alcohol abuse; and the search for meaning (Bishops' Committee for Justice, 1998). The research report described many young people as "lacking purpose and meaning in life. They often lack helpful role models feeling that the world in which they live bears little resemblance to that from which their parents emerged" (Bishops' Committee for Justice, 1998, p. 15). In light of a sense of global turmoil and fear, and the resonance of this in both national and local scenes, a need for young people to locate meaning in their lives and develop an authentic sense of self is vital. If young people are not provided with opportunities for authentic meaning-making, then undoubtedly, undesirable alternatives would be found:

> Many youths today are saturated with quasi-religious compulsions and worshipful obsessions and some actually believe in media celebrities, cinema personalities and rock stars. There are, as it were, the degraded and cultic

substitutes for genuine spiritual relationships with sacred or mythological figures. If our culture has no pantheon of living Gods, it will quickly develop clusters of human idols and commercial gurus…dangerous…because the human need for worship and surrender before cosmic forces is instinctive, and youths will throw themselves before commercialized interests that can only exploit them (cf. CSTTM, 2002, #1; Michaels, 2004; Tacey, 1997, p. 112).

In an environment flooded with alternative ways to make meaning and to find their 'true selves', providing young people with authentic means for critical reflection of their experiences in relation to meaning, identity and spirituality is essential. Realistically, however, some adolescents can and do live without any apparent interest in questions of ultimate meaning. For many reasons they are unconcerned with reflecting upon the imponderables of life. They seem self-centred and lacking a social consciousness and by default theirs appears a narcissistic, individualistic existence. One explanation has been the materialist and consumerist world's seductive bombardment of the message that happiness can be bought. The lived reality however is frequently different. Too often young people in particular have found their dream world and their wish list divorced from their real life experiences. All the hair products, cosmetics and designer jeans in the world will not make them *cool*. The Internet cannot manufacture love with the shift of a mouse and lack of, or incapacity for, desired employment opportunities can be personally disastrous:

> What is particularly problematic is the new prominence of nihilistic thinking — a tendency to believe there is no meaning to life. This can coexist with a very pragmatic, existential and materialistic outlook. Having nothing much to believe in or hope for can contribute to the increasing levels of boredom, depression, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide in Western countries — especially among the young (Crawford & Rossiter, 2003, p. 6).

Discerning the Spirit

The preceding discussion pointed to an urgent need for the Catholic school's religious education program to seek alternative ways to address the lack of positive self-image, self-understanding and meaning that characterizes the lives of so many young people. The

Catholic school cannot create spirituality for adolescents but it can offer a context and provide opportunities for the development of meaning and identity interwoven with a spiritual dimension in Religious Education. Catholic belief holds that a need for meaning and purpose is a defining characteristic of the human person (GE, #8, Gleeson, 2003, p. 2). Without being dogmatic, it is also a contention of this research study that spirituality which roams free of a tradition struggles to find either meaningful expression or healthy sustainability (Tacey, 2003, p. 147). If, as the literature has suggested, the concept of spirituality holds meaning for young people, then religion must dialogue with young people from that vantage point and within a contemporary anthropology as Tacey (2003) has observed:

> Our youth are the inheritors of a 'modernist' condition that has experienced the death of God, the collapse of Christendom, and the loss of certainty and truth…the present generation sees through any denials or pretence, and understands the deep spiritual plight in which we live. For them spiritual meaning is not just a game we play with life, but a serious business that can cost us our life if we get it wrong or go off the rails. The problem of youth suicide is intimately connected with the spiritual side of youth experience, and when meaning or truth cannot be found, lives can be broken or lost by the terrible discovery that the spiritual vacuum in society has not been filled by a personal encounter with meaning (Tacey, 2003, p. 178).

In order to better understand the perceived dissonance between spirituality and religion alluded to by Tacey (2003), Kelly (2001) has suggested an inherent difficulty in the communication pattern of religion itself. Kelly identified the function of meaning to be less concerned with cognitive reality and more with subjectivity; that is, how meaning "informs or indwells in consciousness, to form a certain identity and self understanding" spirituality is "very attentive to the constitutive, consciousness-affecting types of meaning, but rather vague, at least in a methodological sense, about the cognitive" (2001, p. 315). Touched upon by Kelly (2001) was the challenge for a religious tradition to articulate its core beliefs with deep sensitivity to the contemporary issues and lived experiences of people. In accord

with Kelly (2001) the curriculum for this research study offered the participants an opportunity to work from their experiences of artworks into a tradition (Catholic) which offered them a way of being in the world meaningfully. The mystical dimension of Catholicism operates in the religious education program of a Catholic school when that program invites students into a conversation unbound by that perceived as the pragmatic, measurable and economic designs of the regular curriculum.

Tacey has spoken of education and its root meaning 'to draw out' (Tacey, 2004) His point was that education began with the experience of the student and not the imposed wisdom of the teacher (cf. Crawford & Rossiter, 2003, p. 2). A 'bankrupt' system of education (Tacey, 2004) had students who only needed to jump through predictable hoops to provide right answers and who were never touched by their learning (TCS, 1979, #27). *The Catholic School* (1979) had also declared that

> It must never be forgotten that the purpose of instruction at school…is…the development of man (sic) from within, freeing him from that conditioning which would prevent him from becoming a fully integrated human being…to draw out…the individual's inner spiritual dynamism which complements the psychological (TCS, 1979, #29).

In relation to this last quote it could be said that, intentionally at least, Catholic schools had long been places which recognized the inseparability of the person's spiritual and intellectual dimensions. In accord with this understanding expressed in *The Catholic School* (1979, #27; Kelly 2001) also cautioned that although the 'inner spiritual dynamism' was often intuited rather than thought, intuition alone was insufficient. With this understanding, the curriculum designed for this research study was deliberately planned as a component of the broader religious education curriculum with its content, rigor and language. If to locate, identify and draw meaning from their intuitive experiences the students required a process for unravelling those experiences — any expectation for the

students to 'jump' from their own experiences to an immediate and objective truth derived from those experiences — would be unrealistic. The imagination, feeling, questioning, understanding, reflecting, judging and deciding capacities of the students had to be accessed (cf, Hegel, 1974, p. 208). Consequently and by means of a series of religious education classes that began and ended with their own experiences of artworks the students who participated in this research study were invited to name, explore and reflect critically upon those experiences. As a result it was hoped that discussions around meaning and identity located within but not confined to the Tradition would provide an opportunity for the development of personal spirituality in both its interior and communal dimensions. Incorporated with this process was the potential for the students involved to have a *call to attend* experience of God understood in terms of von Balthasar's Theological aesthetics. Whether or not such a possibility was realised, a deeper exploration of their initial experiences of the artworks afforded the students an opportunity to develop a cognitive appreciation of spirituality together with its social and moral imperatives — in the way that *Fides et Ratio* (1998) referred to a seeking of truth in terms of the direction and meaning of life. For the purpose of this research study, the context of the Catholic school, together with the constitutive and communicative components of personal meaning described by Lonergan[9] (1972), invited the students to reach out beyond a sense of 'me and my needs', that is, subjective relativism, to a sense of the 'needs of the other', that is, Spirit as communion (Kelly, 2004b). The hope therefore would be to engage the students with a community institutionally shaped — at its broadest parameters — by the Church because although imperfect, "the institutional component is necessary if Christian witness is to have a presence, a voice and witness in the groaning, conflictual reality of world history" (Kelly, 2004b, p. 21).

In summation, this chapter has focused on the historical context leading up to the mandating by the Bishop of *Awakenings* (2005), the Religious Education Guidelines for the Victorian Diocese at the centre of this research study. Following are the main points drawn from this chapter and their implications for the remainder of the research study.

The recent historical context from which the curriculum design for this research study emerged ─ religious as well as educational ─ remains influential. The curriculum designed for this research study has to operate in a classroom situation which has teachers of varying professional capacities and personal dispositions towards Religious Education. Consequently, the curriculum design for this research study has a strong student directed focus with the teacher as facilitator rather than instructor. Also identified however is a need for the professional development of religious education teachers and their capacity to manage the discursive and exploratory nature of the curriculum design. Although such professional development is outside the parameters of this research study, it is an explicit need identified in *Awakenings* (2005) which provides an over-arching framework for this research study.

A review of *Awakenings* (2005) identified its outcomes-based, cognitive framework for teaching and learning. In complementary fashion, this research study designed curriculum which provided an opportunity for the students to have an aesthetically mediated experience of God which emphasised affective learning. Accordingly, the curriculum design addressed a perceived 'vacuum in students' lives' and the 'oft-silent cry in peoples' hearts.'

Inferred from the previous point was a requirement for college leadership to explicitly acknowledge and support the value of affective learning in the religious dimension of teaching and learning through the formal development of curriculum documentation and its implementation. Perhaps the strongest inference from this review was that connections between the students' understanding of spirituality for life and the role of the institutional Church need to be developed and strengthened.

In light of this discussion of the approaches to Religious Education that provide the context for this research study Chapter Four will address methodology: the approach and data gathering processes for this research study.

Chapter 4
THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study proposed that if an aesthetic and religious experience of God mediated through art, engaged post-compulsory students and was acknowledged within religious education curriculum, it would contribute to their development as human persons. It would also have the potential to draw them into the formal and more traditional elements of classroom Religious Education in a Catholic college. This chapter identifies and describes the data collection procedures intended to address those intentions of the research study.

The Epistemological Paradigm: Constructivism

The research described in this thesis is built on a constructivist view of knowledge which allows that reality is socially constructed, meaning that human beings do not find or discover knowledge already 'out there'. Human beings construct or form knowledge from a particular context (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Constructivist research is characterised by "methodological eclecticism, an hypothesis-free orientation and implicit acceptance of the natural scheme of things" (Burns, 1991, p. 12). The constructivist epistemological assumption is that data, interpretation of findings and outcomes are located in contexts and persons independent of the researcher and are traceable to their sources (Mertens, 2003, p. 15). Therefore the Constructivist paradigm was suited to this research study because of its basic precept of the social construction of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and its incorporation of hermeneutics, broadly defined as a way to interpret the meaning of something from a certain standpoint or situation — which also acknowledged bias. Thus,

and in relation to this research study, the social construction of reality concerned the participants' construction of religious and spiritual meaning derived from their contextualised experience of artworks. The affective learning dimension which was explored in this research study focused upon the attentiveness and willingness of students to respond to art in a particular context.

Implications of constructivism for the theoretical perspective of the research

Drawing on constructivism, the research drew from qualitative research methods considered exploratory and inductive in nature (Mertens, 2003, p. 8). The qualitative methods of this research design were chosen in preference to quantitative methods which are most closely associated with the positivist paradigm, considered confirmatory and deductive in nature. Quantitative methods emphasise experimentation, measurement, facts and causes of behaviour (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). With quantitative methods, mathematical processes are normative for the analysis of numeric data and a final result is generally expressed in statistical terminologies (Charles, 1995). Methodology of this type was unsuited to the religious and spiritual focus of this research study as religious and spiritual experience falls outside the boundaries of manufacture and measurement. Generally speaking, the positivist paradigm and quantitative research methods lead to and flow from a world-view of observable, measurable facts (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 9) and attempt to fragment and delimit phenomena into measurable or common categories with application to the total subjects or wider and similar situations (Winter, 2000). In contrast, the Constructivist approach with qualitative methods is more naturalistic and context-based with no manipulation of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Indeed, the Constructivist approach seeks illumination and understanding from the research findings (Hoepfl, 1997).

The Methodology: Case Study

Qualitative methods, distinctive in the Constructivist paradigm in this research study, allowed emphasis to be placed on observation and discussion for this research design. Case study provided the research methodology and focus group the data gathering instrument. The interactive approach of the research design allowed meaning to be built via the various perspectives presented, exchanged, critiqued and discussed by participants. Ultimately the findings drawn from the data contributed to a classification and description which was considered representative of experience and learning of the participants (Eichelberger, 1989, p. 9). In resisting the universal claim of scientific method and a positivist approach, the research design of this research study focused upon religious and spiritual meaning, the non-measurable nature of which left its claim for legitimacy outside the realm of scientific method.

Case study has application both for qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, yet little consensus is available about what definitively constitutes a case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 360). Therefore, case study as a research strategy for this research study was developed along the lines of the following rationale.

A case study, as an enquiry in a real-life context, as opposed to the contrived contexts of experiment or survey, allows the reader an open-eyed, open-minded appreciation of the unexpected outcomes of the investigation. Even though difficult to organise, this type of enquiry promotes an identification with reality and was ideally suited to the epistemological perspective of this research design (Merriam, 1998, p. 31). Paradoxically however, this research design's requirement for the close proximity of the researcher as participant-observer, aligned it with a criticism (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985, p. 37) that

too great an emphasis was placed upon ethical issues — including, for instance, the influence of the researcher - at the cost of equally important issues of theory and method. Frequently cited academic criticisms of case study include its lack of rigor and limited basis for scientific generalisation "the unit of analysis (case) can, in practice, mean just about anything" (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985, p. 29). As a consequence, limited generalization is considered the result of the intensity of the case study method (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985; Biddle & Anderson, 1986, p. 238).

In support of single case studies, such as that developed for this research study, Hamel (1993) and Yin (1993; 1994) have argued that the relative size of a sample — whether four or 400 cases — does not transform a multiple case into a macroscopic study. The goal of the study establishes the parameters applied to all research. In this way, provided the established objective is met, even a single case is acceptable. Additionally, the peculiar strength of case study via the attention paid to the characteristics of an individual case — a child, a group or class — also recognises the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right (Cohen & Manion, 1989, pp. 124-125). Of particular interest for this research study and its innovation for religious education curriculum, Parlett and Hamilton (1977) identified 'illuminative evaluation' via case study as a means of studying the 'innovatory programme'. Illuminative evaluation aims for discovery and documentation of the experience of participation in a program "whether as researcher or pupil; and, in addition, to discern and discuss the innovation's most significant features, recurring concomitants and critical processes" (Parlett & Hamilton, 1977, p. 10).

Of further significance, case study recognises the intricacy and 'embeddedness' of social truths and offers a 'step to action' in response to those social truths. In other words, the

insights afforded by case study are directly interpreted and implemented (Adelman, Kemmis, & Jenkins, 1980, pp. 59-60; Bassey, 1999, p. 43). Thus, case study method facilitates active learning strategies. Documentation demonstrates that students learn more effectively when actively engaged with the learning process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, Sivan, 2001) and educational research identifies the value of case study as a pedagogical tool. Grant (1997) outlined the benefits of using case study as an interactive learning strategy which shifts the emphasis from teacher-centred to more student-centred activity. Linked with increased student motivation and interest in a subject (Mustoe & Croft, 1999), case study provides an opportunity for the development of key skills such as communication, group work and problem solving, increasing the students' enjoyment of a topic and therefore, their desire to learn. As well, case study allows the application and demonstration of theoretical concepts and bridges a gap between practice and theory (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Davis and Wilcox (2005), for instance, identified case study as student centred activity based on topics that demonstrate theoretical concepts in an applied setting.

As a methodology which facilitates the registering of multi-perspectives, case study not only facilitates the researcher's consideration of the voice and perspective of the case study participants, but also the larger, relevant group and the interaction between them, "This one aspect is a salient point in the characteristic that case studies possess. They give a voice to the powerless and voiceless" (Tellis, 1997, p. 5, cf. Fry, Ketteridge et al., 1999, p. 408) .

In order to accommodate those researchers whose preferred quantitative data provided a scientific research approach, Miles & Huberman (1984) suggested that analytic types such as data displays, tabulating the frequency of different events and so on could be applied to

case study. This was in order to make them conducive to statistical analysis, thereby making the process easier and more acceptable to some of the critics of case study. However, not all case studies lend themselves to this type of analysis. This is particularly the case for this research study where qualitative data, for reasons already stated, were considered more appropriate. Given the application of case study for both quantitative and qualitative research methods then reservations expressed by some researchers for case study might reside with qualitative method rather than case study per se. For the strengths identified above, and despite identified weaknesses, case study as a research strategy was deemed most appropriate for this research study.

Focus group as the method for gathering data within the case study

Focus groups provided the data gathering strategy for this research study (Mertens, 2003, p. 245) and opportunity sampling (Burns, 1991, p. 64) provided the focus group. Opportunity sampling has been criticised for falling outside proper sampling methods with the result that research outcomes cannot be generalised. Given the epistemological orientation of the constructivist design and the particular context of this research study, however, generalisation of outcomes was not intended. The hope was that innovative teaching and learning strategies developed in this research study for Religious Education, particularly at the post-compulsory stage, might identify and provide direction for future research.

Focus group discussions for this research study were unstructured (Mertens, 2003, p. 386), even though starter questions were developed, a question and answer format was not sought. The discussions relied upon group interaction (Krueger & Casey, 2000) in the promotion of demonstrated exchanges of ideas and perspectives from those involved. The

participants were able to observe the struggle for understanding within the group and to find appropriate means for both agreeing and disagreeing with statements made. Small group size and a participant-observer relationship with the researcher were considered conducive to this process and the students' sense of security. As well, via this process, procedures for the resolution of differences and the building of consensus were able to be tracked. A further benefit included that in its promotion of the participants' points of view and heuristic learning, the impact and influence of the researcher was minimised.

Criteria for validity of case study research and limitations

Criteria for evaluating the quality of constructivist, qualitative research that paralleled the criteria for evaluating positivist, quantitative research equated credibility with internal validity, transferability with external validity, dependability with reliability and confirmability with objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Informed by this list the section following describes the criteria appropriate to an evaluation of the research design particular to this research study.

Credibility (paralleled internal validity)

As a descriptive, exploratory case study was used for this research study, internal validity strictly understood did not apply. Absent from this research study was the explicit manipulation of experimental variables instead, any causal relationships were established by inferences drawn from focus group discussions. For this research study, credibility was sought via prolonged and substantial engagement both with the setting and participants. Data-gathering occurred across several weeks of a school term and was supported by the researcher's role as participant-observer both prior to and after the actual data-gathering period. By this means informal observations and conversations also provided data

(Mertens, 2003, p. 386). Peer debriefing occurred courtesy of a critical colleague who attended focus group discussions and the sessions themselves regularly required participants to verify aspects of conversations. This happened informally as well in casual conversations between the researcher and participants. Even though some researchers have speculated over the usefulness of triangulation as a means for developing research credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) opinions vary (Burgess, 1986; Burns, 1991; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; MacDonald & Walker, 1976). This researcher as participant-observer referred to field notes, observation, taped transcripts and discussions with critical colleagues in support of research credibility.

Transferability (paralleled external validity or generalisability)

Transferability was not applicable to this research study because of the sampling method employed and because of the high degree of relatedness between the research site and the receiving context (Mertens, 2003, p. 256). In other words, the high degree of contextualisation of this research study rendered its outcomes specific to Augustine's.

Dependability and Confirmability (parallels reliability and objectivity)

Dependability for constructivist research related to the concept of stability over time. Because a basic precept of the constructivist paradigm was lodged in context-specific research and the social construction of reality, it was vulnerable to the criticism that contexts change — with ramifications for research. Case study protocol which detailed each step in the research procedure helped address this criticism. Similarly, a confirmability audit enacted in conjunction with a dependability audit sought to minimise the researcher's judgement. The tracking of qualitative data to its sources reinforced its authenticity and contributed to a "chain of evidence" (Yin, 1994) and so, an explicit

application of logic in the process of the interpretation of data insured the data supported the conclusions of the research study.

Authenticity

Authenticity addressed the issue of the fair presentation of participants' views by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Criteria for this judgement offered by Lincoln & Guba (2000) included fairness and ontological authenticity. Fairness related to the researcher's identification of the participants and processes for accessing their constructions of reality. Ontological authenticity related to the degree to which the individual's or group's conscious experience of the world was made more informed or sophisticated (Mertens, 2003). This also relied upon an audit trail that documented changes in the individual's or group's constructions throughout the process of the research study.

This brings to a conclusion the description of the main components of the research design the section to follow presents the context within which the research design was immersed.

Who were the participants?

The context of the participants

In Catholic secondary colleges across the Dioceses of Victoria religious education programs are primarily college-based. At the post-compulsory level many colleges also offer 'Studies in Religion' from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). The Studies in Religion neither require nor assume that students have faith in the religious sense; they are knowledge-based, academic studies which allow "that religions can be understood in a general way, as meaning systems…" (VCAA, 1999, p. 7).

Generally speaking, post-compulsory religious education programs in Victorian Catholic secondary colleges incorporate college-based units of study with Studies in Religion.

Even though the content and method of delivering college-based religious education programs differs in Victorian Catholic secondary colleges, a point of connection for some has been the application of guidelines or syllabi of learning. Augustine's, belonging to a Victorian Diocese, was, until recently, served by the Religious Education Guidelines of the Archdiocese of Melbourne 1995 (all future references to the *Guidelines* will mean these Melbourne Guidelines). As this research study is primarily concerned with an experience of personal meaning which falls within the realms of the *Guidelines*, and as they informed Religious Education until May 2005, the *Guidelines* feature initially in the discussion to follow.

In the approach to Religious Education provided in the *Guidelines*, the establishment of a value system (the Catholic Tradition) intended a relationship that was lived out within the life of the school. Such a relationship meant that school policy, in terms of Religious Education, could and did reflect what occurred in the classroom and vice-versa and at the same time provided a sense of surety for students and families choosing to enter a Catholic college. Consequently, that population could be provided with a clear expectation of the commitment to the Catholic Tradition (if not belief in it) required by the college and cohesiveness was promoted. This allowed various religious practices to be incorporated into college life such as liturgy, formal and informal prayer, ministry and retreat experiences. The *Guidelines*, while providing a grid for developing units of curriculum with a schema that included an overview of goals, key learnings and core objectives, also acknowledged an evangelising dimension to teaching. Further, they understood Religious

Education primarily as a catechetical activity (Catholic Education Office, 1995, pp. 13-17) that supported parents in the faith development of their children.

Such a catechetical assumption cannot be made with reference to the students or families of the present day (cf. *Awakenings*, 2005) . Not all members of the Catholic college community are either Catholic in profession and/or practice, and it could not be assumed that all students would choose to engage in a religious education program. Figures for the religious denomination of students (Catholic Education Commission of Victoria: CECV) indicated the following denominational breakdowns for Augustine's in 1995, 2001 and 2004:

Year	Catholic	Other Christian	Muslim	No religion
1995	723	59 (7.4%)	0	17 (2%)
2001	664	180 (20%)	1	46 (5%)
2004	737	241 (25%)	0	0

Figure 2: The denominational distribution of Augustine's for years 1995, 2001, 2004 (CECV).

These figures do not indicate whether the students involved actually practised faith according to their nominated tradition but they do reflect changes in the religious affiliation of the student population of the college. With this consideration in mind, specific elements of curriculum set out in the *Guidelines* have not addressed the religious reality of students in many schools, and there has been a great deal of rhetoric about the religious attitudes and understandings of these students. In the unit of study *The Courage to Be*: Unit 3:3.3 (Catholic Education Office, 1995) for example, the students were required to 'examine the changing roles of the laity, religious and clergy in such areas as

parish leadership, education, liturgical celebrations and pastoral care.' It is quite possible that content of this type is inappropriate for many students as it may be beyond either their experience and/or understanding. Consequently, although providing scope for creative interpretation and development of school-based curriculum for years 7-12, the catechetical bias in the *Guidelines* made assumptions about the existing and lived faith of students in Catholic colleges (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.2).

Identifying the Characteristics of Senior Students in a Catholic Secondary College

This research study was located at Augustine's, a Catholic boy's secondary college, and the population that constitutes a Catholic secondary college, as indicated, is diverse. It cannot be understood as a community of faith because such an observation obscures the relationship between Religious Education and catechesis, and between the faith tradition of the Church and personal faith. A fundamental, shared faith cannot be assumed and therefore a teaching approach located exclusively or even predominantly in catechesis is inappropriate and no longer works with the reality of the religious education classroom (Engebretson, 1999). Not only might the students be unwilling participants, they may feel as 'foreigners in a foreign land.' If they lack a complementary experience of religion outside the school then the language and activity of the religious education classroom will most likely hold little meaning for them, consequently, relevance, in terms of personal meaning would become an issue (Rossiter, 1985). Such a situation places at issue the freedom and integrity of the students when it comes to engagement with a religious education program which seeks the developments of the students' personal search for and sense of meaning.

Senior secondary students today are engaged in a developmental period that for many means a rebellion against any totalising understanding of reality or imposed truth (Guarino, 1996). The world can be understood as fragmented and lacking overarching reference points, such as the authority of specific religious traditions (Wilson, 2004, p. 34). Pope John Paul II identified a crisis of truth as one of the defining characteristics of the 'post-modern' age (*Fides et Ratio*, 1998, s. 5). In such an age many are continually confronted with contradictory messages related to every aspect of their living. As well, the language used in the religious education classroom can contribute to students' confusion and/or disillusionment within this multiplicity of meaning making. If language can be described as "a lens through which reality can be altered" (Whelan, 1999, p. 291) then it is reasonable to understand language as defining us, recognizing that such definitions belong to the whims of time and circumstance.

Questions relating to whom we should believe, or what we should believe constantly arise in the religious education classroom: "Their underlying questions may be not the meaning of a text in Matthew but why a New Testament is needed; not whether the bishop's teaching is correct but whether 'God' is a meaningful term" (Harris & Moran, 1998, p. 38). If the religious education program is to communicate meaningfully, it must do more than attempt to pass on a list of 'immutable truths'.

Part of the Catholic tradition as noted by Conroy (1999, p. 59) is a recognition of the variety and provisionality of all human endeavours and there is a requirement for teachers to equip students to answer questions for themselves, not just accumulate memory; and to grow in the awareness of the possibility of the alternatives. Education is always a function of time, place and circumstance, and is not limited to time or place (Conroy, 1999, p. 156;

Slattery, 1995, p. 252). In creating an environment to facilitate these considerations, the teacher and indeed, the school community has the opportunity of providing a 'space' (physical, emotional and religious) that may offer students the possibility of being raised into full consciousness, through diversity in the approach to Religious Education. Rossiter (1985) has acknowledged that although Religious Education in Catholic schools generally might be criticised for an apparent loss of the values of the tradition, it may, in fact, be that there has been a change in the understanding of the meaning of faith itself, its nature and communication. More recently he has suggested that "faith development is more of a *hope* than an aim for Religious Education" G271 (Rossiter, 1998, p. 22) and that a multitude of approaches, affective as well as cognitive have potential in leading to the development of personal faith.

Within this context of identifying characteristics of senior students of Religious Education, and with an intention to address many of the issues acknowledged thus far, three Victorian dioceses and the Archdiocese of Hobart recently engaged in the development of an Inter-diocesan Guidelines Project for Religious Education. The relevant document which emerged from this collaboration is named *Awakenings* (2005). In 2005, *Awakenings* was mandated by the Bishop of the Victorian Diocese concerned with this research study as the newly developed core document and curriculum framework for Religious Education. Through its engagement with teachers and stakeholders, *Awakenings* (2005) is asking educators to rethink Religious Education. It is concerned with an explicit movement, beyond content, to most effective practice in teaching and learning. With that purpose in mind, it is providing educators with core documentation and a 'meta-approach' (Shared Christian Praxis) to Religious Education. One of its stated aims is to recognize and address the 'world of the student' in order to provide meaningful Religious Education.

Consequently, in the professional development of teachers working with *Awakenings* (2005), the following intention is identified:

> It must never be forgotten that the purpose of instruction is education, that is, the development of the person from within, freeing them from that conditioning which would prevent them from becoming a fully integrated human being. The school must begin from the principle that its educational program is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person (The Catholic School [TCS], 1979, n. 29).

Such an intention resonates with Pope John Paul II's statement that:

> The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school (The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium [CSTTM], 2002, n. 9).

Conducting the Research

The focus group

In accord with *Awakenings* (2005) and the Catholic education style it promotes, this research study examines religious education curriculum designed to attend to the teaching and learning needs of the students identified. Augustine's, as the location of this research study, provided an opportunity sample for the data gathering. From a class of 19 Year 12 students who agreed to participate in the curriculum design, volunteers to participate as a focus group were called for and four students put their names forward. Those four students formed a case study and focus group for data gathering. The remainder of the class, grouped in accord with subject preferences and the organisational structures of Augustine's, undertook the curriculum-based sessions as components of their religious education program. The data gathering procedures for this research study followed the protocols of Ethics Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee was gained before the research study was commenced and letters to the Headmaster of Augustine's, parents/guardians and

participants were sent. Copies of the letter and signed consent forms are included in Appendix A.

Even though four students represented a small sample as a case study, the focus group size was important given the context particular to Augustine's. Chapter Three of this research study identified some negative characteristics attributable to an all boys' college in the tradition of Augustine's. In this light a secure setting and small group size afforded participants the best opportunity to feel at ease and safe when describing their experiences of artworks and expressing their points of view. As well, given that the students were Year 12s close to the end of their secondary schooling, focus group sessions had to take place in the students' own time. For reasons including study, sport, work and travel, to name but a few, this organisational requirement proved unmanageable for many.

The focus group participants, identified for the purposes of this research study with pseudonyms, Ian aged 17 years, Red aged 17, Mac aged 17 and Ryan aged 17, attended Augustine's for the whole of their secondary education. Their families were local to the region surrounding Augustine's. The period of data gathering, six weeks of Term 3, was compatible with the timetabling structure of the college. The curriculum-based sessions averaged 50 minutes in length with the exception of Sessions 3 and 5 when one hundred minutes was allocated for excursions to a cathedral and a Fine Art Gallery respectively. Before commencing the curriculum-based sessions, the class as a whole was introduced to ways of viewing artworks. This provided the students with 'keys' for an appreciation of general features of artworks including composition, design, light, colour and texture.

The final stage of this research study considered the implications of the results for further development and extension of the existing religious education curriculum at Augustine's with limited possibilities for other Catholic secondary colleges.

Description of the participants

A brief description of the members of the focus group follows. Details were provided by the participants as well as by means of general observation. The students participated in six curriculum-based sessions of viewing artworks followed by focus group discussion sessions of those experiences (Appendix C).

Mac:

❖ Age: 17

❖ Participation in religious education classes in terms of engaging with discussions, asking questions and note taking: good

❖ Participation in the religious life of the college outside prescribed classes: low key

❖ Family background: conventional Catholic.

❖ Traditionalist (self-described)

Red:

❖ Age: 17

❖ Participation in religious education classes in terms of engaging with discussions, asking questions and note taking: very good

❖ Participation in the religious life of the college outside prescribed classes: excellent.

❖ Family background: conventional Catholic

❖ Red considers himself a conventional Catholic but desires a broader outlook.

Ian:

❖ Age: 17

❖ Participation in religious education classes in terms of engaging with discussions, asking questions and note taking: good

❖ Participation in the religious life of the college outside prescribed classes: very good

❖ Family background: practising Catholic

❖ Would describe himself as a practising Catholic and open-minded, that is, considerate of the beliefs of others.

Ryan:

❖ Age: 17

❖ Participation in religious education classes in terms of engaging with discussions, asking questions and note taking: average at best

❖ Participation in the religious life of the college outside prescribed classes: none

❖ Family background: Catholic

❖ Ryan described himself as open-minded, that is, considerate of the beliefs of others.

Gathering the data

The data collection consisted of six sessions with an organisational structure graphically described below, and in the pages to follow:

Table 1: Organisational Structure of Focus Group Sessions

Session 1 Date: Tuesday 27 August 2002 **Location of data-gathering: Classroom**	
Discussion starters: 1. As you look at the artworks try to describe what you feel/think. 2. Some people respond to artworks in different ways: with shock, surprise, by frowning, smiling etc. could you describe/explain your responses? 3. Describe how a particular artwork affected you. In what way did the artwork affect you? Try to explain that effect in anyway that you can. 4. Name the artwork that appealed to you most. Describe as best you can your initial response to it.	Artworks: 1. Käthe Kollwitz: *Pieta.* 2. Käthe Kollwitz: *From many wounds you bleed O people* 3. Maurice Denis: *The Catholic mystery* 4. Detail: *The Catholic mystery* 5. James Ensor: *Christ calming the storm* 6. Georges de la Tour: *Jesus and Joseph* 7. Caravaggio: *Conversion of St. Paul* 8. David Alfaro Siqueros: *The Hanging One* 9. Arnulf Rainer: *Wine crucifix* 10. John Martin: *The great day of his wrath* 11. Rembrandt: *Adoration of the shepherds* 12. Caravaggio: *Death of the virgin* 13. Detail: *Death of the virgin*
Session 2 Date: Wednesday 28 August 2002 **Location of data-gathering: Classroom**	
Discussion starters: 1. Can you identify and describe apparent themes(s) shared by the artworks you saw? 2. Can you describe how you felt about that shared theme or aspect? Did it have any meaning for you and would you describe it? 3. If a theme was identified what was your previous experience of it? Where have you encountered it before and what do you understand about it? What has this experience contributed to your understanding of the theme? 4. Did that theme relate to a particular tradition? Could you explain how you think it related to the tradition you identified? 5. Do you feel 'connected' to a tradition? Explain please. 6. Does this experience of art help you relate to a tradition? Why? How? 7. Describe the artwork that appealed to you most. Describe your first response to it.	Artworks: 1. Craigie Aitchison: *Calvary* 2. Graham Sutherland: *The Crucifixion* 3. Stanley Spencer: *The resurrection of the soldiers* 4. John Everett Millais: *The carpenter's shop* 5. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *The Annunciation* 6. Michelangelo Caravaggio: *Deposition* 7. Matthias Grunewald: *Crucifixion* 8. Horst Sakulowski: *Christophorus (Chrisbearer)* 9. Arthur Boyd: *Crucifixion, Shoalhaven* 10. Herbert Falken: *Pregnant man with two others* 11. Colin McCahon: *Victory over death 2* 12. Daniel Goldatein: *Icarian II* 13. Piero della Francesca: *Resurrection*

Table 1 continued: Organisational Structure of Focus Group Sessions

Session 3 Date: Tuesday 3 September 2002 **Location of data-gathering:** **Fine Art Gallery**	
Discussion starters: 1. In what way(s) is this experience different from previous experiences of Religious Education? 2. Would you like to see this experience incorporated/fitted into the Religious Education program? 3. Has this experience enhanced your understanding in any way? Please describe how it has helped you. 4. How were you affected by the experience of the artworks? Do you feel encouraged to pursue that experience? Would you please explain this? 5. Can you suggest ways in which this experience could be linked with Religious Education? 6. For this session's viewing of artworks, describe the one(s) that appealed to you most. Describe your first response to it (them).	Artworks: Students to choose
Session 4 Date: Friday 6 September 2002 **Location of data-gathering: Classroom**	
Discussion starters: 1. Did you locate/find any expression of truth, reality and/or value with the artworks you saw? Please explain your response. 2. Has the experience initiated a response that is new to you? Would you describe that new response and what it means? 3. Since your first session viewing the artworks, have you noticed a change in the way you respond to the artworks? 4. What does your response indicate about yourself? 5. Has this experience helped your learning? Please explain your response. 6. Describe the artwork that appealed to you most. Describe your first response to it.	Artworks: 1. Horst Sakulowski: *Christophorus (Christbearer)* 2. Giotto di Bondone: *Death of St. Francis* 3. Giotto di Bondone: *Lamentation* 4. Caravaggio: *Deposition* 5. Caravaggio: *Death of the Virgin* 6. Caravaggio: Detail: *Death of the Virgin* 7. Caravaggio: *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* 8. Caravaggio: *Conversion of St. Paul* 9. Rembrandt van Rijn: *Return of the Prodigal* 10. Jacek Waltos: *On both sides of the gate* 11. Ben Willikens: *Last Supper* 12. Harald Duwe: *Last Supper* 13. Emil Nolde: *Prophet* 14. Colin McCahon: *Victory over death 2*

Table 1 continued: Organisational Structure of Focus Group Sessions

Session 5 Date: Tuesday 10 September 2002 **Location of data-gathering:** **Cathedral**	
Discussion starters: 1. In viewing the artworks over recent weeks and in different locations, did you find that an experience in one particular location particularly impacting? Which location? Would you describe the experience and how it was different for you? 2. Describe the artwork that appealed to you most. 3. Describe your first response to it. 4. Do you recognize a difference in your response to this artwork compared to the response you described in session 1? Would you explain that change? 5. Has it become easier for you to respond to the artworks? Why do you think this is so? 6. Have you come to appreciate the artworks at a deeper level? Would you explain what that means please? 7. In viewing these artworks have you had an experience of "something beyond yourself"? If so, would you describe that experience? Would you explain what that means for you? 8. Have these sessions and experiences given rise to informal discussions, conversations with others in the class? Would you describe something of the subject of those discussions?	Artworks: In accord with the environs of the Cathedral's interior.
Session 6 Date: Wednesday 11 September 2002 **Location of data-gathering: Internet**	
Discussion starters: 1. General conversation/discussion of the experiences. 2. Do you have any questions/observations relating to the experience of the past weeks?	Artworks: Session 6 artworks from which the students were free to choose were provided via the following websites: http://www.christusrex.org/www2/art/ http://www.atabet.com/gallery2.html http://www.bc.edu/bc-org/avp/cas/fnart/links/contemp-relig.html

Lonergan's Method as a Means of Analysing the Data

While the Constructivist paradigm and qualitative research methods provided an overarching framework for this research study, Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method provided a specific lens for identifying art as a carrier of meaning for religious and spiritual experience via the findings of this research study. The discussion of the scope of the transcendental method is beyond the parameters of this research study and therefore a brief introduction is provided and followed by details of its most relevant aspect for this research study, that of art as a carrier of religious and spiritual meaning.

From the outset, it is important to note that Lonergan (1972) characterised religious experience (in terms of meaning), as the gift of God's love first described as experience and only consequently objectified into theoretical categories:

> 'Knowledge precedes love' has been the standard…the major exception to the Latin tag is God's gift of his (sic) love flooding our hearts. Then we are in the dynamic state of being in love. But who it is we love, is neither given nor as yet understood…so it is that in religious matters love precedes knowledge (Lonergan, 1972, p. 122).

This research study held that such an experience of the holy, or mystery[10], not measurable in scientific terms, was enough to awaken enquiry and wonder within the personal and social realm. The personal realm related to the inner or spiritual life, and the social realm related to the ways the inner life compelled the person to behave ― with a sense of belonging in the world, particularly in relation to the tradition and culture of the Catholic college. In view of this research study, Lonergan's description of the process of coming to full knowledge provided a means for interpreting focus group responses in relation to their experiences of art as a carrier of religious and spiritual meaning.

In the religious education classroom, religious experience mediated via art was a process that enabled the self-directed learning of students in relation to personal experience. Self-

directed learning in this context also called upon the students' capacities for 'knowingly' identifying and understanding the intentions directing their attitudes and behaviours, that is, their 'conscious intending'. Transcendental method (Lonergan, 1972) and its concern with conscious intending was applicable to observations and responses of the focus group in order to identify an 'occurrence of progress' in terms of their personal integrity — or not. In accord with transcendental method, an occurrence in progress was identified via the students' exploration and construction of personal meaning from a religious experience mediated by artworks, and by virtue of their observing the transcendental precepts of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible (Lonergan, 1972, p. 53). By means of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible, a person formed the transcendental concept of the intelligible when s/he objectified the content of intelligent intending; formed the transcendental concept of the true and the real when s/he objectified the content of reasonable intending; and grasped the transcendental concept of value, of the truly good when s/he objectified the content of responsible intending.

In a way, everyone in her or his daily life appeared to engage transcendental method to the degree that she or he was attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible but in a stricter sense it was less accessible. This meant that in order to be fully experienced, transcendental method required a person's conscious operational intent (cf. Lonergan, 1972, p. 14), consequently, the ultimate concern of transcendental method was with awareness, not of what was intended, but of the intending (Lonergan, 1972, pp. 23-24). The transcendental mode of intending was understood as comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in signification and unvarying over cultural change. The transcendental mode of intending and its particular relevance for this research study resided in its capacity for and exploration of questions of meaning such as, Is there life after death? Does God exist?

Given Lonergan's (1972) four precepts for transcendental method: attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility, together with his acknowledgement that the gift of God's love was first described as experience and only consequently objectified into theoretical categories (Lonergan, 1972, p. 122), then a link can be established between Lonergan's theory and von Balthasar's theological aesthetics — at least at the initial level of human attentiveness (affective domain). With this understanding, Lonergan's method (1972) as an interpretative lens was applicable to student responses to artworks, either described as an immediate experience of God's self-communication, or observed as disclosing God's self-communication across the data-gathering time.

In light of this discussion of Lonergan's Transcendental Method, a discussion of art as a carrier of religious meaning in relation to religious and spiritual experience follows.

Art as a Carrier of Religious Meaning in Relation to Religious and Spiritual Experience

This research study investigated religious and spiritual experience in relation to the theological aesthetics wherein an experience of God's love, or 'God's presence to me', preceded knowledge and any immediate understanding of the experience (cf. Lonergan, 1972, p. 122). It was as if a person was 'swept off their feet' or caught in an overwhelming emotion of experience, only later understanding or seeking to understand the experience. Such an experience, albeit possible, would not be described as 'everyday' and so its event could reasonably be conceived as rare.

By means of a process alternative to the spontaneous event captured in the theological aesthetics, religious and spiritual experience could also be affected over time. The previous

discussion on transcendental method provided an insight into the thinking process and a person's capacity to be: attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible in which case an artwork's mediation of religious meaning might 'soak in' over time by means of self-directed, intended learning. In such an instance transcendental method provided another way for both interpreting the students' responses to the artworks and assisting them to direct and develop their own learning from those experiences.

The carriers of meaning for a religious experience (Lonergan, 1972) included: inter-subjectivity; inter-subjective meaning; art; symbols; linguistic meaning (language) and incarnate meaning (via the lives and deeds of people). In light of the specific interests of this research study, art as a carrier of religious meaning is the subject of focus.

From the perspective of Lonergan's method (1972, pp. 62-64), art was the objectification of a purely experiential pattern identifiable to the degree that it excluded those patterns that instrumentalised experience in the service of scientific knowing — 'alien patterns' — such as those that linked red and green with traffic lights with stop and go respectively (Lonergan, 1972, p. 63).

The authenticity of a purely experiential pattern in art, expressed via its elemental meaning, was both the work itself, and its transformation of the world into the illusory domain. Paradoxically, this relationship between art and the illusory domain enhanced the potential capacity for an artwork to convey even greater reality and truth for the viewer located in the 'real' world. In this sense, art conveyed meaning as it invited or drew the participant into its space with an awareness of "emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom" (Lonergan, 1972, p. 63). For the participant it meant the offer of a chance to engage with,

to experience, and to apprehend something of the artwork's elemental meaning in order to momentarily withdraw from practical living in exploration of the possibilities of "fuller living in a richer world" (Lonergan, 1972, p. 64). The elemental meaning of art, which engaged a person, included the sources, acts and terms of meaning (Lonergan, 1972, p. 74). For this research study the acts (functions) and terms of meaning were most significant, and in particular, their constitutive and communicative dimensions.

Generally speaking, acts (functions) and terms of meaning included the cognitive, efficient, constitutive and communicative dimensions. The cognitive function of meaning led from the infant's world of immediacy to the adult's world mediated by meaning. In the development, over time, of this cognitive function, the efficient function of meaning facilitated 'achievement' by means of qualities and skills which included planning, imagination and investigation. Achievement, grounded in the collaboration of experience, knowledge and skills contributed to an individual's elemental sense of self, of 'what constitutes me', in a to and fro action of self-understanding mediated by culture. For students in this research study, the particular importance of the constitutive and communicative dimensions of religious meaning carried by art, resided in the inference that culture 'forms me'. It may seem an obvious point but not so for adolescents who, generally speaking, deny the influence of the peer group and who may be unaware or unwilling to acknowledge the impact of the every day environment upon their self-perception and the behaviour this self-perception engenders. The curriculum designed for this research study offered a method for addressing the negative elements of college culture. It promoted the positive by offering broadening religious education experiences for informed, self-directed student learning in an environment of safety.

On another level, beyond the personal, the constitutive function of meaning engaged shared cultural understandings such as those communicated via social institutions including religions, sporting and arts organisations. Of course these social institutions mediated individual as well as cultural identity but identity susceptible to change in accord with the circumstances and needs of populations on those social and cultural levels. The constitutive function of meaning cooperated with such change. Constitutive meaning incorporated a possibility for change and development for the students. This related to their understanding of self and the type of community to which they wanted to contribute and belong. It was in this identification of self and the possibility of self-transcendence — with wanting to contribute and to belong — that an ethical dimension of learning was 'actionable' for the students. This meant, even on the smallest scale, that participants who were previously disengaged with Religious Education could have a positive change of heart and mind. It could be conveyed to the larger group in the promotion of a 'give it a go' attitude.

The understanding of art as a carrier of religious meaning expressed here is described diagrammatically in Figures 3 and 4.
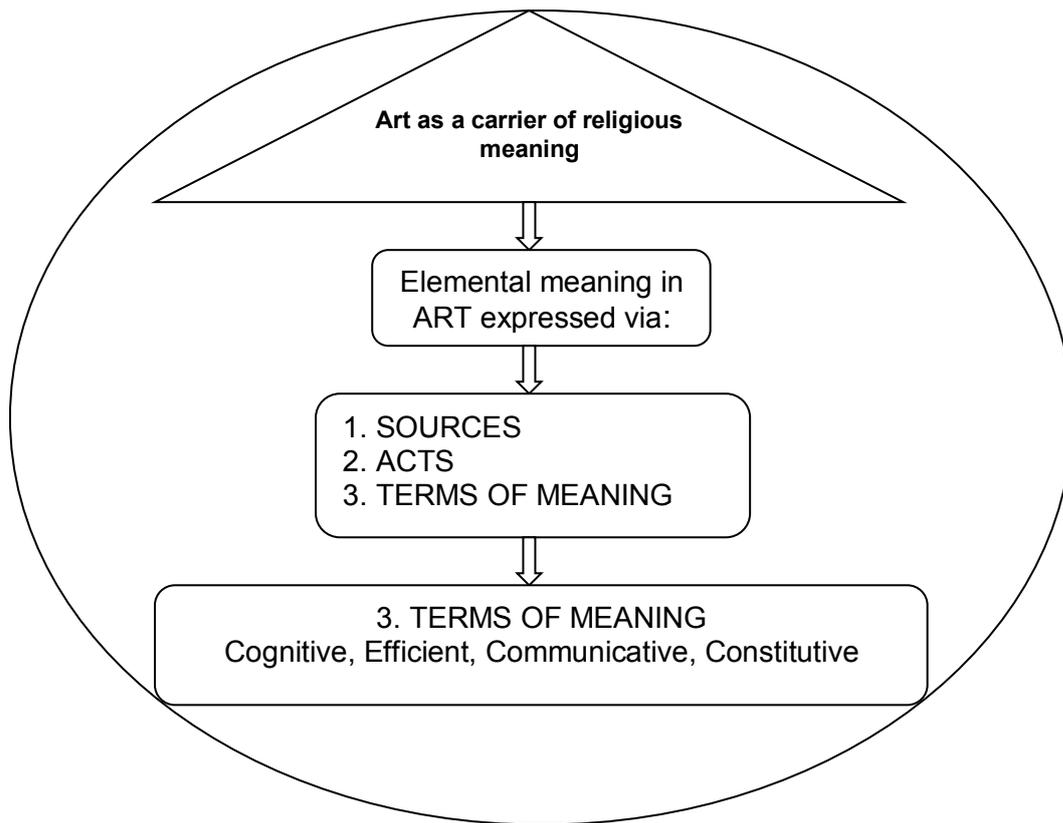
Figure 3: Art as a carrier of religious meaning: an adaptation of Lonergan's (1972) approach for locating meaning in religious experience.
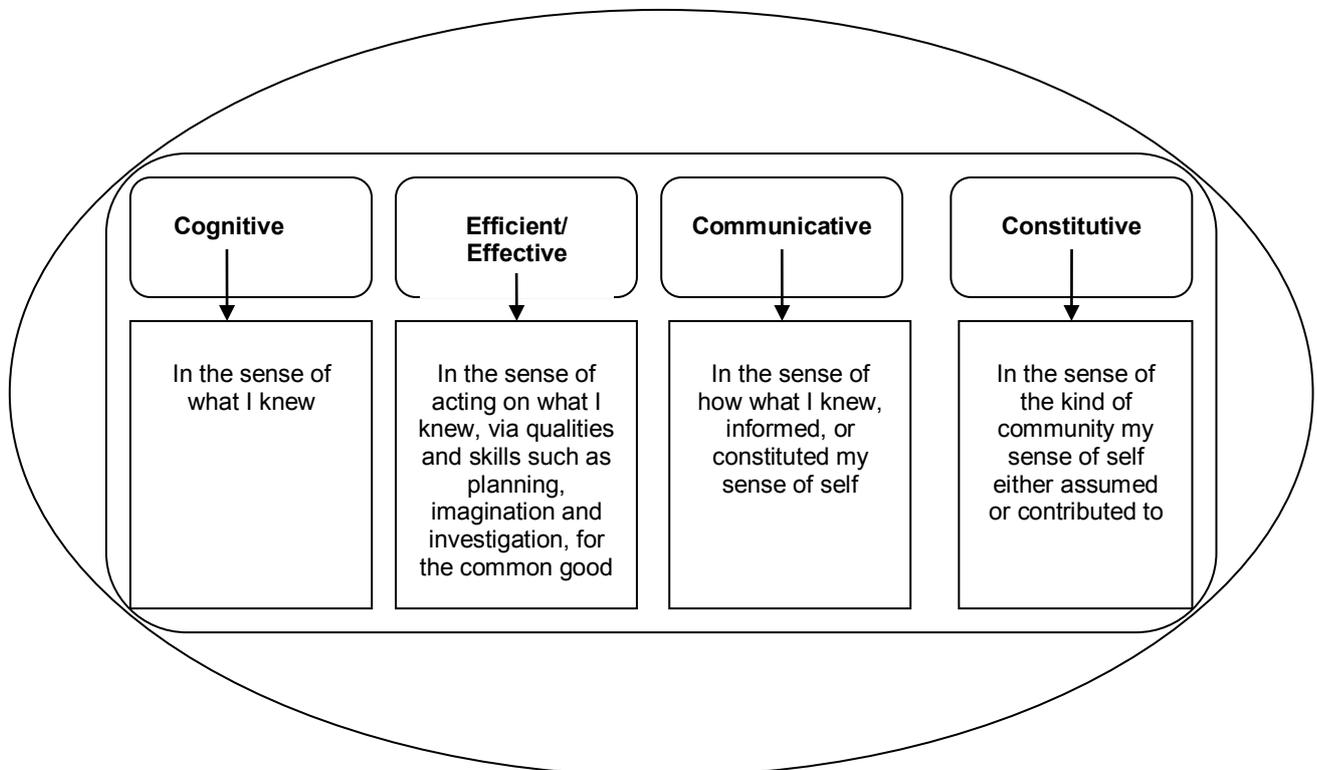
Figure 4: The terms or dimensions of meaning: an adaptation of Lonergan's (1972) approach for locating meaning in religious experience.

Therefore, and in agreement with transcendental method, these functions of meaning (Fig. 3) informed an interpretation of focus group responses to the artworks, responses which might promote deeper questions of meaning, insight and altered behavioural intentions grounded within the Catholic context of the college and its religious education program. In addition, transcendental method could encourage a broadening of the students' understanding of the Catholic tradition, with its intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions, discovering on the way, via their own experience, that no single text, image or interpretation of dogma 'captured' God. As such, a correlation drawn between transcendental method and the data gathered from this research study facilitated a means for interpreting the participants' experiences and the effectiveness of art as a carrier of meaning for religious and spiritual experience. A positive finding pointed to an acknowledgement of experience, it reflected the questioning of experience, and further to transcendental method, indicated that members of the focus group had broadened and deepened their search for meaning.

Process for Drawing Findings from Data

The primary data-gathering strategy for this research study was focus group and the participants' discussions of their experiences of artworks. These discussions were transcribed and included as Appendix C.

The transcripts were made when the whole of the data-gathering period was concluded in accord with the research methodology and its student-directed, heuristic teaching and learning process. The focus group discussions, discursive in nature, unstructured, and reliant on group interaction, were not researcher-directed in a quest for particular answers to particular questions. There was no intention for this researcher to control or skew data

via chains of leading questions developed from each of the preceding sessions. The focus group discussions, prompted by generative questions, were flexible. They promoted a bringing to the surface of the participants' own responses, perceptions, issues and reflections and thereby minimised this researcher's realm of influence to the greatest possible degree.

This research study was not concerned with a manipulation of the phenomenon of interest, that is, there was no manipulation of artworks to trigger participants' responses. Emerging from the constructivist approach, more naturalistic and context-based, its concern was for illumination and understanding from the research findings in relation to the research question. In order to achieve this intention the gathered data was analysed and reorganised in accord with the following outline:

1) Identifiable levels of 'attending' (affective learning) in participant responses to artworks (Krathwohl et al., 1964);

2) Identifiable progression in conscious participant learning in response to artworks, interpreted via Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method;

3) Correlation of data analysis with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning; leading to

4) Identification of findings in terms of themes, derived from a correlation drawn between the analysed data and the communicative and constitutive dimensions of religious meaning carried by art (Lonergan, 1972).

Through careful attention to the gathered data, and laying the four criteria (or characteristics provided above) upon the data, interpretations were drawn and particular findings emerged. These are identified, justified and explained in the following chapter.

Finally, interpretations were drawn from these findings in relation to the research question and sub-questions.

In bringing this section to a conclusion, Lonergan's (1972) process for human knowing contributed to a means for examining research data that revealed how students experienced religious and spiritual meaning carried by art — if indeed the students did have such an experience. More than the passive reception of experience, knowing in terms of a reception of religious meaning, involved active enquiry into the object. In relation to this research study, the catalyst of this process for Religious Education was provided by artworks and so a brief identification of understandings which underpinned the choice of artworks follows.

The Choice of Artworks

The review of literature for the theological aesthetics referred to an experience of the beautiful in the form, wherein the form itself embraced a sense of 'fullness' and proportional harmony; "Beauty is formositas" (Saward, 1997, pp. 40-46) and thus provided the 'sensible form' perceived through the senses, in other words, that which made a dog a dog, or a tulip a tulip. von Balthasar's theological aesthetics also embraced the 'intelligible' form of a thing that enlightened the mind. It was this idea of 'intelligibility' which created form that gave perception to the senses that in turn provided for something to be 'seen' (cf. Crowe, 1988, pp. 205-6, 208).

Given this understanding of beauty as a value, as an element of substantial form, *perceived* but not produced by the senses (Saward, 1997, p. 47), artworks used for this research study were identified with the following understandings:

1) The religious dimension of meaning carried by art;

2) Art's communication of religious meaning across time.

The religious dimension of meaning carried by art

The first understanding which underpinned the choice of artworks for this research study related to the religious dimension of meaning carried by artworks. In the broader sense, religious art was associated with issues of ultimate concern and questions of existence; in the narrower sense, religious art was associated with particular religious stories, images and symbols - art could express religion and religion could appear in art. Tillich (Michaelson, 1956, pp. 128-146, cf. *Awakenings*, 2005, p. 18) proposed four levels that expressed this relationship between art and religion.

The first level included a style which described ultimate concern indirectly. On this level of art, non-religious in both style and content, images could still provoke questions associated with the ultimate interpretation of human existence.

The second level included a particular style whose form expressed the meaning of the period. Explicit religious content was again omitted but the overall style expressed a sense of 'self-interpretation'. It was characterized by a deeper meaning that belonged to the image and that managed to 'work its way' to consciousness. This level of art, to do with religious style and non-religious content, was also concerned with ultimate meaning or existence. The inference was that a 'mapping' of artworks at this level (through the twentieth-century) revealed the human situation existentially, through the unveiling of a deep and profound understanding of what it meant to be human. Tillich (Michaelson, 1956) suggested that the artworks belonging to this level expressed for humankind a sense of being un-reconciled with the world, ill at ease and out of place. Artworks mediated this

human situation but did not prescribe the response — whether from an atheistic or theistic perspective.

The third level of art was concerned with secular forms of non-religious style which even so, managed religious content. Of particular note for this level of art was the 'dangerously irreligious' nature of those images with a supposed religious content (direct or indirect) but lacking religious style.

The fourth level, expressive of the relationship between art and religion, was concerned with the integration of both religious style and religious content in a particular artwork. Tillich however remained uneasy with the possibility of achieving the fourth level in modern art considering instead that 'idealised naturalism' remained the favoured form and tended to cover or mask the 'real situation' (from an existentialist perspective) at the cost of a repression of truth.

With respect to the preceding discussion, the range of periods of art chosen for this research study recognized the artistic scope of the Christian tradition. It also accommodated the various preferences for style, and scope for response from the participants in the research study. The intention was to offer as broad a range of images as possible in order to provide the students the greatest potential to locate a point of connection with, or a response to, one or more of the artworks.

While statements such as the 'intelligibility of the form' and criteria for artworks such as 'radiance, harmony and wholeness' might contribute to an interpretation of an experience of God, in the end, the potential for response rested entirely with the person. There was no

way to guarantee that what worked for one person would operate in the same way for another similarly there was no way to guarantee that any particular artwork would offer a person an experience of the beautiful. This leads to the second understanding in the identification of artworks for this research study — a potential, beyond individual tastes, for art to continually communicate religious meaning across time.

Art's communication of religious meaning across time

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1993) referred to the *singularity* of the aesthetic judgment, such as: 'this painting is beautiful'. This singularity incorporated a hold on the person by the beautiful thing (cf. Saward, 1997) rather than a person's subjective response to the beautiful thing, expressed in terms of personal preferences for colour, composition or subject matter. Subsequently, it was possible to understand the work of art as structured other than by descriptive language, even to the claim that each work of art carried the singularity — a potential to express beauty independently of the preferences of the viewer — in its structure. In order for this singularity to be communicated Ricoeur (1996) promoted the (Kantian) concept of the *communicability* of artworks, of 'contagion from one case to another'.

The concept of communicability relied on 'an imagination of harmony' that engaged understanding, imagination and the beautiful. In resisting a particular history of styles and tastes it acquired a dimension of 'trans-historicity' of permanence via an escape from the originating culture and time of the artwork. Further to this, Ricoeur (1996) identified 'utility' as just one polar extreme for understanding an artwork. The opposite pole offered openness to sacred dimensions wherein art provided a vehicle for the 'unutterable' — for the category that language alone could not satisfy, and which related to the inscrutable

mystery of God. In this way Ricoeur (1996, p. 2) acknowledged a "temporal transcendence of the work of art" wherein art, understood as a 'species' and with the concept of singularity extended to all, also held a potential communicability across and through the barriers of history.

On the side of the receiver and the reception of the work of art another historicity was revealed and it was as if the work of art created for itself a temporally open and indefinite public. Termed 'monstration' (Ricoeur, 1996) this capacity suggested that an artwork by nature was destined for 'showing'. Monstration referred to the artwork's capacity to be shared but in a way that freed the viewing public from the intentions of the artist (Ricoeur, 1996, p. 3).

This concept allowed that art offered a "metaphor beyond language"; in providing meaning, it created resemblance where there was none (Ricoeur, 1996, p. 5). Metaphor understood in this way in relation to art was mimetic, meaning creative and not merely imitative to the limitation of a copy. It allowed that art had an infinite capacity for 'speaking' and could be received and responded to or re-inscribed, across time.

The artworks used for this research study (Appendix B) included those that were: recognized by art historians as religious artworks in accordance with the intention of the artist and/or purpose of the artwork; potential conveyors of a sense of radiance, harmony and wholeness (as described previously); accessible to the classroom through projection and/or visits to galleries and churches; selected from readily available sources such as library texts and accessible exhibitions and with an intention to avoid the artistic preferences of this researcher; from a range of contexts so that everyone would be in the

position of experiencing the 'otherness' of various images — all with the intention that no one would have the cipher for every image and consequently, no student would be either advantaged or disadvantaged over another.

This concluding discussion has canvassed the choice of artworks, and refocused attention with the practical nature of the religious education curriculum devised for this research study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has identified and justified constructivism as the epistemological paradigm for this research study and the specific nature of its context. As well, the reasons for choosing qualitative over quantitative research methods, for choosing case study as the preferred methodology and a focus group as the data-gathering instrument have been clearly articulated. In light of this research design, its method and procedures, an argument was put forward for Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method as a lens for interpreting the data. This included an identification of the participants' levels of 'attending' to artworks as well as their progression in conscious learning in response to artworks. From this analysis of data a correlation with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning was drawn, leading to an identification of findings in terms of themes. Finally, with art as both an essential yet independent element of this research study, a discussion of the religious characteristics of art and art's capacity to mediate religious meaning, sought to establish an understanding for the choice of art.

In light of this chapter, Chapter Five will present the findings from the focus group sessions. The participant responses will be described and analysed in order to identify emerging themes which are relevant to the aims of this research study.

Chapter 5
THE PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The previous chapter outlined the research design, methodology and procedures for this research study; it also refocused attention on the practical nature of the religious education curriculum devised for this research study and which facilitated data-gathering strategies. This chapter presents the findings arising from data gathered. As such the data is referred to throughout in order to illustrate the meanings and interrelations of the findings particularly with regard to the research question.

The first part of this chapter reintroduces a brief summary of the theological and educational context against which the findings were interpreted. The second part presents the findings as a consequence of the analysis and reorganisation of data gathered across the six focus group discussion sessions. The analysis and reorganisation of the data gathered accords with the following outline:

1) Identifiable levels of 'attending' (affective learning) in participant responses to artworks (Krathwohl et al., 1964);

2) Identifiable progression in conscious participant learning in response to artworks, interpreted via Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method;

3) Correlation of data analysis with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning; leading to

4) Identification of findings in terms of themes.

A brief summary of the theological and educational context within which the findings were interpreted

The theological and educational framework of this research study together with Lonergan's transcendental method (1972) provided both the context and interpretative lens (respectively) for the findings. von Balthasar's theological aesthetics provided the theological framework and enabled the location of this research in the field of human and religious experience, particularly when that involved a personal response to God's gift of love, mediated though artworks and in relation to an experience of the transcendental concept of beauty. Beauty, understood in this transcendental and theological sense, was the focus of von Balthasar's intention "to construct a philosophy and a theology starting from an analogy not of an abstract Being, but of Being as it is encountered concretely in its attributes (not categorical, but transcendental)" (von Balthasar, 1993, pp. 115-116). Accordingly, this research study investigated how artworks could mediate an experience of transcendental beauty.

Since the experience of beauty is beyond the realm of manipulation (cf. Gadamer, 1993, pp. xii-xiv), an investigation of its mediation and application for the religious education classroom was particularly suited to this student-centred inquiry for several reasons. Firstly, it suited the students' developmental stage of emerging independence and searching for meaning. Secondly, it respected the students' developmental stage of emerging independence and associated resistance to any perceived imposition of external authority and belief. Thirdly, and essentially, the educational approach for this research study was entirely different from any usually undertaken in Religious Education at Augustine's, which were more traditional and teacher-directed with a leaning towards the use of text books and work-sheets. Alternatively, and for the purposes of this research study, the religious education teacher acted as facilitator for the heuristic and self-directed

learning of the focus group members. Finally, the potential outcomes for this type of teaching and learning, though observable, were not measurable and contrasted with those usually sought in the specific educational setting of Augustine's with its all male student body. The outcomes-based religious education program at Augustine's privileged the cognitive over the affective domain as a way of knowing. This cognitive emphasis at Augustine's also tended to support negative stereotypes associated with masculinity and spirituality (Tacey, 1997, 2003, 2004).

In light of these observations, and given the appropriateness of this approach for Augustine's, concepts relating to meaning-making and interpretation, in relation to experience and consciousness, were also necessary for this research study. Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology* (1972) and specifically, transcendental method, provided the interpretative tool for this particular task, wherein consciousness and its attendant experience, were understood as essential to knowing, but not to have completed the knowing process. The essential components of interpretation and reflection — leading to judgement — were also necessary. Lonergan's structure for coming to full knowledge, described in the previous chapter on research design, was applied to the findings of this research study as a means of interpreting focus group responses.

The methodology of this research study also provided that research was informed by the research question: *can visual art be a medium for religious and spiritual experience for post-compulsory adolescents to enhance Religious Education.*

This in turn led to related questions that dealt with the theological resources called upon in this research study:

   I.   What is the understanding of the theological aesthetics that grounds this research?

  II.   In terms of the theory of Lonergan, how is art understood as a 'carrier of religious meaning'?

 III.   Is there a relationship between an experience of art as a carrier of religious meaning and a religious and spiritual experience?

 IV.   How can the learning environment and strategies enhance these experiences in a Catholic college's post-compulsory religious education program?

  V.   How can these experiences contribute to the religious education program?

In addressing these questions, an assumption was made that any religious meaning carried by art (Lonergan, 1972) was at least accessible to the particular receiver (focus group participant) with a potential to facilitate movement from appearances to deeper issues of truth for members of the focus group. In this regard, art had the potential to lead to an experience of the transcendent.

In light of the preceding discussion, the process for analysing data gathered for this research study and identifying findings follows.

The Initial Analysis of Data from Focus Group Sessions Contributing to Findings

In relation to the research question and the data gathered, transcendental method used as an interpretative lens sought to identify the nature of participant responses to artworks. This application of transcendental method focused upon the degree to which the participants were aware of their process or means for coming to know something — anything! It was not concerned with a process for finding answers to questions as a fait accompli.

Transcendental method as such was particularly suited to this research study focused upon non-quantifiable religious and spiritual experience.

Transcendental method incorporated the four precepts of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible and so indicators of these precepts were sought in affective learning (receiving or attending to stimuli) (Krathwohl et al., 1964), language and content of focus group discussions.

Interest in Session 1 of the focus group discussions resided with the students' immediate, sensory responses to the artworks, together with their understanding of those responses. Session 2 saw the introduction of crucifixion as a starter topic to promote any *a priori* religious meaning associated with crucifixion, thus providing a bench-mark for observing changed participant responses in subsequent sessions. Session 3 at the fine art gallery introduced a location for viewing artworks outside the classroom while Session 4 saw a return to class. A cathedral provided the setting for Session 5 and for Session 6 the college's computer lab afforded Internet access.

The Levels of 'Attending' (Affective learning) responses of Participants to Artworks: Mac

In relation to the first two sessions, Mac's discussions indicated that his **attentiveness** (affective learning) to the artworks began at the level of 'willingness to respond'. Implied here was Mac's capacity for a voluntary response to the artworks indicated for instance in his reaction to images he described as 'aboriginal' such as Siqueros' *The Hanging One.* Mac recoiled from it physically. Alternatively, *The Annunciation* and *The Deposition* were 'nice' images. *The Annunciation* captured Mary's fear and consequently, humanized her. *The Deposition* offered depictions of ordinary humans in their emotional response to

Christ. Statements from Mac indicated that not only were the familiar and conventional images he had grown up with at school and church more appealing, they were good, and the unconventional or unfamiliar, were bad (Appendix C, p. 234). This level of affective learning indicated in Mac's willingness to respond to the artworks, was repeatedly illustrated up until a point (in Session 3) when, in agreement with Red, his own (affective) development was identified, "Previously…there's only (been) a set range (of art) where this is religious and this is not. But now I'd say I'd extended that scope" (Appendix C, p. 244); also inferred in this development of Mac's religious attitude and capacity was the beneficial influence of his interactions with the focus group (Appendix C, p. 253). In particular, Mac spoke of feeling more receptive to visual expressions of Indigenous Christianity; compared with his initial disposition, he felt he had become more open-minded and able to contemplate a variety of artworks (Appendix C, pp. 245, 246). Mac recognised something religious in the paintings "…There was one we saw…just yellow squares and that was linked to spirituality and then…one of the traditional ones of Jesus as the carpenter and you interpret them as spiritual and so you can take a spin on anything you see" (Appendix C, p. 244). The level of affective learning indicated here was that of valuing, wherein the artworks were attributed worth — by virtue of and reflected in Mac's attitude to the religious meaning the artworks carried. As well, the abstract concept of worth, attributed to valuing, indicated Mac's own assessment and reflected the socialising effects he had internalised and utilised as criterion of worth for his initial responses. By the final session in the computer lab, Mac's overall response to the artworks was that they had 'opened him up' and that he rejected less — there was a sense of spirituality 'happening' — "It has to an extent (the experience of artworks) opened my eyes to other peoples' interpretation of spirituality…you'd look and say what's this, what does it mean? Then you'd kind of discuss" (Appendix C, p. 253). The affective indicator illustrated here was

'acceptance of a value' even to the point of 'preference for a value'. Indicated here was Mac's willingness to receive religious meaning from artworks to the degree that he would continue to draw from the experience, "It's time…having time to reflect on them (artworks) spiritually or as a religious path…I imagine myself…when I get older and walk past a gallery or hear anything about a gallery I'll remember the time we went with the school for religion and think like that and relate it to that" (Appendix C, pp. 244). Mac recognised his ability to make conscious, religious connections with artworks and suggested he would continue with this process (Appendix C, p. 243).

The identification of this hierarchy of attending to artworks with Mac's responses to the artworks is not clear-cut. Such is the nature of affective learning and the indicators relied upon for pointing to that learning. Essentially, Mac's own words implied that from start to finish, the artworks had conveyed meaning that effected change in him in a religious sense.

The Levels of 'Attending' (Affective learning) responses of Participants to Artworks: Red

It was observable that in relation to affective learning, Red's attending to artworks ran parallel with Mac's (Appendix C, p. 234). Initially, this response located him at the level of 'willingness to respond' ― indicating that Red's response to the artworks was voluntary and not from fear of 'getting into trouble'. Red demonstrated this level of attending via the frustration he expressed when an artwork contained enough visual clues to be familiar, but too few for him to discover meaning. With respect to *From many wounds you bleed O people,* for instance, Red did not understand "…why the sword was in the picture at all, didn't understand its significance…and I didn't understand…the two people at the sides hanging or crucified" (Appendix C, p. 234). Consequently, Red was also confused and shocked by *Crucifixion, Shoalhaven*; the incorporation of a crucified, female body was, for

him, "totally out of left-field!" (Appendix C, p. 237). Alternatively, even as Red was 'grabbed' by the colour and light of *Christ Calming the Storm,* he was disturbed both by the darkness of the water and its not being "very blue" (Appendix C, p. 235). Upon further reflection however, Red related a sense of peace the painting evoked (in spite of the subjects of the painting being "on a tidal wave") with "the parable of Jesus walking on water" (Appendix C, p. 235). For Red, this reconciling of a recognisable image with scripture, apparently contributed to its acceptability. Paradoxically, it would seem, Red also liked *Icarian II*, even though it could be termed non-figurative or abstract. The key to Red's acceptance of this work was revealed when he said it reminded him of the *Shroud of Turin*. In spite of Red's self-acknowledged conventional tastes he expressed a desire to be modern in outlook — again identifying Red's willingness to respond to religious meaning carried by artworks.

Session 2 responses by Red located him at a different level of attending to the artworks, that of commitment. This was because Red's responses to artworks in this session implied a degree of certainty in belief with a possibility for the development of belief. Also implied was an emotional response to the artworks, "…a majority I felt had death, death coming out of them I thought a little bit disturbing and I felt it showed that Jesus was human... he experienced death" (Appendix C, p. 235). Associations with death drew Red's attention to the artworks for this session and they disturbed him. Images of "Jesus dying for us" were related to his own experiences. The recent death of Red's grandmother, a woman described as having had a great and positive influence on his life, was ascribed new insights via this session. Red made connections between the artworks he saw and his grandmother's death, "…in a few of the pictures…on a lot of the faces, there was despair…sadness…grieving and I've experienced that from loved ones dying" (Appendix C, p. 236). At that point, Red

claimed to have experienced more religious learning in Session 2 than previously —

whether at or outside school. He then became angry because he believed other students did

not give Religious Education "a go".

Red felt a spiritual response to artworks in the cathedral environment came more easily

because together with a progression in experiences leading up to the cathedral there was

greater ease in relating the artworks to the cathedral space. Further, when Red compared

his unease and seriousness in attending to artworks in Session 1 compared with Session 6

responses, he identified his own affective development,

> [in response to the artworks] there's been a progression even from the very first session. I was very against contemporary [artworks]…more into traditional images…on the computers it was all contemporary images…there were completely different messages in them, and they were subtle and I've grown in affection for them (Appendix C, p. 250).

By the concluding stage of the process Red's comments implied a more relaxed approach

that reflected his increased confidence in trusting his responses to the artworks. Red also

believed this (affective) development contributed to his relating better to the broader

society.

The Levels of 'Attending' (Affective learning) responses of Participants to Artworks: Ryan

Initially, indications were that Ryan's affective learning or willingness to receive

meaning from the artworks was linked to his ability to understand them. Indicated here

was a 'willingness to receive' or tolerate stimulus from the artwork, not to avoid it. This

was demonstrated in his rejection of della Francesca's *Resurrection*; the subject of the

painting was recognisable but he found the narrative of the image confusing and obscure

(Appendix C, p. 241). Similarly, *Christbearer (Christophorus)* was rejected because Ryan was unable to locate meaning in the image it presented (Appendix C, p. 242).

In the first two sessions, Ryan was most impressed by *Christ Calming the Storm, The Great Day of His Wrath* and *The Hanging One*. The colour of the first two artworks caught his attention because they conveyed the power of Jesus. Important to Ryan's affective learning was the cognitive learning that operated in a free-flow of ideas, interpretations and expressions between Ian and himself, "You know I [Ryan] didn't really think of that until Ian mentioned it…" (Appendix C, p. 241). They helped each other find the language needed to express their responses to the artworks, and they were not concerned when those responses differed (Appendix C, pp. 240, 242). Each gained from hearing the thoughts and opinions of the other in much the same way as Red and Mac. This exchange appeared to assist Ryan and he subsequently attended to a variety of images and their experiential patterns. Elements such as light and colour functioned on an emotional level for him in non-figurative artworks, for instance, he had a strong feeling of 'being grasped' in a religious sense, by *Icarian II:*

> *Question: So in this 'grabbing', it called your attention and then your consciousness engages with…what is it calling me to?*
> **Ian and Ryan**: Yeah.
> *Question: Can you name one [an artwork] like that Ryan [that caused that reaction]?*
> **Ryan**: Um, probably number twelve on Wednesday, *Icarian II*, yeah that is kind of like that.
> **Ian**: I loved that.
> **Ryan**: It is just like…it has got that background that spiritual figure coming through well, first of all [there is] that centralized light sort of thing in the middle that grabs your attention then you just start to think about the significance of it (Appendix C, p. 239).

Ryan also found *Icarian II* relaxing and he discussed it with Ian. Initially the sense of light inherent to the work took hold of his attention and interpretation followed. Within the

context of Religious Education, the work made a connection because of the way it conveyed religious meaning. It could be said that Ryan demonstrated 'satisfaction in response' with regard to *Icarian II,* "It's got that big spiritual figure coming through. First of all that centralised light in the middle grabs your attention then you just start to think about the significance of it" (Appendix C, pp. 242, 243). At this level in the affective learning hierarchy*,* the assent to respond to an artwork was accompanied by a feeling of satisfaction. In accord with this observation, during Session 2, Ryan was affected by *Pregnant man with two others* — "I thought that was pretty good and it showed a different view. Instead of the normal crucifixion you get depicted as being dark you got some sort of light" (Appendix C, p. 241). The sense of hope conveyed by the image inferred an affirming spiritual significance for Ryan. Similarly, Ryan valued the atmosphere of the Cathedral and felt that it contributed positively towards his reflective attitude. He agreed with Mac that his strongest sense was one of familiarity and knowing what to expect.

Of interest with Ryan as with Mac and Red, was that by Session 6 he identified ease in relating to the differences in interpretation and expression of artworks he saw. He suggested his own sense of spirituality helped him look more deeply into the images, past seeing into sensing and feeling,

> …just looking at everything we've been doing it's probably been a help [in developing spirituality], I think a fair bit actually…it lets you reflect on what you believe, if you don't agree with something then you'll say 'oh no, I don't agree with that, this is what I believe', but then you might think what does the other person, what's he [*sic*] trying to get [at]? (Appendix C, p. 250)

Ryan described many religious connections with the various artworks he saw; he also implied his understanding of and respect for difference had increased. He had been more prejudiced at the start but now identified an endless potential for his growth via experiences of art leading to greater communication and interaction with others. The

movement in affective learning indicated for Ryan here was to 'valuing', such that Ryan apparently accepted and consciously acknowledged the worthiness of his experience of the artworks, "you also wonder how far that extent would go, I mean how far you'd surprise yourself by keeping on doing all these different things until you just stop and understand everything...until you can't interpret anything anymore" (Appendix C, p. 252).

The Levels of 'Attending' (Affective learning) responses of Participants to Artworks: Ian

In Sessions 1 and 2, Ian's immediate and self-described responses to the Käthe Kollowitz artworks were empathetic — he experienced sadness and a sense of emptiness, "When the [Käthe Kollowitz] images came up…to try to capture the initial [impact]…I just wrote words down…sad, empty, longing, sombre, dramatic, dark" (Appendix C, p. 239). The unusual depiction of the subjects captured his attention because he found the images unfamiliar. Ian associated the images with death and losing a loved one, but the connection between Kollowitz's images and the God/Jesus story was not immediately apparent to him; it only emerged upon reflection, "I haven't experienced people dying in my life but I think it captured the way I think [about] it…if it was to be connected with God I think it was pretty modern…there wasn't anything directly religious in it…it was open to interpretation" (Appendix C, p. 239).

The Catholic Mystery drew a positive response from Ian especially with respect to its juxtaposition with the Kollwitz images. For Ian, *The Catholic Mystery* was less confronting and more typical of religious imagery. Its peaceful, contemplative 'attitude' captured a sense of ritual, remembering and sacredness (Appendix C, p. 238). Overall, Ian's expressed favourite was *Icarian lI*: although there "wasn't much to the image", the golden glow of the work conveyed something of the Spirit and it was haunting. For Ian the

image conveyed a sense of something observing, coming — God all around us. Ian's statements regarding *Icaran II* inferred his experiencing an initial 'spiritual pull' from the artwork, "I felt that with the gold colours…that little glow, like a spirit coming through it, almost like something coming at you…almost haunting…observing you…"(Appendix C, p. 240).

Even at this comparatively early stage in the curriculum process (Session 2), the consistency and stability of Ian's affective learning responses to artworks posited him at the level of 'conceptualisation of a value'. Conceptualisation of a value referred to Ian's capacity to abstract meaning from his responses to the artworks to the degree that he was able to relate it to other values — in this instance, to hold as worthy the religious meaning conveyed by artworks for affective learning. Ian's empathetic responses to the Kollowitz images, for instance identified a mediation of religious meaning beyond words — even though he tried to capture his response to Kollowitz's art with words — and Ian was able to identify the learning he gained from this experience,

> Firstly I think it [Käthe Kollowitz's art] related [to Crucifixion], it was about human suffering and humanised Jesus as he should be humanised because he was human…firstly it was interesting because typically you think Jesus, well he was a man because they were women, that was another thing that modernised it as well as making it more related, it made it more real and it made Jesus seem more real and more human (Appendix C, p. 239).

The association Ian made between his responses to the artworks and feelings associated with death were then taken one step further as he inserted his experience into the Christian context, but in the non-prescriptive way alluded to in the previous quote. As a singular event this response from Ian to an artwork could relate to Red's experience of the artworks and his real-life experience of the death of his grandmother, however, unlike Red's concrete experience of death, Ian's experience related to the abstract and thus,

conceptualisation of a value characteristic of a belief (Krathwohl et al., 1964, pp. 176-185). Ian's level of affective response indicated here was reinforced with his described experience of the *Catholic mystery*. More than valuing the image for its narrative quality, Ian responded to and identified the sense of tradition the *Catholic mystery* conveyed and affirmed across the dimensions of ritual, remembering and sacredness (Appendix C, p. 240).

During Session 6 Ian said that searching the websites for artworks allowed freedom, "The variety and scope is important and the images that were most abstract were most open to interpretation; they said more because you were left asking questions" (Appendix C, p. 254). Ultimately, however, Ian's search resulted in his experiencing a strong 'spiritual pull' by one of the artworks he came upon. A particular set of images which Ian described as "a set of shapes" captured him with a sense of sorrow and aloneness. From this experience, Ian empathised with Christ and the aloneness he would have felt throughout much of his life. One of the images from the website, a swing, drew such a spiritual response from Ian he said he would "…hunt it down and put it on my wall" (Appendix C, p. 254). An implication drawn from this experience of Ian's was that he could consciously look for religious dimensions in all manner of artworks. Having seen so many interpretations of the same event, such as the crucifixion, he now understood that "Your spirituality is concerned with how you feel about that event, how you connect to it." When asked what the point of the connection was, Ian answered that he had his own interpretation of things that other people might not understand as perfect. Before the experience of these sessions he had not really looked at art, and consequently now understood spirituality differently:

[It is] what's inside us. Everyone can share it but in unique ways. You can't do that with many things, it's not like pop music. It's not like a rule or law that everyone does without thinking or interpretation (Appendix C, p. 252).

Ian's consistent, higher level responses to the artworks over time, concluding with his conceptualisation and objectification of spirituality, supported a claim for his affective learning at the level of characterisation. At this level, Ian's internalisation of values pointed to an integration of beliefs, ideas and attitudes reflected in his discussions, behaviours, interaction with others, and ultimately, his informed and developed understanding of spirituality.

Data gathered and explored thus far for this research study indicated that the affective learning of all focus group participants benefited from their experiences of the artworks. This indication however was only a first stage leading to the identification of findings for this research study. Following is a discussion of the participants in relation to the remaining transcendental precepts: be intelligent, be reasonable and be responsible.

Analysis of Data in Relation to the Transcendental Precepts: be Intelligent, be Reasonable, be Responsible

The first stage of this analysis of data (leading to an identification of findings) has examined the levels of 'attending' to artworks demonstrated in participant responses to the artworks. Identified were both a willingness to attend and the development of willingness by participants to both receive and respond to religious meaning carried by art — the focus of this research study.

Given that some of the artworks did draw and hold the participants' attention, a second stage analysis was sought of participants' responses (data) in relation to the transcendental

precepts: be intelligent, reasonable and responsible. This second stage analysis sought identification of conscious development in the participants' responses affected by artworks for this research study. This related to the participants' capacity for 'knowingly' identifying the intentions directing their attitudes and behaviours regarding personal spirituality and Religious Education.

Mac

In relation to artworks seen across all sessions, Mac's responses indicated a distinctive **cognitive** focus at the level of knowledge of specifics. His statements inferred that 'traditional Catholic artworks' should have a particular style which was conventional and identified them as religious works, "[I] accepted that this is religious art…and I suppose that it was pleasing in a way, that we weren't getting any more abstract art" (Appendix C, p. 235). 'Aboriginal' type images were rejected because he was unable to link Aboriginals with Christianity. He described greatest ease in understanding the cathedral images during Session 3, "…because they were in the church they were classical type pictures so it was easy to relate to them" (Appendix C, pp. 248, 249). In Session 4, Mac found the Harald Duwe *Last Supper* too literal in its interpretation of the gospel narrative and suggested it mocked and ridiculed the Last Supper. Mac's recall of familiar religious information (indicated in these responses) with its emphasis on symbols with concrete references consistently turned up in the data.

Additional data from Mac indicated a change for him in relation to Lonergan's (1972) transcendental precept **'be intelligent'**. By means of Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method, intelligence took the person beyond experiencing and being attentive to ask questions of the experience. The data indicated a progression in this direction for Mac.

After the art gallery visit for instance, Mac's comments inferred that there was more to see in an image than details "It's the time…having time [to] look at some pictures…to reflect on them spiritually" (Appendix C, p. 243). Additionally, Mac identified a broadening in his understanding of what constituted a religious image (Appendix C, pp. 244, 245). With regard to Leunig's drawings in particular, Mac identified a religious dimension he had not previously considered and which in some instances connected with his social justice involvement at Augustine's. In discussions over Session 6 artworks (viewed via websites), Mac again mentioned how much easier it was for him to consider variety in artworks when the location for looking at them 'matched' the artworks; just as the classical images of the cathedral suited that building, abstract or modern images located via websites 'matched' the technology, and he said, "It's made me see them a bit more" (Appendix C, pp. 250, 251). In making this point Mac was self-reflective and consciously identified influences that contributed to his responses to artworks. He suggested for instance that teaching and learning for Religious Education was predictable to the degree that it was too easy and 'blunted' his interest (Appendix C, p. 249). The different locations to view artworks increased his interest and he 'saw' more. Mac said he had grown to accept images originally rejected and wanted to learn more about them (Appendix C, pp. 250, 251). Lonergan's (1972) transcendental precept of **reasonableness** applied to these comments of Mac's and his desire to challenge prior learning and pursue meaning.

Finally, the data provided by Mac identified his preference for freedom of movement (at the cathedral and art gallery) and choice (in all locations but the classroom) when it came to looking at artworks (Appendix C, p. 246). This autonomy contributed to his receptivity to the artworks and the spiritual interpretations of others. Mac also acknowledged the positive interaction conducive to this type of learning and the 'checks' interaction with

others brought in terms of the formation of judgement (Appendix C, p. 252). This acknowledgement hinted at the '**be responsible'** dimension of his learning (Lonergan, 1972).

Red

Initially Red's statements about the artworks, like Mac's, identified a **cognitive** focus wherein he matched what he saw with the recall of religious information (Appendix C, p. 237). In this regard in Session 1 he rejected *From many wounds you bleed O people.* Red said he had an immediate dislike for the image and he could not understand it. Red "scanned it" and "still did not like it at all!" (Appendix C, p. 234). In spite of his acknowledged self-awareness of a traditional religious bias however (Appendix C, p. 236), Red wanted a modern religious outlook "Being a youth, you know, things have to change. I'd love to see priests get married and all that sort of thing…" (Appendix C, p. 236). In the first Session, Red also said that he had learned more about religious values from life than the religious education classroom. He blamed peer pressure for inhibited religious education learning at the college "…it doesn't help with peers here, they manipulate what's being said and what's heard…I think religion's so much of a hoax because no one [the students] gives it a fair go…a lot of people just don't care" (Appendix C, p. 235). In relation to the understanding expressed here, Red acknowledged a benefit from the process of viewing artworks wherein students were free to look and reflect without the intimidating influences of others (Appendix C, p. 238); as well he said that many of the artworks had made him "look at different aspects" and had challenged and stimulated his thinking. Red's responses, stimulated by the artworks indicated not only Lonergan's (1972) precept to **'be intelligent'** but Red's consciousness of his own desire to be so and to learn more.

Red opened the focus group discussion after Session 3 and said the experience of the artworks had been different from other religious education experiences. Red said that previously, he thought he had been told what to believe whereas the current experience left him 'isolated in his own time' with the artworks, able to disconnect from what was going on around him and to remain connected with the artworks, free to think and to interpret for himself (Appendix C, p. 246). Indicated here was Red's questioning of his religious learning in light of his experiences of the artworks. He was '**being reasonable'** (Lonergan, 1972) in so far as he had begun consciously to look beyond answers of intelligence to constructively consider and weigh up alternatives. Red acknowledged (Appendix C, p. 245) that prior to experiencing the artworks for this research study he would have identified a set range of images wherein "…this is religious and this is not." By the time of Session 3 he had abandoned that stance. Red identified a religious dimension to Leunig's drawings previously unimagined "...never before have I taken a religious connection there" (Appendix C, p. 246).

For reasons similar to Mac's, Red identified various locations for seeing artworks as being significant. This significance related to the suitability of imagery for a location. It also related to Red's insight that religious art had a place in the 'real world' outside the comparatively closed world of the religious education classroom. He said, "The Internet, the computers are in your life — that was strange to see religious art in there" (Appendix C, p. 252). This insight challenged Red to reason beyond what he already knew about religion and religious art and to ask questions in pursuit of what was real and true and acceptable (Lonergan, 1972). Red also said the progression of experiences through the sessions was necessary for the participants' (identified) development (Appendix C, p. 252).

In relation to Session 6, Red also identified the co-operative nature of the learning process as the students as a class group, and not only focus group participants, exchanged responses to the artworks. Notably, Red did not identify negative peer pressure as part of these exchanges. Red described the session as good natured, where a weighing up of different opinions happened (Appendix C, p. 253). Red's developed preference for this type of interactive religious education learning extended beyond the classroom. He said "It was quite different going out trying different things and then putting it into society in relation to where we live (**be responsible**)" (Appendix C, p. 252).

Ryan

Like others in the focus group, Ryan's initial rejection of artworks was lodged in his inability to understand their religious meaning (Appendix C, pp. 241, 242). However, Ryan's responses indicated less reliance upon this **intelligent** (Lonergan, 1972) mode of response, if to begin with, elements such as light and colour captured his attention. Referring to *The Great Day of His Wrath,* for instance, Ryan at first glance described it as a storm painting. After a second look however, Ryan associated the 'power' of the lightning in the painting with God (Appendix C, p. 239). In such an instance Ryan's affective response to the artwork promoted reception of religious meaning from the artwork. If Ryan's initial, affective response to the artwork was low however, such as with *Christophorus,* then indications were that his receptivity to religious meaning was correspondingly reduced (Appendix C, p. 242).

A low level of abstraction was observable in Ryan's response to *The Hanging One* wherein he associated the sealing of the subject's mouth with Jesus being "shut up". He also acknowledged the influence of context for interpreting artworks. Ryan for instance

liked *Icarian II*, but a spiritual connection was made because "we were in that train of thought".

As discussions of the artworks progressed Ryan continually acknowledged and agreed with Ian's insights "You know I really didn't think of any of that until Ian mentioned it. I think he's spot on..." (Appendix C, p. 241). In this way a free-flow of ideas, interpretations and expressions operated between Ian and Ryan. They helped each other find the language needed to express their responses to the artworks, and they were not concerned when those responses differed. Each gained from hearing the thoughts and opinions of the other in much the same way as Red and Mac. By means of this heuristic learning Ryan was paying attention to Lonergan's transcendental precept to **be reasonable**. His interactions with Ian in particular, led to Ryan's challenging concepts already held and exploring new ideas. This was demonstrated in Ryan's response to Falken's *Pregnant Man with Two Others:*

> I [had] never really thought of the way the painting was putting it [the Crucifixion], it was like Jesus giving life to mankind again…[it] was pretty good and it showed a different view instead of the normal crucifixion you get depicted as being dark [instead] you got some sort of light (Appendix C, p. 242)

Again and in relation to **being responsible** (Lonergan, 1972), Ryan acknowledged the benefits of an outlook broadened not only by the variety in artworks but by the conversations that followed the experience of seeing them (Appendix C, p. 242). From Ryan's perspective, Religious Education had been about people telling you what to think whereas the art allowed for personal interpretations, "It lets you reflect on what you believe...but then you might think what [is] the other person trying to get [to]? You're looking at other peoples' beliefs and not just your own…you weren't really thinking about it at the start [of the process]" (Appendix C, p. 250). Also in relation to being reasonable

and responsible, Ryan implied that the process of this research study offered unlimited potential for spiritual growth (Appendix C, p. 253). He suggested (Appendix C, pp. 243, 246) the process could work positively for younger students as well and that an allowance of time with the freedom to make choices were significant contributing considerations:

> More people in the group have been affected and achieved something to deepen their understanding in this [spirituality] and to acknowledge there's been a connection there, whereas some of those people would have been just at a loss if you'd just been dictating it 'this is what it means', they wouldn't have wanted anything to do with it. Being able to interpret it yourself in your own rate and time a few of them have come on board as well (Appendix C, p. 252).

Ian

From the outset, Ian's descriptions of his responses to artworks generally provided more than a recall of religious information that addressed questions generated via the artworks (**be intelligent**). Whereas initially, Mac, Red and Ryan's drawing of religious meaning was linked with a conventional style of artwork (Appendix C, p. 234, 239), Ian tended towards higher levels of abstraction over literal interpretations of what he saw in an artwork "I haven't experienced people dying in my life but I think it (Kollowitz' *Pietà*)…described what it's like…it was so dark and there wasn't much in it…longing (Appendix C, p.239). Similarly, Ian made associations between the subject of *The Hanging One* and the anonymous, faceless person who was persecuted (Appendix C, p. 240). Seeing actual artworks at the gallery and the cathedral Ian said "You see and feel the artist; what were they thinking?" (Appendix C, p. 254). The higher level thinking indicated in Ian's responses contributed to his subsequent **reasoning** over the artworks. Ian suggested of Sutherland's *Crucifixion* for instance, that in the end it was confronting people with questions of Jesus' identity:

> …a crucifix…it's just become a shape. Now days for some people he's [Jesus] just an exhibition or something in a museum… [the artist] showed us this Jesus on show behind the rope. Kind of don't fall for it. And for us, [it said] it is not what it should be, well, what do you think? (Appendix C, p. 241).

In accord with others in the focus group, observations such as these from Ian promoted a conscious identification of the benefits of seeing and discussing the artworks ─ and how other people think about religious issues "It broadens, brings it out into the open" (Appendix C, p. 242). These comments resonated with others about the religious education classroom "I don't think the teachers would think to say [of the crucifixion] that oh this happened, there was blood like this, it looked like this…its become kind of glorified" (Appendix C, pp. 241, 242). He implied that the experiences of the artworks promoted both affective and cognitive learning 'through the visual'. Ultimately, Ian's comments identified his sense of **responsibility** (Lonergan, 1972) and conscious seeking to understand what was truly good when he said:

> My interpretation of things; people might not see my interpretation as perfect. Before this I hadn't really looked at art, now spirituality is what's inside us. Everyone can share it but in unique ways. You can't do that with many things, it's not like pop music. It's not like a rule/law that everyone does without interpretation/thinking. It's a benefit [the connection between art and spirituality] because it made me consider others' spirituality in trying to discover my own. Others can bring you to a greater understanding. That's what the art's doing (Appendix C, p. 254).

The discussion thus far has attended to two stages of analysis of the data which assist in the interpretation of the findings for this research study:

1) Identifiable levels of 'attending' (affective learning) in participant responses to artworks (Krathwohl et al., 1964);

2) Identifiable progression in conscious participant learning in response to artworks, interpreted via Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method.

Solely, Ian's experience of *Icaran II* and a web-site image could be interpreted as akin to that described by the theological aesthetics. In general however, the analysis of data provided in stages one and two identified 'an occurrence of progress', in terms of the

personal integrity of the participants. Lonergan (1972) acknowledged that in a way, everyone was attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible in their every-day life. In relation to the procedures for this research study and transcendental method however, the data identified the participants developed consciousness of their thought processes (awareness of intending) as they 'knowingly' identified and understood intentions that directed their attitudes and behaviours in religious experience and spirituality.

The artworks provided a catalyst for this experience, insofar as the data identified the artworks' conveyance and the participants' reception of religious meaning that translated into the subject-matter of focus group discussions. Because the role of art as a carrier of religious meaning is a focus of this research study then the third and final stage of data analysis sought to reconcile the analysis of participant responses to the artworks, with the dimensions of art as carrier of religious meaning, to see if the meaning conveyed by the art was in nature, religious. Lonergan (1972) identified four dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning: cognitive, efficient, communicative and constitutive. For their particular relevance to religious and spiritual experience within the context of this research study, the communicative and constitutive dimensions carried by art applied, and thus follows:

3) Correlation of data analysis with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning; leading to

4) Identification of findings in terms of themes.

Analysed Data	Communicative Meaning	Constitutive Meaning	Themes
Chapter 5	A relationship exists between the location and the style of artworks that contributes to my ease of contemplation of artworks (pp. 136, 138) **1.**	Religious artworks have a particular style (conventional) and content (pp. 136, 138) **1.**	**1. *Suitability of religious imagery and art viewing environments***
	Time and freedom to choose artworks contributes to the formation of understanding (pp. 136, 137, 140, 141) **5.**	There is more to an artwork than what I see on the surface (pp. 136, 138, 141). Art provokes questions of meaning (p.141) **3. & 4.**	
		Understanding can be abstracted from the artwork to what I already know eg. Social justice as a dimension of Religious Education. New ideas develop (pp. 136, 139, 140) **3. & 4.**	**2. *Meaning mediated by college culture***
	The experience of artworks provides me the opportunity to interact with/learn from others (pp. 137, 138, 139, 140, 141) **4.**		**3. *Relevance and the voice of the other***
		Different influences affect my understanding of what is religious (p. 137, 140, 141) **2. & 5.**	
		Peer pressure affects my religious learning experiences (pp. 137, 139) **2.**	**4. *Communication and formation***
	I need time and freedom to contemplate religious and spiritual meaning for myself (p. 138, 140) **5.**		
		In some Religious Education experiences at college we are told what to believe (p. 138, 140) **2.**	
		What I learn affects how I understand society (pp. 137, 138, 139) **3.**	**5. *Variety and freedom***
		Variety in artworks informs my religious experience and understanding (p. 140, 141) **5.**	
		The experience of artworks has developed my sense of spirituality (pp. 137, 138, 140, 141) **4.**	

Figure 5: Correlation of data analysis with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning resulting in themes

In bringing this chapter to a conclusion the analysed data was correlated with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning and from Figure 5 the following themes emerged as findings:

1. Suitability of religious imagery and art viewing environments;

2. Meaning mediated by college culture;

3. Relevance and the voice of the other;

4. Communication and formation;

5. Variety and freedom.

In light of this outcome, a discussion and interpretation of the emergent themes (findings) follows in Chapter Six.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The intention of this research study was to ascertain if visual art could be a medium for religious and spiritual experience for post-compulsory adolescents to enhance Religious Education. In accord with this intention, Chapter Five presented the findings, identified as themes, that emerged from focus group discussions and which represented recurring perceptions and understandings from the four focus group participants' experiences of art as a carrier of religious meaning.

These recurring perceptions and understandings (themes), related to and represented the four participants' various and varying degrees of religious and spiritual experiences associated with the artworks. Non-quantifiable in nature but noticeable, these recurring perceptions and understandings (themes) emerged from an interpretation of the data via Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method — particularly in light of his (Lonergan's) characterisation of religious experience (in terms of meaning) as the gift of God's love first described as experience, and only consequently objectified into theoretical categories (Lonergan, 1972, p. 122). In terms of this research study, Lonergan's (1972) characterisation of religious experience resonated with the theological underpinning for a relationship between art and religious and spiritual experience captured in von Balthasar's (1989b) theological aesthetics.

This chapter will briefly recap the process for drawing findings from the data and then discuss an interpretation of the findings according to the themes identified on page 140. The order of the discussion of themes will be: suitability of religious imagery and art viewing environments; meaning mediated by college culture; relevance and the voice of the 'other'; communication and formation; variety and freedom.

A brief recap of the process for drawing findings from the data

The primary data-gathering strategy for this research study was a focus group of four participants and their discussion of their experiences of artworks (cf. Appendix C). Once gathered, the data was analysed and reorganised in accord with the following outline:

1) Identifiable levels of 'attending' (affective learning) in participant responses to artworks (Krathwohl et al., 1964);

2) Identifiable progression in conscious participant learning in response to artworks, interpreted via Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method;

3) Correlation of data analysis with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of art as a carrier of religious meaning; leading to

4) Identification of findings in terms of themes, derived from a correlation drawn between the analysed data and the communicative and constitutive dimensions of religious meaning carried by art (Lonergan, 1972).

Through careful attention to the gathered data, and laying the four criteria (or characteristics provided above) upon the data, interpretations were drawn and particular findings (themes) emerged.

The content of the findings (themes) reflected the developmental nature of the conscious religious and spiritual experience of participants, thus, an 'occurrence of progress' in relation to personal integrity was identified in the participants' overall responses to the artworks. In accord with this positive identification for the participants, the findings (themes) indicated areas of concern for Religious Education at Augustine's and highlighted the enhancement the process of this research study offered which might help address those concerns.

Findings According to Themes

Suitability of Religious Imagery and Art Viewing Environments

The first theme (finding) to emerge from the data revealed that initially, the affective responses of participants to artworks was linked to their perception of *suitability of religious imagery and art viewing environments*. Reasonably, therefore, the lower the participants' levels of affective responses, the less willing their receptivity to the mediation of religious meaning for religious and spiritual experience. Discussions identified participants' pre-conceived ideas (linked with schooling) regarding the suitability of images for religious subjects. These pre-conceived ideas included, for instance, that Catholic artworks should have a particular style that was conventional. However the findings for this research study also identified the process of this research study as promoting the willingness and receptivity of participants to the experience of eclectic religious images. This, in turn, was shown to develop their religious affective and cognitive learning. A salient factor identified in this phase of the research study was that students required experience and skills development to help them to 'read' artworks, and to read artworks 'differently'.

This finding for the relatedness of religious imagery and environment was relevant to an enhancement of curriculum development for Religious Education because it revealed that the style and scope of religious artworks at Augustine's had remained relatively conventional and static throughout the schooling of focus group participants. Accordingly, conventional styles of artwork were most accessible and familiar to the participants. It was easier for them to understand artworks of that type. Consequently, if an environment lacking visual scope and challenge contributed to the stultification of ideas and other ways of imagining God (which was indicated in focus group responses), the possibility existed that a visually stimulating environment might allow for, if not promote, affective learning and thus the potential for a religious experience of art. In small ways, for instance, if crucifixes and crosses provided for classrooms were varied to express ethnic or indigenous influences, they could attract students' attention and promote perception rather than identification of the crucifix or cross as a generic piece of wall furniture — much like a light switch. Revealed via this finding was that during the period of data gathering, the participants were gradually able to come to terms with both the difference and challenge of unfamiliar artworks in a way that benefited them personally. Indications were that initial, uncomfortable reactions to less conventional artworks, when compared with later responses, most likely resulted from a narrowness of experience rather than a considered rejection of alternative imagery. In accord with this interpretation, if as the finding indicated, the experience of a church space for students was of a traditional bluestone or brick structure modelled on the Gothic style then it was highly probable that is how they would understand a 'real' church and the artworks it housed. For students with limited experience and interest, one form would most likely go with the other, they would match. Analogously, the 'state of the art' nature of Internet technology facilitated an acceptance of 'modern' religious images; they seemed compatible. Thus, as the findings indicated,

religious artworks from the Internet were rejected in the space of a church, just as the traditional artworks that were acceptable in the cathedral were rejected when the students visited the Internet sites.

Concordant with the students' perceptions regarding religious subjects and artistic styles, this finding also revealed a general preference (among focus group participants) for particular art styles in certain locations and situations; the classroom for instance, was considered least suitable. Factors which contributed to this perception included 'familiarity' and associations with 'less desirable' behaviours such as frequently demonstrated disrespect for Religious Education. As such, the religious education classroom was understood to automatically 'set up' a context that minimised affective learning in response to the artworks. This interpretation was reinforced when the classroom experience of seeing artworks was compared with the more positive experiences gained from the cathedral, gallery and computer lab. Because the Internet was accepted as a familiar resource they enjoyed using, it provided a means of 'letting go' resistance to Religious Education as such, and adopting a more willing attitude to respond to the artworks. By accessing the World Wide Web through the Internet, the students could explore and ask questions of personal meaning they might be unwilling to raise in a traditional classroom setting. The freedom and independence built into the process of this part of the research study seemed to suit them. It was almost as if they were not doing class work but just searching for and discussing their selected images in a comfortable and familiar format which promoted affective learning beyond that of the focus group (Appendix C, p. 252). An essential part of this process was the teacher's role as a facilitator and not as an initiator or director of discussion or reflection; the students themselves had demonstrated a capacity to manage that role. Consequently, and in terms of

future planning, once the group had broached questions of meaning there, an opportunity existed to draw them into more structured components of curriculum, even to share in the design of associated, developmental work.

In light of the interpretations of this finding, the benefits gained from curriculum developed for Religious Education which explicitly addressed affective learning for religious and spiritual experience via artworks, was evident. Freed from a context which carried particular connotations for Religious Education, such as the classroom, experiences of artworks in other locations could be less guarded to promote affective learning for questions of personal meaning.

Meaning Mediated by College Culture

The second theme, *meaning mediated by college culture*, referred to the intersection of these participants' experiences and perceptions of attitudes to Religious Education at Augustine's with the constitutive dimension of religious meaning carried by the artworks.

The richness of the constitutive dimension of religious meaning carried by the artworks promoted a conscious development in the religious outlook of participants and also identified, in their opinion, gaps in their religious learning at the college. The artworks which explored the Crucifixion, for instance, offered them another way of seeing and experiencing that event from the perspective of suffering. This was in contrast to their perceived schooling in the Crucifixion which minimised the human dimension of Christ's suffering and which emphasised the Resurrection. For some participants in particular, this alternative experience of the Crucifixion via art resonated with their life experiences. As such, it challenged and extended their spiritual reflections, and their self-understanding. At

the very least consideration of factors which constituted their self-understanding, was extended.

From another perspective, the constitutive dimension of meaning carried by some of the artworks also resonated positively with the participants' religious learning and social justice experiences at college. Given time, space and the context of Religious Education, members of the focus group, for the first time, 'read' Leunig's drawings (exhibited at the Gallery) differently (Appendix C, p. 193). They identified religious commentary in his drawings inferring enrichment of their perceptions of religious learning from college. Asked specifically about the drawings they tagged 'religious', focus group members identified (unexpectedly for them) those linked with social justice, racism, prejudice and "how to be real" (Appendix C, p. 194). Inferred (in light of the context) from the participants' responses, was that school life and life outside school had intersected at the point of Christian ideals raised in a classroom, and then identified in drawings for general consumption. This inference was important for curriculum development for its indication that participants had independently begun to develop positive attitudes and make meaningful connections with a religious dimension experienced both in art and in the catholic nature of Religious Education. The participants' surprise in their discovery of religious meaning in Leunig's drawings identified a gap in their conscious understanding of the connection between Religious Education, spirituality, self-understanding and 'the way I behave in the world'. The findings indicated that this perceived gap was being addressed via the participants' experiences of artworks and subsequent discussions of them.

In relation to the particular context of Augustine's and the opinions of the focus group, this finding also pointed to gaps in the scope of transmission of religious values and practices at the college. It indicated that focus group members identified college culture and Religious Education with students being brought into 'the way we *really* do things around here', that is, into a sub culture which rejected, ignored or was apathetic to religious values and practices — popularly referred to as 'peer-pressure'. Anecdotally speaking, this type of sub-culture was commonly recognised in religious education classrooms and was mentioned in focus group discussions.

This observation supported Welbourne's (2001, p. 59) suggestion that colleges erroneously continued to assume a common discourse of Catholicism for students. They assumed that students could be brought as functioning members (enculturated) into the existing patterns of belief even against the competing need of other cultures (religious and secular). Together with evidence of student disinterest in the institutional Church (de Souza, 2001, p. 72), these considerations indicated how disconnected students might be from a culture founded in explicit and particular religious affiliation. In many instances therefore, it seemed that Religious Education held little or no meaning for them, and a sense of alienation developed. Surrounded by their peers, many of whom thought and felt the same way, the *real* culture of attitudes towards Religious Education subsequently developed into one of disaffection. Given those considerations for senior students, the potential for the 'normal culture' to fail and the 'real culture' to prevail was strong.

By means of its curriculum design, this research study acknowledged and provided at least one way of addressing the issues discussed above. Given the scope of sites and artworks developed for curriculum in this research study, provision was made for the rich

diversity of students and the diversity of their cultural backgrounds. In the pursuit of personal meaning, the process of this research study respected and allowed for various responses including apathy, a claimed acceptance, or rejection of God — but within the boundaries of respect for self and others.

Another aspect of this finding — *meaning mediated by college culture* — to emerge referred to focus group perceptions that students at Augustine's were told what to believe in religious education classes. The inference drawn from this perception was that Religious Education 'turned (many) students off'. Given that in many instances students experienced a general sense of disinterest, scepticism or even bewilderment as they entered the religious education classroom, their minds were already closed. To a great degree, the sub-culture had already imbued them with the understanding that they would not be hearing or learning anything new. A commonly held perception was that teachers were looking for the 'right' answers relating to questions of meaning and belief, which in turn contributed to an understanding that the students' opinions and beliefs did not count.

Contributory factors to these perceptions included the compulsory nature of Religious Education and the difficulty for students to accept that Religious Education could be approached critically. This latter point was not unreasonable. Speaking from an historical perspective, religious education teachers have emerged from a background of personal commitment to 'the faith' but not necessarily academic expertise in Religious Education. Their commitment coloured by their own life experiences has placed them in the religious education classroom. As well, many of these teachers have filled the gaps, especially for colleges in remote regions, where adequate and qualified staffing continues to be a problem. These factors remain influential in many contemporary classrooms and colour

the responses of students to Religious Education. In accord, student exposure to and engagement with a variety of beliefs, practices and life-styles has made their presence in class more challenging for teachers which, together with a current requirement for teachers to become more academically accountable, has placed increasing strains and demands on them both professionally and personally (Hargreaves, 1994). Given the situation described, weakness in an academically based program that could offer a critical stance in Religious Education has been an increasing concern for many teachers. The academic credentials of a teacher would influence her or his capacity for teaching the subject in terms of the accuracy and consistency of formal content.

In light of these factors, it was not unreasonable to accept any student's scepticism in relation to Religious Education. Consequently, if students were unable or unwilling to accept that Religious Education was not concerned with indoctrination — as the findings indicated — their resistance to it intensified. In light of the preceding discussion, this research study has offered an alternative way to approach Religious Education.

This thesis proposed that artworks both expressed and evoked multiplicity in responses. The artworks by their nature resisted any effort to contain them to singular expressions or interpretations and therefore reflection upon them allowed for personal and diverse responses — coercion free — from the students engaged. Although, in the first instance, such a process for Religious Education may or may not have been either a comfortable or familiar undertaking for them, it offered the students the possibility of experiencing and exploring personal meaning unhindered by any sense of indoctrination or negative peer pressure. In doing so it also negated any suggestion that everyone had to understand God in the same way.

Relevance and the Voice of the Other

The third theme to emerge as a finding for this research study, *relevance and the voice of the 'other'* identified a shift in constitutive self-understanding for focus group members away from the predominantly subjective. A shift of this nature was apparent in comparisons made between initial focus group discussions and those which followed.

Initially, the participants' expressed relatively fixed and limited understanding of what constituted religious art, and this limited understanding coloured their religious and spiritual outlooks. In the unfolding of curriculum designed for this research study however, their understanding developed and reflected positive change. Deeper questions of meaning emerged in relation to the artworks and what the artist was saying, and those questions reflected a more objective outlook; in this way the communicative dimension of the artworks (the religious expressions of others) informed the constitutive development of the participants (the religious self-understanding in relation to others). This development happened as the focus group consciously responded to layers of meaning in the artworks which led them to respect the 'other's view'. This finding suggested that others and their artworks brought the participants to a deeper understanding of the subject matter and the self in a conscious 'opening of the eyes' for critiquing and respecting difference.

The process of religious and spiritual development captured and described in the finding for this theme accorded with Lonergan's (1972) transcendental method. Identified was the focus group's attentiveness to the artworks and subsequently their intelligent, reasonable and responsible pursuit of religious meaning conveyed by the artworks. This was an enhancing experience of Religious Education for the participants wherein Religious Education was perceived as relevant and meaningful. From the perspective of focus group

members, art from the world outside the classroom had mediated religious meaning related to teaching and learning from inside the classroom but in a challenging way. The artworks had extended the boundaries of meaning established at college; had related to the participants' own life experiences; and had provoked questions of significance regarding what really mattered and where God fitted in. Participants for instance commented upon and agreed over society's devaluing or having no concept of Jesus (Appendix C, pp. 238, 239). Their statements implied a sense of loss for society in general. The suggestion was that Jesus' real meaning had been 'lost' and that for many he had become little more than a figure relegated to exhibitions or museums. There was a tendency for instance for people to wear crosses around their necks but for no religious intention or purpose; the cross had simply become a manufactured shape (Appendix C, p. 239).

In accord with the participants' observations, the claim could be made that although a Christian mindset continues to provide the predominant, contemporary cultural context, Christian meaning for that culture has been significantly diminished. Given the realm of influence from such a trend in terms of society generally and religious education classrooms specifically, the findings implied that participants' experiences of Religious Education benefited from the curriculum format of this research study. As their interaction with artworks and each other became more familiar, the participants became more confident, less defensive and able to learn from others. In this way, they began to connect their learning from Religious Education with the religious dimension of 'real life'; in other words, the focus group saw that art reflected real life thus extending their religious learning. Engagement with alternative platforms for matters religious also facilitated a sense of connectedness with 'bigger issues' for the focus group; empathy for images and emotional responses to them, for example, were shown to lead to feelings of connectedness

and subsequent questions of meaning in relation to and beyond the religious education classroom.

The finding represented by this theme *relevance and the voice of the other* also pointed to development in the affective learning of the focus group — a conclusion with particular benefits for Religious Education at Augustine's. Members of the focus group had expressed their perception of the negative influence of peer pressure for Religious Education at the college. In the opinion of participants, the demonstration of a general detachment, unwillingness, or mind-set against religious education classes either limited or quickly brought to conclusion many attempted discussions leading to religious insights. These perceptions of focus group members were indicated in Hay:

> It is almost as if a shifting into that mode offers a necessary refuge from exposing the vulnerable world of personal relatedness to an outsider. We have seen that the children are already aware that there is a social taboo on speaking about spirituality (1998, p. 143).

Accordingly, the focus group members inferred that even though Religious Education had held relevance for them they had been reluctant to engage explicitly on a personal level, in classes throughout the year. The every day constraints of the classroom were difficult to break down.

This research study was designed, at least in part, to attend to that dilemma of the religious education classroom. The communicative and constitutive dimensions of meaning carried by art offered students alternative access to the possibility of God's self-communication. Essentially, given the specific context, the process of this curriculum design protected students from having to declare themselves before a classroom of their peers. It facilitated a process for students to pursue meaning on a personal level without a requirement for public declarations. The small group size for discussion sessions also

safeguarded students. Small groups allowed greater ease for individuals to speak and to be heard, and minimised any negative peer-pressure that caused students either to disengage, or mask their interest with the affective and aesthetic dimensions of learning. In this a 'safe' cultural environment for affective learning in spirituality was achievable.

The dynamic of small group discussions also freed students from any perceived need to learn dispassionately. The findings indicated for instance, how interactive, energised and enjoyable focus group communication was for the participants (Appendix C, pp. 239, 244). The small group dynamic allowed teachers to facilitate learning without controlling it, thus promoting the students' own consciousness of their learning in the light of the language and culture from which it emerged (Lonergan, 1972, p. 14; Hay, 1998, p. 155). In these ways the vulnerability of the students to being ridiculed, marginalised or excluded in a whole class situation was lessened.

The participants' receptivity to the ideas, opinions and interpretations of others, described in a small, focus group dynamic offered positive prospects for curriculum development in Religious Education at Augustine's. A college like Augustine's, given its geographical location as a regional college for boys, relatively removed from broader, national, ethnic and cultural issues, offered a certain protection for the students. The protected nature of that environment was cloaked in forms consistent with notions of 'establishment' for regional or country Victoria. A sporting culture, for instance, and more specifically, a football culture, has been an experience of the history of Augustine's. The limited cultural mix of students, mainly Caucasian, has had, at the very least, an expressed Christian orientation. Consideration of these points offered strong anecdotal support in

understanding the limitations of the culture of Augustine's for engaging with difference on many levels.

Consideration of these points in conjunction with the findings for this theme resonated with Tacey's (1997) critique of 'true' masculinity, understood to include an internal suppression of beauty and aesthetics, and an external suppression and domination 'of women, gay men, and all those who fail to demonstrate or express hegemonic masculine powers' (p. 197). Accordingly, this finding of the research study identified a need for providing students at Augustine's with scope for interaction with a larger moral and spiritual environment. Given these reflections and an implied need for students to develop personally in terms of awareness and respect for 'other', the sequence of sessions described in this research study, offered a way to lift students out of their 'comfort zones'. Just as artworks offered greater scope for impact and interpretation when seen in different locations, similarly, students benefited from being 'dropped into' different contexts to provide them with other ways of seeing. This disruption to their usual experience of Religious Education could underpin, as well as renew their sense of community, in the sharing and management of new and challenging experiences. As a consequence of the constitutive meaning conveyed by artworks, students could be more receptive to personal development and its affective domain characteristics including: attitudes, emotions, values, spirituality, morality, self-esteem and aesthetic sense.

Given this potential for personal development, the participants' sharing of experiences, memories, attitudes and ideas within the group dynamic of this research study, could also contribute to the personal development of a sense of belonging and optimism, and the lessening of any personal sense of isolation and fear. The focus group's experiences of the

artworks and their related discussions had already indicated their engagement with these deeper issues associated with the inner, spiritual life. The possibility for Religious Education to provide for this type of experience on a broader scale could lead to the students making connections with the tradition previously unimagined — such as through its ethical dimension wherein conscious connections were made between a person's beliefs and the influence of those beliefs for behaviours. From this ethical perspective and theologically speaking, God's grace or self-communication was offered to the person as a task to be performed. Inferred from this moral imperative was that a student's religious experience of artworks could disturb them positively. Insofar as the acceptance of God's gift was 'veri-fied' (made genuine) in and through an ethical response constituted by mutual love through justice, liberation, mercy and forgiveness, students could express authenticity in a harmony of these dispositions with their lived behaviours.

Communication and Formation

The fourth finding, characterised by the theme, *communication and formation,* identified development in the self understanding of members of the focus group and the implications from this developed self understanding for community. In particular this theme resonated with the communicative and constitutive dimensions of meaning carried by artworks, marked by the related, conscious learning of the participants.

The finding was that art communicated meaning of a religious nature for focus group members and was accessed affectively and to various degrees, by the participants. The religious meaning communicated by artworks was also facilitated via the dynamic of the focus group, inferring that the communication of meaning and learning was student directed, heuristic and progressive.

The interactive peer-learning and formation offered via the curriculum for this research study was fundamental to effective pedagogical practice, evidenced in the claim made by Mercer & Foster (2001) that teaching was more than the transmission of knowledge. This finding supported a proposal of this research study that art could mediate religious meaning and provide for different ways of knowing via an emphasis on affective learning. The strategy of small group discussions for this research study required in turn the provision of secure learning environments supportive of a collaborative building of knowledge for students ─ also highlighted by the finding.

In light of this understanding, religious literacy emerged as a factor for consideration in the communicative and constitutive dimensions of meaning carried by art. However, any development of discipline-related language offered both possibilities and constraints for religious learning. While a broadening vocabulary was valuable in assisting participants to capture their experiences with words, such an expansion virtually contradicted the unique experience of art itself. As well, any transmission of terminology offered to students from teachers, often unavoidable in the natural flow of discussion, was nevertheless understood as value-laden and influential.

The complexity of language alluded to here, was interpreted by Hay (2001), both as a human, biological need for communication; and as an instrumental facilitator of meaning. Previously as a co-researcher with Hay, Nye suggested that the need for communication was the domain of the spiritual and that this 'relational consciousness' was the core of children's spirituality (Hay & Nye, 1998). The understanding described coincided with Groome's 'positive anthropology' of individuals (1996, pp. 108-110). The research undertaken by Hay & Nye (1998), although located in contemporary Britain with a pre-

teen cohort of children, explored various themes relevant to the finding of communication and formation for this research study. Relational consciousness, for example, was understood in terms of its reflected patterns, delineated by Nye in terms of:

1. An unusual level of *consciousness* or perceptiveness, relative to other passages of conversation spoken by that child;
2. Conversation expressed in a context of how the child *related* to things, other people, him/herself, and God (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 113).

Focus group discussions from which the findings emerged for this research study reflected these described patterns. Comprehensively, focus group discussions reflected a progressive shift from descriptions to interpretations of artworks, heuristically achieved and often insightful in nature. As a result of this progressive learning the findings reflected a developed consciousness of God and others by focus group members.

Nye (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 113) described this sense of consciousness or relationship as 'distinctly reflective', allowing that the child, in particular contexts, was aware of their thought processing. An objective insight into their subjective responses was important because their self-awareness as 'subject' encouraged an appreciation of the world in relational terms (Hay & Nye, 1998, p. 114). Nye's discussion of those terms correlated in turn, with Lonergan's transcendental method (Lonergan, 1972, p. 14) in so far as both addressed a person's conscious appropriation of meaning. Transcendental method addressed the person's discovering within her or his own experience that they were 'intending subjects' engaged with questions of deeper meaning. Subsequently, as intending subjects, individuals grew in self-awareness of their process for knowing and with this self-understanding others could be encouraged to share in the process, significantly contributing to the communicative dimension of meaning (Lonergan, 1972). The findings

identified this developed self-awareness for focus group members when the art caught their attention and provided a source and perspective for reflection. Discussion sessions offered personal insights related to the artworks that were shared, considered, weighed up, judged and translated into various behaviours, including greater demonstrated respect for the beliefs of others.

In relation to language as a facilitator of meaning, Hay (2001) differentiated between 'oral' people and 'literate' people. The first group was described as existing in the 'here and now' with language tied to daily concrete experience. A colour, brown for example, might be described as 'goat's dung brown'. The second group, literate people, were less restricted by the limits of language because literacy extended memory, movement into abstraction, the private world and individuality. For such a group, the colour brown might be described as 'shale brown'. This distinction between the groups had nothing to do with intelligence and everything to do with the possibilities made available through language.

The first implication for the students was that it would be difficult for them to describe a spiritual experience if they did not have appropriate language, evidenced for example, when the students struggled to offer the 'right answers' in responses to questions (Appendix C, p. 235). Unfamiliar with the process they had experienced, and unable to locate appropriate language to adequately capture their experiences, they resorted to a recognised classroom format and a teaching and learning style perceived as seeking the right answers to the right questions.

The second implication was that the value of a spiritual experience was beyond measure and beyond words. Just as the greatness of an artwork resided in its potential and

possibility for affect and interpretation, conceptual reflections would always fail to capture the experience (Appendix C, pp. 241, 242). It would be possible for instance, to talk about God without being spiritual, similarly, students familiar with religious language could use it as a means of cutting themselves off from the reality of their own experience, talking instead in a disconnected way about religious 'facts' learned in class. The fact of the students talking about God would not prove a personal relationship with God (cf. Lovat, 2002). The curriculum design for this research study recognised both the limitations and difficulties inherent to articulations of God. How much easier the work of the religious education teacher would be if words alone captured God! So narrow a hold on God would never be possible however, particularly in relation to Lonergan's concept of God as 'unrestricted understanding' — always exceeding human grasp (Beer, 2002, p. 92).

A key intention of this research study, therefore, was to explore alternative mediations of God. As such it questioned the emphasis placed upon outcomes based education where the cognitive domain, as a way of knowing, dominated, and considered instead curriculum developed around a religious experience mediated via artworks. A learning experience of this nature which emphasised the affective domain might in turn 'move the human heart' towards God (Garcia-Rivera, 1999) in an emotional relationship with an invisible sacred presence. For those who experienced the relationship it could be real, transformative and complete (Tacey, 2000, p. 17).

Variety and Freedom

The fifth theme *variety and freedom* identified the enhanced religious learning that occurred for participants as a consequence of the range of artworks offered for this research study and its mode of student-directed learning. This finding identified the

importance of variety and freedom for many reasons. Firstly, variety and freedom minimised what the students perceived as teacher choice and bias, such as with the classroom sessions, when no choice of artworks was available to the students. Secondly, as indicated by the finding, the eclectic mix of artworks available to participants alleviated pressures related to 'having to know answers'. The finding showed the students' valuing choice and the time to reflect and draw their own meaning from the artworks. This freedom to choose and reflect from a range of images also promoted insights and understandings from images previously unseen and unimagined, with inferences for the nurturing of participants' 'religious imagination' as part of the process of curriculum designed for this research study. The religious imagination, according to Harris (1999), allowed that art evoked and communicated complex meanings non-verbally; a concept related to Pauly's (1976, p. 88) suggestion that religious awareness in fact required the viewer's being 'cut loose' from any customary identification of the religious with conceptual and historical-narrative language.

Implications from this discussion for curriculum development included that the students' exposure to variety in terms of artworks could draw from them personal and empathetic responses to the subject matter. In turn, students' capacities to extrapolate meaning from artworks indicated their potential to broaden their perspectives from the narrow margin to the wider horizon. In this circumstance art, as a visible and tangible extension of the creation, was employed for more than the sake of reason and could be appropriated sacramentally in terms of an acquisition of the spiritual through the personal.

The finding also indicated the progressive nature of the sessions experienced (in terms of increased freedom to determine their directions and choices) as part of this research study

contributed significantly to the students' religious and spiritual appropriation and development. The idea of freedom encompassed movement, as well as the opportunity to choose and discuss artworks for themselves; the students had a sense of being in control. While the religious imagination defined by Harris (1998) offered an understanding of the different ways students might engage with artworks, there was nothing prescriptive that dictated the way artworks had to be understood. By virtue of the fact that the artworks were not restricted to a singular expression, style, interpretation or location, students were permitted a personal and diverse response, in freedom. The findings showed no evidence of the students feeling manipulated in any way. The strongest indication was the need for a staggering of experiences which facilitated the development of a peer culture which promoted learning. Surprisingly, the classroom was considered a good starting location for the initial viewing of artworks and was understood to have prepared the students for the increasing autonomy offered in subsequent locations.

This chapter has briefly covered the process for drawing findings from the data and has discussed an interpretation of the findings as themes. The content of the themes reflected the developmental nature of the conscious religious and spiritual experience of participants in response to artworks as components of an enhancement process for Religious Education. Drawing from this discussion and interpretation of findings, Chapter Seven presents an interpretative overview, conclusions and recommendations for this research study. Further, Chapter Seven outlines the significance of this research study together with its potential for future development for curriculum in Religious Education.

Chapter 7
SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION OF RESULTS

Purpose of the Research Restated

In light of the discussion and interpretation of findings detailed in Chapter Six, Chapter Seven presents an interpretative overview of the research study, together with conclusions and recommendations. The purpose of this research study was to argue for a curriculum design in Religious Education which facilitated art as a mediator of beauty in the theological sense. It emerged from a number of factors, these included: experiences of teaching and learning in the religious education classroom and the (general) disaffection of students for Religious Education; a conviction of the limitations of current, outcomes-based Religious Education to address the mystery of God, and for those limitations to 'dull the voice of revelation'; dissatisfaction with the peripheral place assigned to the aesthetic, affective domain of learning in Religious Education; the inspiration of the theological underpinning of this research study — an adaptation of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics — and a return to the importance of beauty for Catholic thinking and Religious Education.

Accordingly, this research study promoted the aesthetic mode as a dimension of affective learning in complementarity with cognitive learning. It also promoted a curriculum design for re-engaging senior secondary students with Religious Education. In place of a teaching and learning style that began with dogma then developed classroom strategies to support it, the curriculum design for this research study invited the students into an experience of art

that promoted a natural emergence of religious meaning from an experience that could be grounded in Catholic Tradition.

Design of the Research

The research described in this thesis was built on a constructivist view of knowledge which allowed that reality was socially constructed and characterised by "methodological eclecticism, an hypothesis-free orientation and implicit acceptance of the natural scheme of things" (Burns, 1991, p. 12). This suggested that human beings did not find or discover knowledge already 'out there', but that they constructed or formed knowledge from a particular context (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). The Constructivist epistemological assumption was suited to this research study because of its basic precept of the social construction of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and its incorporation of hermeneutics, broadly defined as a way to interpret the meaning of something from a certain standpoint or situation — which also acknowledged bias. Thus, and in relation to this research study, the social construction of reality concerned the participants' construction of religious and spiritual meaning derived from their contextualised experience of artworks.

The employment of qualitative methods, distinctive in the Constructivist paradigm in this research study, allowed emphasis to be placed on observation and discussion for this research design. Case study provided the research methodology and focus group the data gathering instrument. The interactive approach of the research design allowed meaning to be built via the various perspectives presented, exchanged, critiqued and discussed by participants. Ultimately the findings drawn from the data contributed to a classification and description which was considered representative of experience and learning of the participants (Eichelberger, 1989, p. 9). In resisting the universal claim of scientific method

and a positivist approach, the research design of this research study focused upon religious and spiritual meaning, the non-measurable nature of which left its claim for legitimacy outside the realm of scientific method.

An Interpretative Overview

The findings (themes) for this research study identified 'occurrence in progress' in the religious and spiritual development of focus group participants initiated by their experiences of artworks. In light of those findings and in bringing this research study to a conclusion, the interpretative overview relates the findings to the thesis question and the secondary considerations and questions for this research study:

To ascertain if visual art can be a medium for religious and spiritual experience for post-compulsory adolescents to enhance Religious Education.

The secondary considerations and questions included:

I.   What is the understanding of the theological aesthetics that grounds this research?

II. In terms of the theory of Lonergan, how is art understood as a 'carrier of religious meaning'?

III. Is there a relationship between art as a carrier of religious meaning and a religious and spiritual experience?

IV. How can the learning environment and strategies enhance these experiences in a Catholic college's post-compulsory religious education program?

V.   How can these experiences contribute to the religious education program?

The Research Question:

In order to address the research question, it was necessary, that a number of 'foreshadowed questions' (Stake, 2000) were identified, questions which would give rise to the research question itself. Because religious and spiritual experience was a focus of this research study, it was necessary to adopt a theological framework as the starting point and so this interpretative overview begins with the secondary considerations and questions for this research study as a lead into a synthesis and conclusion of its results.

Secondary Research Question:

I. What is the understanding of the theological aesthetics that grounds this research?

Having chosen to adopt von Balthasar's (1989b) *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 1. Seeing the form,* for the theological underpinning of this research study, in Chapter Two I reviewed the literature relevant to this framework. This review included concepts particular to the theological aesthetics interpreted in such a way as to establish a 'working relationship' between those concepts and approaches to Religious Education. As a result of the review and the interpretation it provided, the findings for this research study indicated, firstly, that a development of classroom Religious Education which accommodated the theological aesthetics was possible, and secondly, that such an accommodation *re-presented* traditional teaching and learning strategies for Religious Education at the post-compulsory level. In particular, this understanding was conveyed via the findings for *communication and formation*, and *variety and freedom.*

Secondary Research Question:

II. In terms of the theory of Lonergan, how is art understood as a 'carrier of religious meaning'?

In the development of the theological framework for this research, it became evident that an interpretative theological method was also necessary if the data were to be sensibly and meaningfully understood. In accord with Lonergan's method (1972), findings indicated that religious meaning was both carried by artworks and responded to by participants. For some participants, on some occasions, this experience was swifter and more significant than on other occasions. Also in accord with Lonergan's method, the findings showed that at times, the religious meaning carried by art was significantly realised by means of the heuristic, student-directed nature of the learning experience. Findings for the theme *suitability of religious imagery and art viewing environments* attested to the nature of this learning experience as did the theme *communication and formation.*

Secondary Research Question:

III. Is there a relationship between art as a carrier of religious meaning and a religious and spiritual experience?

This question, although highly significant was not quantifiable. It promoted the development of the particular design of this research study lodged in the Constructivist paradigm wherein the social construction of reality concerned the participants' construction of religious and spiritual meaning derived from their contextualised experience of artworks and subsequent discussion of those artworks in a 'safe' environment. Given the specific and limited context of this research study — with four participants in an all boys' college — the findings indicated an 'occurrence of progress' for each focus group member. This occurrence of progress was interpreted in accord with Lonergan's method (1972) as an instance of religious and spiritual experience that

deepened the participants' pursuit of questions of meaning. In every instance the findings showed that the participants' experiences of the artworks promoted this development and consequently facilitated the linking of art a carrier of religious meaning with religious and spiritual experience. Findings for *the voice of the other* contributed significantly to this understanding.

Secondary Research Question:

IV. How can the learning environment and strategies enhance these experiences in a Catholic college's post-compulsory religious education program?

In Chapter Three, I reviewed the approaches to Religious Education which provided the context for this research study. It revealed that a historically conservative, catechetical approach was employed for Religious Education at Augustine's. In contrast, the findings for this research study, particularly those for *meaning mediated by college culture* and *variety and freedom,* seemed to indicate the appropriateness of the curriculum design of this research study, which focused, instead, on evangelisation. The focus group participants responded favourably to the learning environment and strategies in terms of their attitudes, behaviours and responses. Inferred from the findings was the respect the participants felt in directing their own learning and that this approach left them more receptive to Religious Education generally.

Secondary Research Question:

V. How can these experiences contribute to the religious education program?

Overall, the findings reflected surprise from focus group members in relation to the richness of learning for Religious Education. They were shocked to experience religious art outside the college environment and to realise the links between the religious meaning conveyed by art and 'real life'; significantly, once identified, the participants' levels of

interest for Religious Education in general, were raised. The findings indicated that the learning environment and strategies provided for this research study contributed to the religious education program because they were alternative, creative and also because they shed light on current classroom practice. This occurred when, for instance, Leunig's drawings at the gallery added value and meaning to Augustine's social justice program and vice-versa.

Conclusions of the Research Study

This research study has nominated a specific and narrow field for investigation (if visual art can be a medium for religious and spiritual experience for post-compulsory adolescents to enhance Religious Education) in relation to a specific context Augustine's (a Catholic secondary college for boys). As such, the findings were pertinent to the students and curriculum of the school.

In response to the research question and generally speaking, positive findings for this research study were strongly indicated for those particular students who participated. Indications from the findings were that the participants had begun to develop a more personal sense of and relationship with God and they had expanded their vision and developed a respect for the religious outlook and expression of others. In this light, the participants had displayed openness for wider exposure to the religious outlook and expression of others, in a realization that very different contexts can shape understanding. Through their demonstrated understanding of the capacity for art to mediate religious meaning, the participants also expressed a sense of how personal belief can be informed though engagement with others, and religions or religious beliefs are not static entities. The participants' discovery that religious belief is life-related contributed to their raised

consciousness of personal belief in God and that such a belief held a potential for personal change and development. The findings also strongly indicated the participants' developed consciousness of the value of a religious tradition.

In general, the positive findings of this research study pointed to the importance of affective learning for senior male students particularly in light of the demonstrated capacity of those students to respond. Future planning for religious education curriculum can be informed by these findings. Accordingly, recommendations generated from the findings of this research study are offered below.

Recommendations emerging from the Research Study

Recommendations emerging from the research study require that the following points are paid attention:

1. In planning and developing religious education curricula for senior secondary male students, consideration needs to be given to the gender specific context of the student body and the implications of that context for schooling in general and Religious Education in particular; it is significant and requires attention.

2. Given that parents can no longer be assumed to practise the role of first educators of their children in Religious Education, it is important to make their children's learning in Religious Education accessible to them in some way so that religious learning is promoted as relevant to and consistent with 'real life' beyond the classroom. In light of social trends and a decline in institutional religious engagement, the facilitation of shared learning in aspects of Religious Education with and for family members needs to be developed. These entry points could be

experiential and discursive in nature (such as those developed for this research study) and could use locations beyond the classroom, which would be friendly to and inclusive of parents — characteristics which are not always present or perceived in school classrooms. In addition, if learning sessions were developed as they were for this research study, without need for prior learning, both students and family members could access them.

3. An examination of recent developments in teaching and learning is essential to curriculum developed for Religious Education. All learning programs need to be responsive to new theories and approaches in education. While curriculum emphasising cognitive learning fits the 'measurable' nature of an outcomes based structure, curriculum focused upon affective learning has the potential for learning experiences that are open-ended in nature but with effectiveness indicators. Learning of this type would incorporate monitoring to determine that program requirements were met. Emphasis upon particular modes of learning, affective or cognitive, would not place one over and above the other but would recognise the differences and need for both.

4. An examination of student engagement with a view to providing for the development of the whole person — their heart and their mind — is advised for curriculum development in Religious Education. Curriculum developed for Religious Education must attend to affective as well as cognitive learning in a reflective, challenging exploration of Catholic teaching, culture, practice and worship. Any religious education program ought to be examined for its capacity to provide for and evaluate learning opportunities of this type and those opportunities,

when offered as a component of the regular classroom program, could encourage as well as heighten a student's sense of personal worth and achievement — even extending to religious and spiritual experience for them.

5. Growth does not happen automatically, it is a process and the implications of life-long-learning ought to be investigated. This implies there is need for Religious Education to provide extended pathways in learning for students, especially in the post-compulsory years. Consequently, to be effective, a religious education program ought to recognise the emerging autonomy and independence of senior students and the impact of information technology on their learning. Curriculum should be life-giving, inspiring and transforming, providing appropriate skills and perspectives for life-long meaning-making. In capturing the attention of students, it should have the capacity to provide for an exploration of current emphases within the religious education domain including personal spirituality and ethical living.

6. Recognition of the need to address the spirituality of students together with a commitment to provide for that need is required. In other words, Religious education curriculum which explicitly declares an intention to encourage development of a student's spirituality must provide both a cognitive and ethical framework to house that spirituality. In the current social climate with its fads, where many young people seek a sense of belonging, the Catholic school has the capacity as well as the institutional responsibility to promote a community grounded in the tradition which can offer students a sense of authentic spiritual belonging.

Significance of the Research Study

This research study provided learning in the aesthetic and affective dimensions of Religious Education. The positive results indicated that senior male students would respond to learning of this type in an environment conducive to personal challenge, a sense of security and respectful discussion. Nurturing spirituality through aesthetic experience is beneficial and promotes growth. In relation to this research study, aesthetic experience helped students to develop the imagination and challenge preconceptions about what being spiritual or religious means. This growth was achieved via teaching and learning experiences that moved beyond the language of reasoning and explanation alone. It negated a catechetical emphasis interpreted by many as indoctrination and recognised that senior college students require challenge, scope and a context for meaning if they are to be engaged in Religious Education. Therefore, this research study was not concerned with concepts and ideas that were taught but with the provision of an environment conducive to reflection upon an experience in the religious sense. In particular, this research study was significant for its attention to issues associated with boys' education and a great need to develop new visions to lead and guide young people into a larger moral and spiritual consciousness.

This research study argued for a broadening in the understanding and development of curriculum for Religious Education at the senior secondary level of schooling. In so far as Religious Education is about students entering into the dialogue with what they experience and what they learn, in order to articulate what they believe and how they choose to live in the world, this research study offered such an opportunity via aesthetic experience and the transformative nature of beauty. This understanding and approach could lead to Religious

Education being refreshed and reinvigorated as colleges embrace the dimension of the aesthetic mode of theological understanding and of teaching and learning.

Future research

In accord with the design of this research study, the construction of innovative, educational philosophies that embrace the aesthetic mode and the encouragement of their adoption by teachers is a continuing challenge, and much would hinge on the openness of schools, teachers, students and parents to the new and challenging insights which serious attention to the aesthetic mode would engender. Accordingly, the research study has explicitly related a theological framework with pedagogy for Religious Education to initiate new approaches to Religious Education for post-compulsory students. As such, the research could be a catalyst for religious educators to critically examine curriculum and practices in their own learning environments. Consequently, this research study has the potential to contribute to the ongoing planning and development of appropriate professional learning for Religious Education that would promote effective and desirable Religious Education for students and their families.

Limitations of the Research Study

As this research study took place in a Catholic boys' college, the findings were applicable to the students and curriculum of that college and this study made no claim for the general application of its findings. The school's situation which framed the study and included factors such as its all male student population, its nature as a boarding as well as a day college, its links with a founding religious order and its conservative tradition, limited general application of the outcomes to other colleges and curricula. However, and in spite of the acknowledged limitation of findings, the experience of the focus group for this

research study has raised interesting considerations in relation to boys' affective learning and did provide an important marker and an instance of interest for future developments in religious education curriculum.

In conclusion and given that this research study identified scope for development and improvement in Religious Education which could promote areas for future research it also discerned signs of hope, with evidence of focus group responses, research, theorising and writing for religious education curriculum, all of which provide cause for optimism. The process of employing the religious education curriculum devised for this research study has the potential to encourage the emergence of the theological aesthetics as a frame of reference, and it is offered as part of an ongoing, exciting and challenging process to revivify Religious Education.

ENDNOTES

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[1] In general terms 'gestalt' referred to an organised whole perceived as more than the sum of its parts. In von Balthasar's theology, the *Gestalt Christi* or 'form of Christ' referred to the revelatory form in which all other forms located their true foundation and centre. From this understanding emerged the hermeneutical principal: the theological object, Jesus Christ, provided the means for understanding it. Jesus as the revelatory form (Gestalt) was the way God assumed contours in space and time (O'Donnell, 2000, p. 21).

[2] Also see "The origin of the church on the cross…" (Kehl & Löser, 1997, p. 216).

[3] von Balthasar's use of analogy was intended to provide a broad guiding principal for his theological aesthetic. The principle of analogy was inspired by the text from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) with the understanding that: "No similarity can be found so great but that the dissimilarity is even greater" (DS 806, McBrien, 1989). Given the scope of the Council's statement, its use left space for captivation with and insights from a narrowly defined Christian tradition even as it simultaneously stressed the transcendence of the Christian revelation. Essentially, analogy worked to achieve the meditation upon which von Balthasar's theology depended (cf. Riches & Quash, 1997, p. 137).

[4] AG 13a. See Flannery, A. (Ed). *Vatican Council II – the conciliar and post conciliar documents.* Boston, MA: St Paul's Books and Media.

[5] Intellectual conversion suggests a movement in understanding from appearances to truth. It provides that members of the focus group might 'see' more than the physical structure of an artwork, its colour, composition and subject matter. For members of the focus group, intellectual conversion can provide for a movement in understanding, a grasping of 'truth' via the vehicle of the artwork. The described movement, the grasping of truth, holds the potential to evoke an experience of the transcendent. For further explanation see the chapter on Findings from this research study.

[6] A more detailed discussion of Shared Christian Praxis follows on pp. 78-82.

[7] For a summary in this separation, see Philip Sheldrake, 'Spirituality and theology' in Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden (eds), *Companion Encyclopaedia of Theology* (London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 516-19).

[8] See Bloom, Madaus & Hastings (1981). *Evaluation to Improve Learning.* New York: McGraw-Hill. pp. 296-331. cf. Anderson, L.W., Krathwohl, D.R. et al (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing.* New York: Longman. Chapter 14.

[9] The constitutive function of meaning directed to the human subject is concerned with meaning as it indwells consciousness, to form a certain identity and self-understanding such as what it means to be Christian. The communicative function of meaning is to form, sustain and guide a given group in its communal life such as the Christian orientation of a Catholic school (Lonergan, 1972, p. 265, 292).

[10] Mystery (Gr. 'secret'). Not a merely obscure or inexplicable matter but God's loving plan for human salvation now disclosed through Christ. While definitively revealed in Christ, the mysterious reality of God transcends human reason and comprehension. It is not the human mind that grasps God: the divine majesty grasps us (O'Collins & Farrugia, 2000, pp. 168-9).

APPENDIX A

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne

⊕ ACU National

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Marian de Souza   Ballarat Campus

Co-Investigators: n/a   Ballarat Campus

Student Researcher: Gina Bernasconi   Ballarat Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:
Art in Religious Education: an experiment.

for the period: 1st August 2002 to 1st December 2003
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: V200203 19

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

(i)   that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
- security of records
- compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
- compliance with special conditions, and

(ii)   that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
- proposed changes to the protocol
- unforeseen circumstances or events
- adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: ....*Jan Hayduk*.......................... Date: ...*1/8/02*............
            (Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

(Committee Approval.dot @ 15/10/04)   Page 1 of 1

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARENTS

Title of Project: Playing with the Sacred Seriousness of Art: an investigation into whether art can be a medium for spiritual experience for senior boys in a Catholic College.

Supervisors: Dr. Marian de Souza, Prof. Anthony Kelly & Dr. Peta Goldburg
Student Researcher: Ms. Gina Bernasconi

Program in which enrolled: Doctor of Education.

Dear Parents,

Your son has been invited to participate in a research study that will investigate whether or not artworks of a two-dimensional nature can be a medium for spiritual experience.

The method of research will involve participants viewing and reflecting upon religious artworks within the classroom, at the Cathedral and the Fine Art Gallery. There will be 6 sessions of approximately 20 minutes duration across 3 weeks. These sessions will be part of the Religious Education program and will not take time from any other subject area.

From the Religious Education class of approximately 20 students, there will be an invitation for 4 students to volunteer to form a focus group for a case study. These students will be asked to meet for approximately 30 minutes on the day of each session in order to expand responses to the artworks during an in-depth discussion period.

No inconvenience is envisaged for participants and it is hoped that the research study will provide them with an opportunity to experience their own spiritual depth perhaps for the first time, as well as to come to a deep appropriation of their religious tradition. It recognizes the distinctive needs of boy's education and the place of reflection and artistic experience in such education where young men have the opportunity to develop in areas including communication skills, expression of emotions and cross-cultural respect.

Given the emerging interest in the spiritual dimension of education and the spiritual dimension of being, the findings that emerge from the research study would have the potential to inform educators and policy makers in the area of curriculum development in Religious Education. This may lead to the development of programs that will nurture the spiritual and emotional growth of young people.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Playing with the Sacred Seriousness of Art: an investigation into whether art can be a medium for spiritual experience for senior boys in a Catholic College.

Supervisors: Dr. Marian de Souza, Prof. Anthony Kelly & Dr. Peta Goldburg

Student Researcher: Ms. Gina Bernasconi

I ... . (the participant) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ... .

(block letters)

SIGNATURE .... DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ....

DATE:...... /.?./..?/.0.2.........

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ....

DATE:........ /9 /8 /0 2................

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Participation in the research study is voluntary and participants will be free at any time to withdraw from it without need to justify such a decision. The research study has no impact on assessment or academic progress for any student involved. While the focus group from whom data will be gathered will be known to the researcher and the teacher who is present during interviews (for the purpose of verification), their identity will be protected. Students' names will be replaced by a letter code and all data gathered will be maintained in a secure location. If the contributions of prospective participants are published at a later date anonymity will be maintained and the privacy of the participants respected. Once the research study is completed in accordance with university guidelines, all records will be destroyed.

Any questions regarding this research study should be directed to:

Ms. G. Bernasconi

or

Dr. M. de Souza on 53 365 316
School of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Aquinas Campus
1200 Mair St.
Ballarat 3350

This research study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way your sons have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisors and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of:

Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel: 03 9953 3157
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Aquinas Campus 1200 Mair Street, Ballarat Victoria 3350, Australia • PO Box 650 Ballarat Victoria 3353, Australia
Telephone: (61 3) 5336 5300 Facsimile: (61 3) 5336 5305

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www.acu.edu.au

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Any complaint will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to your son's participation in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to Ms. G. Bernasconi in the addressed envelope provided.

Yours sincerely,
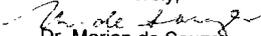
Dr. Marian de Souza
PRINCIPAL SURERVISOR
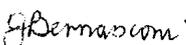
Ms. Gina Bernasconi
STUDENT RESEARCHER

I .... (*the Headmaster*)
have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Headmaster. Any
questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that the
volunteer student participants may take part in this activity, realising that I can withdraw
my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be
published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the
students of   in any way.

NAME OF HEADMASTER: ....
                                                  (block letters)

SIGNATURE ....

               DATE......... ....

- SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

...... *Gunawan* ....   DATE: ...*August 14th : 2002*..

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Playing with the Sacred Seriousness of Art: an investigation into whether art can be a medium for spiritual experience for senior boys in a Catholic College.

Supervisors: Dr. Marian de Souza, Prof. Anthony Kelly & Dr. Peta Goldburg

Student Researcher: Ms. Gina Bernasconi

I .... *(the participant)* have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ... .

(block letters)

SIGNATURE .... DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .... *m - de Louz*

DATE: .....*13 / 8 / 0 2*.......

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: .... *GBernasconi*

DATE: ......*19 / 8 / 02*....................

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Playing with the Sacred Seriousness of Art: an investigation into whether art can be a medium for spiritual experience for senior boys in a Catholic College.

Supervisors: Dr. Marian de Souza, Prof. Anthony Kelly & Dr. Peta Goldburg

Student Researcher: Ms. Gina Bernasconi

I .... (the parent/guardian) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN: ....
(block letters)

SIGNATURE ....
DATE... ... .

NAME OF CHILD . ...
(block letters)

SIGNATURE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

......Dr. MARIAN de SOUZA........ DATE:...19/8/0 2...............

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

.....GBernasconi................... DATE: ...19/8/02...................

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I ,   (the participant aged under 18 years) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18: ....

(block letters)

SIGNATURE ..   .. DATE................................

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....DR M AR I AN ....

DATE:......19/8/...............

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ....Gorman..........................

DATE:.......19/8/02.................

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM FOR PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN AN IN-DEPTH
DISCUSSION AS PART OF A RESEARCH STUDY FOCUS GROUP

Title of Project: Playing with the Sacred Seriousness of Art: an investigation into whether
art can be a medium for spiritual experience for senior boys in a Catholic College.

Supervisors: Dr. Marian de Souza, Prof. Anthony Kelly & Dr. Peta Goldburg

Student Researcher: Ms. Gina Bernasconi

I . ... *(the participant)* have read and understood the
information provided in the Letter for Permission to participate in an in-depth discussion
a part of a focus group. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my
satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time.
I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided
to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....
(block letters)

SIGNATURE . . .. DATE . . ..

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: ..... Δκ MARIAN ......

DATE: ...../9/8/0.2..............

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ...... GBernascom..................................

DATE: ...19/6/02.........................

APPENDIX B

Appendix B

Artworks available for this research study included:

❖ *Medieval*

- Giotto: *Lamentation* c.1305; *Death of St. Francis* c.1320

❖ *Renaissance*

- Masaccio: *Expulsion from the Garde*n 1425; *The Holy Trinity* 1428; *Tribute Money* c.1420

- Mantegna: *The Dead Christ* 1501; Piero Della Francesca: *Resurrection* 1463; Bosch: *The Carrying of the Cross* 1510; *The Garden of Earthly Delights* 1505-10

- Grunewald: *The Isenheim Altarpiece* 1510-15; detail of *The Resurrection* 1510-15

- Bellini: *Pieta*; *The Agony in the Garden* c.1480

- Raphael: *The Sistine Madonna* c.1500

- El Greco: *Penitent Magdalene* c.1600

❖ *Baroque*

- Caravaggio: *Death of the Virgin* 1605-6; *Conversion of St. Paul* 1605-6; *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* c.1602; *Supper at Emmaus*; *Deposition* c.1600; *Calling of St. Matthew* c.1600.

- Jan Vermeer: *Young Woman with Water Jug* c.1665

- Georges de La Tour: *St. Joseph the Carpenter* c.1640; *The Lamentation over St. Sebastian* c.1630

- Rembrandt: *Adoration of the Shepherds*; *Return of the Prodigal* c.1650

❖ *Romanticism:*

- John Martin: *The Great Day of His Wrath* c.1789-1854

- *Pre*-Raphaelites: Rossetti: *Ecce Ancilla Domini* c. 1828-82

- Millias: *Christ in the House of His Parents* or *The Carpenter's Shop* c.1829-1896

❖ *Social Realism:*

- Millet: *The Gleaners* c.1814-75

❖ *Impressionism/post-impressionism*

- James Ensor: *Christ Calming the Storm* 1891

- Monet: *Rouen Cathedral* 1894

- Van Gogh: *A Wheatfield with Cypresses*; *Lilac Bush* c.1865

❖ *Twentieth century*

- Kandinsky: *Allerheiligen* (All Saints) c.1911

- Max Ernst: *Crucifixion* 1913

- Karl Schmidt-Rottluff: *Pharisees* 1912

- Käthe Kollwitz: *Pieta* 1903; *Aus vielen Wunden, blutest Du, O Volk* (From many wounds you bleed, O people) c.1900; *The Widow, 1 & 11* 1922-23; *The Sacrifice* 1922-3; *Karl Liebknecht Memorial* 1919-20; *Mother with Child in Arms* 1910; *Woman and Death* 1910; *Mother and Dead Child*; *The Downtrodden* 1900

- Siqueiros: *El Colagado* (The Hanging One) 1947

- Leonora Carrington: *The Tree of Life* 1917

- Dorothea Tanning: *Guardian angels* 1910

- Mark Rothko: *Black, Brown on Maroon* 1957

- Colin McCahon: *Victory over Death* 1970

- George Mung Mung: *Mary of Warmum* c.1983

- Rover Thomas: *Yari Country* 1989; Harald Duwe: *Last Supper* 1978

- Stanley Spencer: *The Resurrection of the Soldiers* c.1891-1959

- Graham Sutherland: *The Crucifixion* c.1903-80

- Jacek Waltos: *On Both Sides of the Gate* b.1938

- Craigie Aitchison: *Calvary* b.1926

- Horst Sakulowski: *Christbearer (Christophorus)* 1987

❖ *Australian*

- Margaret Preston: *Golgotha* 1950; *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden* 1950

- Arthur Boyd: *Crucifixion, Shoalhaven* 1920; *Pulpit Rock and Black Cockatoos* 1993; *Riverbank with Images*; *Shoalhaven Riverbank, Dawn* 1985; *Starry Night, Shoalhaven River* 1985

Reproductions of images projected for sessions 1, 2 and 4 in the classroom follow:

Session 1: Tuesday 27 August 2001.
Location of data-gathering: Classroom.
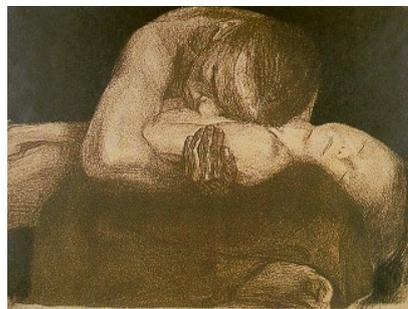
Käthe Kollwitz: *Pieta*
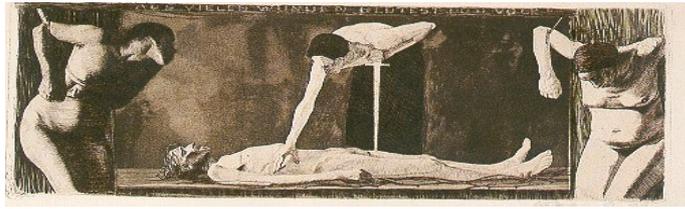
Käthe Kollwitz: *From many wounds you bleed O people*
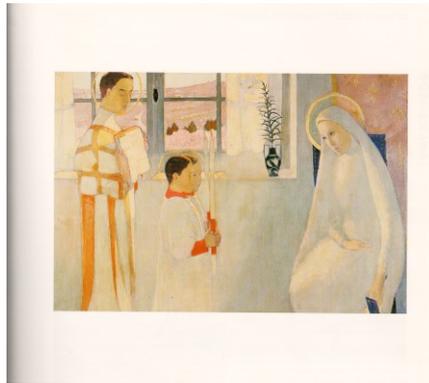
Maurice Denis: *The Catholic mystery*

Detail of *The Catholic mystery*

James Ensor: *Christ calming the storm*

Georges de la Tour: *Jesus and Joseph*

Caravaggio: *Conversion of St. Paul*
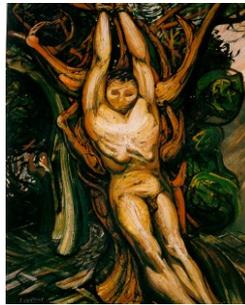
David Alfaro Siqueros: *The hanging one*

Arnulf Rainer: *Wine crucifix*

John Martin: *The great day of his wrath*

Rembrandt: *Adoration of the shepherds*

Caravaggio: *Death of the virgin*

Detail of *Death of the virgin*

**Session 2: Wednesday 28 August 2001.
Location of data-gathering: Classroom.**

Craigie Aitchison: *Calvary*

Graham Sutherland: *The Crucifixion*

Stanley Spencer: *The resurrection of the soldiers*

John Everett Millais: *The carpenter's shop*

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *The Annunciation*

Michelangelo Caravaggio: *Deposition*
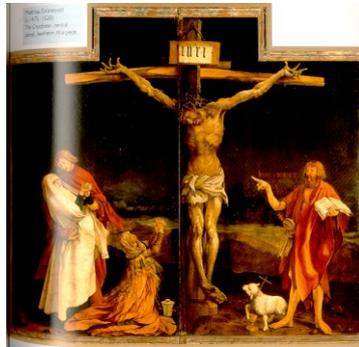
Matthias Grunewald: *Crucifixion*

Horst Sakulowski: *Christbearer* (*Christophorus)*

Arthur Boyd: *Crucifixion, Shoalhaven*

Herbert Falken: *Pregnant man with two others*

Colin McCahon: *Victory over death 2*

Daniel Goldatein: *Icarian II*
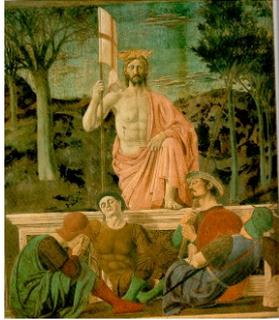
Piero della Francesca: *Resurrection*

Session 4: Friday 6 September 2001.
Location of data-gathering: Classroom.

Horst Sakulowski: *Christbearer (Christophorus)*

Giotto di Bondone: *Death of St. Francis*

Giotto di Bondone: *Lamentation*

Caravaggio: *Deposition*

Caravaggio: *Death of the Virgin*

Caravaggio: Detail

Caravaggio: *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*

Caravaggio: *Conversion of St. Paul*
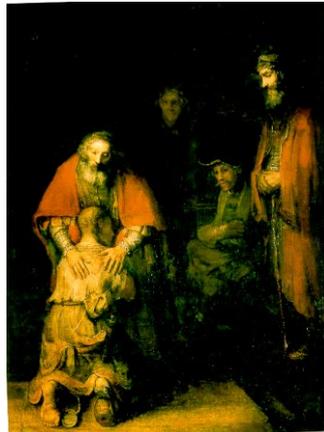
Rembrandt van Rijn: *Return of the Prodigal*

Jacek Waltos: *On both sides of the gate*
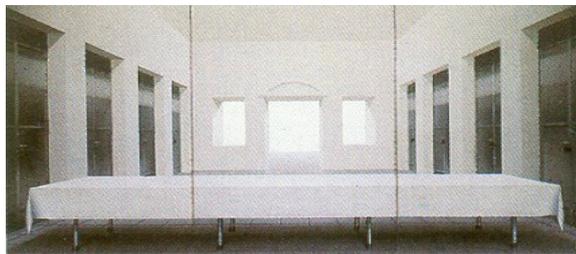
Ben Willikens: *Last Supper*

Harald Duwe*: Last Supper*

Emil Nolde: *Prophet*

Colin McCahon: *Victory over death 2*

APPENDIX C

Appendix C

Focus Group Discussion
Transcript of Questions and Responses
Augustine's Term 3, 2002

Participants: Mac and Red, Ian and Ryan

Margaret Leahy (a senior teacher at Augustine's) attended the discussion sessions as a critical colleague and co-facilitator.

Red: I like geographical images and it [The Great Day of His Wrath] had huge mountains in it and it was a large picture too.

Q: And what did you think Mark?

Mac: Number 3 about the Catholic mysteries and number 6 of Jesus and Joseph, together [were my favourites]. I didn't really like them at all [the first two] and then I got to this [Catholic Mystery] and it was peaceful and Mary in the white and it was simplicity and purity and with the sun coming through the window and the angels, with the candles and everything it was really traditional and it appealed to me. It stuck out after those other ones and number 6 where Jesus was with Joseph in the workshop and he was holding the candle, [it was as if] he was the light of the world and that's it.

Q: And so the same question to you, when those images came up after the other ones are you aware of your first response?

Mac: Probably relieved a bit after seeing all of those kind of…

Q: You…?

Mac: Felt relief, I saw those other ones and I thought this is more what I enjoy looking at. And I could relate to it more as well.

Q: For either of you now, were you aware of any strong response in terms of shock or surprise or joy or empathy? Just from the list can you name any of the works you're aware of? Even thinking back?

Mac: The hanging one, I didn't like that [number 9], number 8 that was Aboriginal. I'm not really sure but it seemed to be Aboriginal and it seemed to me he was hanging from a tree with his arms tied up over above his head. That one, I was shocked that it was in this. [It] related to hanging as if it didn't, it couldn't appear to be God.

Q: So have you any consciousness of being shocked first and then thinking about the picture, or…?

Mac: Yes I was. When I first saw it [The Hanging One]. I [thought] this isn't good.

Q: Okay, as you were just describing it then, your eyes were going wide open and you were physically jerking yourself back.

Mac: Yeah I looked at it and just thought this doesn't appeal to me at all.

Q: Red?

Red: Well I really immediately didn't like the second one From many wounds you bleed O people I didn't understand why the sword was in the picture at all, didn't understand its significance, there was no colour and I think that's what made it gloomy, [with] an angry, sad, evil type sense. And I didn't understand at all the two people at the sides hanging or crucified. I didn't like it at first then after looking at it and scanning it I still didn't like it at all.

Q: So when you say you didn't like it at first are you saying that that was your initial reaction? For either of you it's easier to describe that reaction for the ones you didn't like but the ones you really did

like? Mac, you indicated the traditional Mary and Jesus ones, can you just tell us again what your initial reactions to those were? What are the names of the ones [you liked] from yesterday?

Mac: The Catholic Mystery and Jesus and Joseph. No reaction. [I] accepted that this is religious art and it came up and I saw it and could live with it straight away and I suppose [it was] pleasing in a way, that we weren't getting any more abstract art.

Q: Okay, so immediately it was pleasing.

Mac: Yeah.

Q: And describe how you felt physically.

Mac: Relieved because I didn't have to put up with any more of this.

Q: And before, the ones that you didn't like, you described you eyes opening and…

Mac: It was strange.

Q: And so are you aware of an opposite or different reaction for the ones that pleased you?

Mac: More in terms that I analysed the whole painting. I looked for the finer details [such as] with Jesus holding the candle and I was looking out the window of the Mary one and just examining what was going on outside and I think taking a keen interest in that picture, not shying away from it.

Q: Okay, thank you and Red for you?

Red: Well, along with the tenth picture I also liked the image with Christ calming the storm and it was probably just the initial colours, it was a little abstract but I didn't mind that for some reason, I, it was strange the water wasn't very blue and I'm not fond of water and [it was] dark, that sort of thing and I felt peaceful even though they were on a tidal wave and I related [it] straight away and thought of the parable of Jesus walking on the water with the fishermen and calming the storm.

Q: Are you aware of a physical response before you were thinking about it?

Red: Well yeah, probably.

Q: Can you tell me what that was?

Red: Well first the colours grabbed me. I liked that and then understanding it, it stimulated a bit of thought and that's when the parables came into my thinking.

Q: For today was there any apparent theme that ran through the artworks?

Red: Not all of them but a majority I felt had death, death coming out of them. I thought a little bit disturbing and I felt it showed that Jesus was human and he died for us and that was part of him that he experienced death. While some people ridiculed him others helped him and that recognised what he did but there's a few crucifix pictures there.

Q: So death, dying and the crucifixion [are themes] is that what you're saying?

Red: Yeah I got that vibe coming out of that.

Q: Where's that…what have you linked that with from the past, can you explain where you've been aware of images of that type previously?

Red: Well in a few of the pictures there was on a lot of the faces, there was despair I think and sadness and grieving and I've experienced that from loved ones dying and family members and I know what it feels like.

Q: And even at school, what's your experience with crucifixes and those sorts of images here?

Red: At school?

Q: Yes within your schooling experience. Like they've come up on the screen [the artwork] nothing's been said to you, there's been no writing to indicate to you, you know, this is what you're looking at, yet you know what you've seen. What's your past [experience]? Can you explain how that links with any past educational experiences in the classroom? How has that image been explained to you? How have you learnt about that?

Red: I suppose I probably learned more outside school at least initially. Yeah, I feel that and it doesn't help with peers here, they manipulate what's being said and what's heard and that.

Q: In school?

Red: Yeah in school and that's why I think religion's so much of a hoax because no one [the students] give it a fair go I think if it was singled out it'd work. They just… basically, my decision to come here was on the religious aspect and the decision was made, so I know the importance [of religion] and that it's probably getting older now [speaking of himself] getting to the senior levels you know how it's sort of up to you, ethics, and you write what your own morals are.

Q: So you feel independent in your choices to engage with it or not engage with it [RE]?

Red: Yeah we can go either way we want. We don't have to follow our father or mother or family lines.

Q: Okay given that the theme again was around crucifixion and death, if that's the theme you picked up going through it; in your classroom experience at school can you recall how that story has been told to you? You know, just generally from year 7 up, how have you engaged with that story if you have at all? How has it been conveyed to you at school?

Red: I suppose we're made to understand Jesus' sacrifice and what we put on our shoulders what we have to do. I think everyone is aware he died so for us to live.

Q: And how's that been conveyed to you, how have you gotten that information? Think of classes where that's been going on how has it been done for you?

Red: Well I can't relate back to complete classes it's more masses and ceremonies outside at parishes and all that; [it's] hard to answer.

Q: No, there's no answer there's just what your experiences are that you can describe that's all, that's terrific. Has that theme of what you saw in the classroom today been a different experience of it for you?

Red: Yeah, from the pictures I saw, some of them with the crucifixion and death some of them were aware that people in the pictures were sad and some of them really didn't care and I find that in a classroom, a lot of people, a lot of people just don't care. Different feelings…make you cross sometimes, why not a universal understanding and then we'd be all the same and there'd be no variety.

Q: And so the artworks were…

Red: I think they showed both sides of what Jesus had to face.

Q: What tradition would you say that you belonged to? What religious tradition what would you name it?

Red: Oh I'm almost, not as far back as Vatican I but almost because I've been influenced by my grandmother and parents very strongly. And she's [grandmother] just come back strongly, now that she she's allowed to eat before mass and that sort of stuff, but she still fasts an hour before [communion] yeah she's very big on tradition so I'm big on that. I've found that I'm very different from my peers.

Q: So within the Catholic tradition you'd term yourself fairly traditional?

Red: Yeah fairly, yet there's a part of me that wants to be modern.

Q: That wants to be? Well how do you describe being modern?

Red: Modern, being a youth, being you know things have to change. I'd love to see the priests get to marry and all that sort of thing yeah, and St. Peter's in Daylesford will have a lay led assembly every second week or most weeks.

Q: From today's slides can you identify the one that appealed the most?

Red: Well I liked number twelve. I think it looked like the shroud that Jesus laid in.
I thought it had pretty good colours and the sort of shine of where he's [laid] the outline of his body is still vibrant after so many years that's sort of what I felt from it.

Q: So you're associating it with the shroud?

Red: Yeah, it probably wasn't but.

Q: And are you aware of any immediate response when that one came up?

Red: Immediate? Yeah.

Red: Well I liked the colours in it and it had different dimensions from the others, vertical and very thin.

Q: Do you think any of the artworks you've seen have given you an insight into matters religious that you didn't have before?

Red: I think seriously a lot of the artworks have made me look at a different aspect there's a few really ugly ones that I didn't really like with Jesus and the people around him all deformed and I found that nearly offensive. But that's someone else's opinion of what happened and certainly the picture of a lady crucified I think that was drastic, out of left field and I've never even considered that but then why not? So, that's stimulating, challenging.

Q: So do you think that's a value?

Red: Yeah, oh certainly!

Q: You can manage the nastiness of the images with this benefit? Do you want to say anything more?

Red: The woman on the cross I'd never even considered it before.

Q: Do you think there is value in your being able to look at the images on your own without explanation?

Red: Yes. Because we're all individuals and we all take different interpretations out of it. We have to do it singly, independently without any other influences around.

(Bell and end of session)

Ian and Ryan: 28 August 2002

(Julian and David)

Q: Were there any artworks that 'grabbed' you in particular?

Ian: The ones that grabbed me the most were the two by Käthe K, is that her name?
Yes Käthe K, those were the first two, when the images came up I wrote [that] down to try to capture the initial, in fact I just wrote words down and for the first one, Pieta, is that it, Pieta? I just wrote sad, empty, longing, sombre, dramatic, dark, I just wrote those down as it came up.

Q: So are you aware of how your body reacted to seeing that image?

Ian: It was a bit more sorrowful than I expected. I think it captured ― I haven't experienced people dying in my life ― but I think it captured the way I think [about] it, the way people have described to me what it's like to lose a loved one because it was so dark and there wasn't much in it, [there] was longing there.

Q: In what you're describing now was there any sense with God? Any connection with that? Or was it purely humanistic? Do you know what I mean do you get the difference?

Ian: Yeah I think if it was to be connected with God I think it was pretty modern. I don't know when it was painted but it seemed to be a pretty modern interpretation of it in that there wasn't anything directly religious in it, it was just too, I mean even the figures if they were human they weren't really distinctive. If they were I don't think they were male or female there was just the feeling of the picture, it was open to interpretation; because of that it could be the sorrow that Jesus felt before he was dying or knowing he had to die, that sort of thing.

Q: Did it do that for you?

Ian: Well I thought seeing, once I thought about it, initially it didn't so much do that but after the others, and when I was thinking back through all of them, similarities and differences I felt it could easily be tied in with the Jesus story.

Q: Anything else you want to tell me about either of those?

Ian: The second one, the From many wounds you bleed… a similar sort of thing except it was a bit, not shocking. But I sense a, not a flinch, but it's a bit more graphic I suppose because of the naked bodies; [they] were tied down very vulnerable and frumpy looking, and the figure in the middle with the sword was being driven through the person's body, it was less, it was a bit more dramatic.

Q: Any connection with religion?

Ian: Well I thought that definitely the women that were tied on either side of the painting, when I first saw that I drew a parallel with the crucifixion.

Q: And did it give you a relationship with the crucifixion that you haven't had before? Like how have you understood it before?

Ian: Firstly I think it related, it was about human suffering, and humanised Jesus as he should be humanised because he was human. And that was ― firstly it was interesting, because typically you think Jesus, well he was a man because they were women, that was another thing that modernised it as well as making it different more related, it made it more real and it made Jesus seem more real and more human.

Q: Ryan?

Ryan: Oh I liked three of them I liked 8 and 10, 5 was the one Christ Calming the Storm, that grabbed me because of the little figure being Christ just shining amongst all that bright colour in the painting. That captured me pretty well. And the power, I just thought of the power of Jesus.

Ian: Another one that got me was the Hanging One, there was another parallel with the crucifixion, and the way the onus captured the character, (he) was anonymous and sort of a faceless person being persecuted and punished.

Ryan: Yeah, I liked that one too.

Q: So you agree with that Ryan?

Ryan: Yeah.

Ian: And yet it wasn't overtly graphic.

Ryan: The other thing, his mouth was sealed over which I thought symbolised Jesus being shut up.

Q: And Ryan you liked ten as well, the Great Day of His Wrath, can you tell me about that?

Ryan: I just thought it was a fairly powerful painting it was different. When you first look at it it's just a normal painting of a storm but just look at the shapes of the clouds, just the power of the lightening I think there were two, two people down the bottom of the painting cowering, [there was] a lot of power in the painting.

Q: So did that make a connection for you with God?

Ryan: Yeah, the power in heaven.

Ian: I liked the Catholic Mystery in a different way juxtaposed with the first two we saw by Käthe K. It was very, not a cliché, but it was very white, 'pearlescent', pure, [a] typical sort of religious image (to a degree). While the others were confronting this one was a bit nicer to be looking at, the altar boys sort of captured the ritual the remembering and the sacredness of it all rather than the sort of the crucifixion and the violence. That was a nice religious, holy image.

Q: Any others, will we have a look at Wednesday's? Maybe if you tell me what you want to from Wednesday.

Ian: My favourite was 12, Icaran II, there wasn't much in it but I felt that with the gold colours, you could barely distinguish it but there was that little glow, like a spirit coming through it, almost like something coming at you. It was almost haunting in a way like something coming out of a wall and observing you.

Ryan: I thought it was more relaxing that one, just that little spiritual figure in the middle, I think Ian and I both agreed [about] that.

Ian: You know when they say God's all around you and that sort of thing, it was funny, that's what I would have thought it was, because it was this blank little thing with this spirit haze in it, it was like that watching over you all the time, but you can't see it.

Q: So you two talked about it?

Both: Yeah.

Ian: initially we just said we liked that one the most and I was surprised when Ryan said that because I thought it was so plain.

Ryan: yeah if you looked at it normally, you wouldn't think of the spiritual connection but since, I think, we were in that train of thought, we found it pretty easy.

Q: So in that context?

Ryan: Yeah, just to pick it up.

Ian: I think I would have picked it up anyway. The thing of all of these paintings that I found the most interesting and maybe the most disturbing because I didn't know what it meant was the Crucifixion by Graeme Sutherland I noticed, it was, first of all it modernised the crucifixion, the image, with very sharp angles and a metallic feel but I noticed, I don't know if I was seeing wrongly but I saw this little rope at the front and I thought that was sort of making Jesus look like an exhibition. And I thought that was some sort of, (because it was modern) an exhibition; it was saying that now days he's become, his real meaning is forgotten and he's become just a figure.

Q: Sort of like roped off in a gallery that you stand back and look at?

Ian: Yes, I noticed that it was like a little rope at the front and he was like an exhibition more than a martyr.

Q: So what did you get from that?

Ian: Well initially, I thought it was a bit disturbing. I've heard people say before [people that are really antireligious] about people who wear crucifixes around their neck that it's just become 'anything' like any shape. You often say to people, oh, I didn't know you were religious and they say oh I'm not and they've got a crucifix around their neck and it's just become a shape that's manufactured, and I think that's what it was emphasising, that picture. Now days for some people he's just an exhibition or something in a museum.

Q: Does that mean that it indicated something of God to you because it didn't? Does the fact that you were aware of a negation of God in the public sphere mean there was a connection with God for you in that?

Ian: I thought that maybe they were trying to make viewers aware of the fact that now it's a bit like that and that maybe from that perhaps we should look at him in a certain way and that was open to me or the viewer to what that other way should be. They showed us this Jesus on show behind the rope. Kind of don't fall for it. And for us, [it said] it is not what it should be, well, what do you think?

Ryan: You know I didn't really think of any of that until Ian mentioned it. I think he's spot on with that one yeah, I didn't really like it at first, it sort of seemed a bit unnatural the way he had his hands down like a gargoyle type figure, that's probably what put me off I didn't really think of the rope down the bottom with the exhibition type.

Ian: Before [I saw] the rope, at first I thought that it was just what I've written down here: '2000 crucifixion' I thought it was trying to bring the scene with the crucifixion up to date and initially that's what I thought it was and that in that way it was a bit of a stupid thing to say. At first I thought that in a way they made it look a bit cool if that makes any sense or, they stylized it in this modern way. But that's not my thoughts on it now that I've seen the rope because I don't think the artist would have put the rope there without some sort of a purpose.

Q: Anything else? If we get on to the tradition, if we're talking 'crucifixion' and I say to you how have you encountered it at school, then what's the context been for you discussing and thinking about crucifixion at school, prior to this experience?

Ian: Ryan and I both went to the same primary school a Catholic primary school and it [the crucifixion] was glorified, always it was glorified and it was never made real it was always expressed in song and they were always nice songs, generally.

Ryan: And we never really saw a sad figure of Jesus on the cross we were always doing something that was the resurrection part of it.

Ian: It was sort of a little kid carrying a made up cross you know, kids being shepherds but I suppose it had to be made innocent in that context because we were kids.

Q: Did it change in secondary school though?

Ian: No it didn't really. I think it's only when you look at the peoples' interpretations of it, I mean teachers, they're not painting for you in class they're just saying things.

Q: So have the words said other things or have the words.

Ian: I don't think the teachers would think to say that oh this happened, there was blood like this, it looked like this, that there was blood, it felt like this to be there, because they weren't there but you know it can only be expressed through art really.

Ryan: Yeah.

Ian: Through the visual. When I think through experiences of [it] I've pictured my own view of it probably through my own family as well.

Ian: I think my teacher said to me once, that he took away from the glorified experiences of it you know and when you see crucifixes up on walls they're always well sanded, very well done. But the teacher said to me that the reality of it would have been basically two trees ripped out of the ground and put together in some sort of a cross that would hold a person, just the way it was. It's become kind of glorified and he said that the crucifixes with Jesus on them even though there are the wounds and the eyes [looking] up to the sky symbolising the sacrifice, and that's it. Then we move on to the resurrection. But this stuff [the artworks] dwelt on crucifixion and I don't really think I've seen this sort of thing before.

Q: So it's brought another understanding of crucifixion to you?

Both: Yeah.

Q: Do you agree with this Ryan?

Ryan: Yeah, pretty much, another thing I found that was interesting was [number] 10 — I think — that pregnant man with two others. Like I looked at that and I never really thought of the way the painting was putting, it was like Jesus giving life to mankind again cause he's got the two others, those who were crucified with him. I think that's what's symbolised with Jesus and the man being pregnant, symbolising yeah, Jesus giving life.

Q: So an irony at the point of death?

Ryan: Yeah. I thought that was pretty good and it showed a different view instead of the normal crucifixion you get depicted as being dark you got some sort of a light.
Ian: I didn't like number thirteen, the <u>Resurrection.</u>

Ryan: Yeah, with the English flag.

Ian: It was like 'I surrender' or 'I win' or something with his flag. I didn't know how that connected him with it but then I thought maybe it was like victory over his sleeping disciples cause they were all sleep, but you know it's just the way that his face was depicted and that sort of thing. It was interesting and different but I didn't like that. Maybe because it didn't match the typical views of what it should be.

Ryan: Yeah, I didn't think it was a spiritual painting at all.

Ian: No, more of a war painting, or a victory painting.

Q: Seeing the artworks here does it help you relate to RE is it a plus is it a minus, nothing?

Ryan: I think it's good you get all these different views from all the different paintings. Maybe it mightn't be so good if all the paintings were the same of the same type but here you've got a different variety of paintings all expressing something different.

Ian: I think everyone has their own internalised views of what religion is and what it all means, and often they don't say it and if it's painted then it's put right out there for you to see what they think. But not directly, so that makes it even more of a comment because there's layers of meaning to the visual. It could mean something different to you and to me than what they intended it to but at the same time the meaning comes across.

Q: So do you see that experience as positive within the context of RE, that you do something like this?

Both: Yes. Definitely.

Ian: It broadens, brings it out into the open how other people think of these religious issues.

Ryan: And you're also making your own interpretation of it as well and say if you talk about it you find out other peoples' interpretations; just talking about it with Ian a lot of the paintings became clearer in my mind; about their meaning.

Q: Anything else that you want to tell me?

Ian: I didn't really know what was happening in <u>Christophorus,</u> was he — was that supposed to be a monster emerging from a body or something, or were there two people there, do you know what that was about?

Ryan: Yeah, what I've got written is deformed shape and I'm not quite sure about that one.

Ian: To me it looked like there was something coming out of someone else.

Ryan: I saw one man in front of another, maybe the other one was supporting him or something — I'm not sure.

Q: Do you think that matters, that you didn't you know? Were there any God connections or God questions?

Ian: No.

Ryan: Well, I was thinking maybe.

Ian: I was thinking of the devil for that one to be honest

Ryan: I was thinking Jesus was the front figure.

Ian: I wasn't. I thought it looked awful I was hoping it wasn't Jesus. I've got [written] 'deformed shapes'; he was wearing those robe things around his waist, I wasn't quite sure what the painting was trying to get across.

Q: Out of the two days was there anything could you name, one work or maybe two, or maybe none that just struck you?

Ryan: Well on Wednesday, 5 and 6, the Annunciation; it showed Mary in her angelic state but it also showed fear I thought yeah, that would be expected to be felt in humans. It also symbolises that God chose ordinary human beings.
(At this point Ryan and Ian laughing as Ryan gets his say, fending off Julian wanting to break in — good humoured).
Yeah, I thought that was good.

Ian: [I thought the] Same thing [about]. Death of the Virgin with that sort of glorified image of the crucifix, so too does there come a glorified image of Mary, you know, in the blue dress that wraps around her head and that sort of thing and she is, or was, just an ordinary young woman and in that [the painting]. She looked real a lot more real than you would usually see her and it made the story a lot more real for me.

Ryan: Another one, number 6, the Deposition actually — and then you got number 7 after that: I liked 6 and I didn't like 7. They were both about the same theme in 6. You see Christ, the body being powerful and the reality that Christ was man and shared emotions with those who loved him like the women in the background, they were like hanging over him mourning and it took up the whole picture it was in the whole picture and then you've got in 7, you've only got two women there and they seem smaller, it's not as focused on what's happening. I thought that one looked a bit unnatural.

Q: Were there any from the two days that just grabbed you, before you were even thinking about it they just grabbed you; you sat with them for a minute and then started to reflect?

Ian: For me it was definitely From many wounds you bleed o people. That was the one.

Q: So that grabbed you as you described?

Ian: Yes, but there were ones that grabbed me just because they were nice and spiritual and they [from many wounds…] were things [images] that you don't want to see. I sort of forced myself to be interested in that because it was disturbing; in that way it grabbed me more than the others because it was different to what you usually see and what you expect in pictures and things like the Annunciation with the haloes and the white garments.

Q: So in this grabbing, it called your attention and then your consciousness engages with 'what's it calling me to'?

Both: Yeah.

Q: Can you name one like that Ryan or not?

Ryan: Probably number 12 on Wednesday, Icarian II, yeah.

Ian: I loved that.

Ryan: It's got that background that spiritual figure coming through. First of all that centralised light in the middle grabs your attention then you just start to think about the significance of it.

Q: Anything else? You can always bring things up again in other discussions. Thanks.

Ballarat Fine Art Gallery
Interview for 3 September 2002

You've had two experiences with the slides in class and now the Gallery…in what way is this experience of RE different from what you've experienced in the past, think about how RE has been for you over the past six years; is this different…how?

Red: Previously religion was run like a dictatorship; you were told what to believe, what's right, what's wrong. I think the artworks and all that sort of thing are open for our interpretation.

Ryan: I believe, by my experience, it seems that as you've gotten older you've been given the chance to put the interpretation that you want into RE.

Q: And how does this fit into that?

Ryan: It's kind of significant in the way that with the artwork you can interpret and put ideas into it.

Q: Is that valuable?

Ryan: In a way, yeah, people aren't telling you what to believe anyway and that's what throes a lot of people off I think.

Q: Do you think it makes a difference having freedom, as you've gotten older?

Red: Yeah, responsibility, maturity to be yourself.

Q: Do you think younger kids would manage it?

Red: No.

Mac: It's the time, having the time to kind of sit back and look at some pictures, having time to reflect on them spiritually or as a religious path. They'd [younger students] look at the pictures and see if anything's happening that's all they'd see.

Red: I don't think it would have the same effect.

Q: So what do you think brings you to that capacity? How come you can do that?

Red: We're more experienced in the real world.

Ryan: I don't know I reckon there might be some younger students that would be able to.

Mac: It's kind of been brought to our awareness that this is kind of a spiritual path so it gets us thinking so that's how we apply that.

Q: Do you think this would be worth incorporating into RE or the year 12 programme where you'd have this experience of art and reflection?

Ryan: Yeah I think it's pretty good. Yeah it just gives you time to reflect; nothing too strenuous.

Q: In saying that though is there a benefit or is it just easy?

Ryan: I suppose it depends on who the person is that's viewing it; some people might not really care, might not get anything out of it, others might.

Q: Do you think that a little bit further on there's a potential (in this) for guys in the class who aren't switching on to it (RE) now? That in the context of their whole RE experience there's the potential for something new? I know that you can't make judgments for other people but speaking for yourself you know, when you're six months out of school or whenever, will those conversations come up, will those experiences come up?

Mac: I imagine myself like when I get older and walk past a gallery or hear anything about a gallery I'll remember the time when we went with the school about religion and think like that and relate it to that. I can just imagine myself doing it down the track; it just kind of brings back the experience at the moment I just can't think like that.

Q: Do you think it'll give you a level of consciousness if you're looking at something that you'd not previously thought of as being, as having a religious dimension, it might bring awareness where you can read things into what you're seeing?

Red: Yeah, another side that you mightn't have considered.
I just say that because it was a comment coming up yesterday with the group going over to artworks and saying well this isn't religious but it could be the Madonna and Child or…
Mac: Yeah a lot of those with the Madonna and child, they were women and a child but I kind of linked it and it brought my awareness to the whole religious theme with the pictures.

Q: Does anyone want to comment on how the experience has enhanced your understanding? Has it opened your thinking or not?

Mac: I wouldn't have really considered Aboriginal religious art. I wouldn't have really associated them with Christianity to an extent, and when I saw those, like Shoalhaven, and there was [also] one of him [Jesus] I think with his hands tied behind his head, it was just a different experience of what I thought would be painted from that [the crucifixion].

Q: So you took the style of those works to have an Indigenous influence?

Mac: Yeah and I just didn't think that they'd be linked a lot with Christianity.

Q: So how has that helped you?

Mac: It's just brought an awareness that they've adopted Christianity and been influenced a bit by the Europeans when they came over.

Ryan: None of them really shocked me, I could kind of relate to all of them in some way and religion can really fit into any form I think.

Marg: *If I brought in a piece of art that was really special to me and showed it to you and it was not a difficult piece to interpret—um—would you say that at this point you would bring to, if I asked you to interpret it for me to tell me what you thought about it would you bring to that interpretation skills or ideas or perspectives that you wouldn't have brought if I had shown it to you say six weeks ago?*

All (spontaneously): Yeah I think so, yes.

Marg: *What sort of things would you then look at?*

Mac: Um, we've been exposed to kind of different, there was one we saw and it was just yellow squares and that was linked to spirituality and then there was one of the traditional ones of Jesus as the carpenter and you interpret them as spiritual and so you can take a spin on anything you can look at.

Red: Yeah I'd say previously I would have gone, okay there's only a set range where this is religious (Mac agrees) and this is not. But now I'd say I'd extended that scope and there could be a bit here and I could see a resemblance happening and that sort of stuff.

Ryan: Yeah.

Q: Was there anything that you saw yesterday that grabbed you in the art gallery; an image that you found yourself responding to?

Red: There were two Nativity scenes, they were out of plaster relief but they were negatives somehow. I thought they were quite good they were in the shape of a bowl and they were just called <u>Justin</u> and they were the nativity scene and crucifixion, I thought it was good seeing all this different art, abstract and colours and that was just a complete difference again, there were no colours involved it was just white however it had a lot of detail and a lot of bodies in there.

Q: What was your reaction as soon as you saw it, what can you remember?

Red: Well the crucifixion one, there was Jesus.

Q: Apart from the details, I mean in your response? I mean you've remembered them out of all the things you saw yesterday so when you saw them, before you started analysing them, was there anything?

Red: Oh, it sort of grabbed me because they were different and with all the walls of huge paintings and these two little things there. Just the simplicity I suppose.

Q: Was there some meaning for you in what you saw?

Red: Oh a little bit, there was the nativity scene and then the crucifixion and so there was a progression almost a story.

Ryan: there were actually another two of them in there as well.

Red: Was there?

Ryan: I can't remember what they were.

Mac: There were two up the other end.

Q: Do you have any response to the Leunig? There was a lot of talk around it.

Mac: I went through and I was with David Brady (not in the focus group but the class) and we went through and read them all and there was a religious theme that was through them and I don't know, I didn't expect that and I was linking those with religious themes.

Q: had you not made a religious connection with Leunig's work previously?

Mac: No, I thought they were a bit more humorous.
[the others chimed in agreeing]

Q: And you Ryan, yesterday when you were looking at them did you pick up religious things as Mac did?

Ryan: Well, not in all of them maybe in some.

Q: And you hadn't previously?

Ryan: No. [laughing] I haven't seen a lot of his work.

Mac: I haven't been exposed to much of his work, I've know that it existed.

Q: That's interesting to know, that previously you hadn't and now you're reading religious things [into his work]. Red were you the same?

Red: I thought yeah, never before have I taken a religious connection there cause some of that, it's in *The Age* [newspaper] isn't it? [It's] more political in there.

Q: Well mixed images; and so did you have a response to any particular one?

Red: Most of them were humorous.

Q: Even the religious ones?

Red: I think so. Well it was sort of a bit like racism and prejudice and so on and everything's tied in together.

Ryan: There was one I think; it was telling you how to be real or something I thought that one was good.

Q: And is that because the message was clear to you?

Ryan: Yeah. And it was humorous as well.

Mac: There was one. It was a square cut out of the ground or the earth and it was up sitting up on the earth and in the hole where the square had been there was a person down in it, the person standing on top of the box on top of the ground. It was saying when people get in power this is what happens or something like they get higher and the poor person gets even lower, and that one was good and kinda stuck with me and someone laughed and I thought no, I understand that one.

Red: Yeah, a person does all the work and goes further down.

Mac: Yeah, they get higher up and they're stealing the other person's ground.

Q: Did that have a religious connection in social justice?

Mac: It did for me.

Q: Do you think your involvement in social justice here, like with St. Vincent de Paul would make you more conscious of that?

Mac: Yeah, people higher up just keep on getting higher as others are getting lower.

Q: So you got that but a couple of the other guys didn't?

Mac: Yeah, they kind of laughed.

Q: What did you think of just going to the gallery? It lacked the focus, we couldn't have the quiet, the dark, there was a lot of stuff going on around you, many, many images, just the space of the room was a distraction, concentration was difficult.

Ryan: Yeah, I thought it was a bit distracting as well but the room with the pictures of the two Madonnas and the sculpture in the middle as well. It was a fairly distracting room because it's just got paintings and sculptures all over the place, trying to have a look at all of them you might forget about that one.

Q: So for this [RE intention], is the classroom more manageable? And does that make it better or worse?

Ryan: Ah probably—but it's good to have an alternative as well.

Q: You mean as in the gallery being an alternative; just another experience?

Ryan: Yeah, it was different; instead of just being shown art you could go and have a look at whatever you wanted.

Q: Could you imagine too that over time you could switch off and find your own concentration space?

Ryan: Yeah.

Q: It's not so easy with a class, but that's a possibility?

Mac: I found it a bit better that you went around and you got to choose your own pictures.

All: Yes.

Mac: You'd see one that you liked so you'd go over to that one and you get as much time as you want to reflect on it and you didn't have to be switching to the next one and you just got time to choose your own and think about your response to it.

Red: Yeah it was just like being isolated in your own time.

Q: Is it of any benefit in seeing the relocation of the religious from the classroom? We go to a public art gallery and you're able to find the things in that space that we talk about in class.

Red: Yes it's good that we've left the school grounds and we're out in the real world and it's a bit different, the environment and I know a few of the boys got a bit excited they didn't want to look at the art they were out, you know.

Gina: Everyone had levels of boredom and interest but no one was disrespectful no one was even attempting to give me a hard time.

Ryan: I think the main problem I get when I go to the art gallery is that my feet get tired, I got there and about 5 minutes into it my feet were already sore.
Gina: The group was very good, very respectful.

Q: Is there anything generally that you want to say?

Red: I think going to the art gallery made it a bit more real, there were a few more dimensions, you could touch it you could see it, size, because just putting it up on the screens, it was different [going to the gallery] because we're used to that [the classroom experience], because technology's all around us

it's nothing special. I'm sure I haven't been to the art gallery for a long time, and I know a lot of my peers haven't. It made it sort of a significant event.

Mac: It was also good that we got to see different art rather than just what you show us, paintings. In there we got to see sculptures and that Book of Hours, and [all agree] it was just a different aspect to the whole religious art thing; and you've got sculpture and if you see sculpture on the projector, it wouldn't go too well. And also with your sessions previously we know all the art we're being shown is religious and a lot of the art in there (the gallery) wasn't and we got to choose what was and that sort of thing and that was a bit different from the other sessions we've had. You know we had a bit of time to stop concentrating with this links to that and it's sort of like a bit of a test on everything.
Gina: We could do that at the end.

Marg: Yes, didn't you tell them about the exam? [laughing]
How would you see this as linking with Religious Education? This experience? It's a difficult question.

Red: Yeah, they're all hard to answer directly.

Ryan: It's giving you different ways to view the different aspects of religion, if you believe. Before as Mac was saying, not being able to realise that Aboriginal art or something might have been part of your religion, or maybe the women in the crucifixion, things like that.

Q: Can I give you a key… which… you can accept or reject— that… there's clearly recognition for intelligence: dramatic intelligence and sporting intelligence and cognitive intelligence—and that maybe an experience like this taps into what we call spiritual intelligence...

All: Yeah.
…so when you talk about this giving you another way into experiencing religion do you think it's valid to think about it as a kind of a spiritual intelligence? Does that make sense for you, what I've said? It's a big concept for you to take on board.

Red: Because we're all on different levels aren't we?

Ryan: It's also what you've been brought up with as well, like some kids haven't had the extent of religion as other kids may have.

Gina: In English, especially in year 7, you get tasks and you make an artwork and do a piece of writing…some drama. And the idea was that each of us connected with a particular kind of intelligence…*Does that seem possible?*

All: Yeah [clear agreement expressed with surprise over the idea].

Ryan: Certainly.

Marg: And I think that Leunig has that spiritual intelligence that ― um ― Leunig is someone that has had a normal like ― um ― hard knocks in some senses in his life. And he has interpreted his life, I think in a most profound spiritual sense. And has put it out there as something that can relate to everybody you know, as a mundane, every day kind of experience. But you can read that spiritual intelligence into it and I think we've got students amongst us who've got the capabilities of being able to do that and too often it's over-looked, it's not valued. And the idea here is that we could elevate this and give people an opportunity, that it becomes another valid way of experiencing Religious Education. Like really valued and then you don't have to go and write an essay to validate it, the experience is.

Ryan: Yours.

Gina: Yes and it's respected.

End

Entries for Ryan, Red and Mac: 11 September 2002.
St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat.

Q: In viewing the artworks over the weeks of this experience, was there one in particular that stood out for you?

Mac: Probably the Cathedral, just the space you were in and being able to relate with the pictures, the windows that were there, because they were in the church they were classical type pictures so it was easy to relate with them.

Ryan: Yeah I also thought that [was about] being in a church with hardly anyone else there, really quiet.

Mac: The Gallery was good as well. You go, have your own freedom of choice in looking at things. Initially because we hadn't experienced the other things, [the experience] in the classroom wasn't too bad to start off with until we actually started to try different ideas then we realised these other ones were better. We hadn't experienced the other ones to know whether it was good or not.

Q: So what was restricting in the classroom?

Mac: Um — just sitting there getting the paintings; the paintings were given to you.

Q: So no choice?

Mac: Yeah, which wasn't too bad but after experiencing the freedom [of the later experiences] you kind of feel that [the freedom] was good.

Ryan: Yeah I probably thought starting off, the slides were better [in the classroom]; just starting off with it was good because you got to build up to going somewhere else looking at something different. In the art gallery after viewing those pictures you got to, it opened your mind to choosing your own things.

Q: So do you think the restrictive nature of the classroom enabled you to deal with the freedom of the other spaces a little bit better?

All: Yeah.

Red: I'd probably say the gallery was the best [experience] and I've been to the cathedral a few times and I like that atmosphere there but it probably would have been a different experience for me going in the knowledge of the last few sessions. But I'll go back down to the Cathedral.
Mac: It was really quiet [at the Cathedral] and everyone looking around going their own way.

Gina: Everyone just moved off and no one interfered with anybody else or attempted to sit and talk with anybody else. They just did their own bit. It was quiet remarkable, I was saying to the guys that I thought the Cathedral — I was thinking from the start that it was a mistake and this wasn't going to work, and yet from my perspective it worked best.

Marg: So that was yesterday and it really worked? Isn't that good.

Q: Red you liked the gallery for much the same reasons as you've heard from the fellers?

Red: Yeah it was a bigger sort of space.

Q: The artwork that appealed to you most, at the Cathedral? Was there something that grabbed you or not? Was there anything like that at the Cathedral?

Mac: Not really because, well there were the windows, like parables and I felt I'd experienced it before and I was able to relate to it, but there was no real transcendence for me.

Q: So the familiarity of them contributed to that ease?

Mac: Ease, yeah.

Q: Did that help you with contemplation, with prayer?

Ryan: The atmosphere helped you reflect on the paintings more than usual.

Q: Do you think [it helped] because this was a traditional church? It would have been interesting if we'd had the experience of a more contemporary space to see if the same thing would work for you or whether it was the darkened space and the illumination of the windows.

Mac: I think it was just the fact that it was a church.

Q: So it wouldn't matter what church, just a church makes a difference?

Ryan: Ah, I think the Cathedral makes a difference.

Mac: Makes a difference because it's so big and now it's well maintained. If it was a little dingy and perhaps it wasn't well kept I'm not sure it would have that same effect.

Q: How would you describe your response to the artworks yesterday compared to your response in the classroom? Think back to that first session in the classroom, the slides with the Hanging Christ, the Christbearer, and the Catholic Mystery think about whether or not any of those grabbed your attention. Think about whether or not that happened for you yesterday. Was there a difference in the type of response?

Ryan: Yeah, I reckon, I wasn't so much surprised with the pictures yesterday as I would have been with some of the ones we saw in the classroom because they were more traditional [the ones yesterday at the Cathedral].

Mac: When you go, you kind of knew what to expect going into a church you don't expect to go there and see contemporary art or anything like that you kind of go in with an expectation of what sort of art you're going to get.

Ryan: Yeah.

Mac: In the classroom everything's thrown up.

Ryan: It's what you think religious art is [at the cathedral] compared to some of the other paintings we might see.

Q: And so did that make what you saw in the classroom of more value, of less value or equal value? Did something in that first session, grab your attention?

Ryan: I'd reckon probably equal value because they're both different really, after seeing them.

Q: Equal but different value?

Ryan: Yeah.

Q: Can you explain the difference?

Mac: There's less value in the classroom, I don't know why really. It's just dealing with something that's easy and you're able to reflect on like in the bible whereas with contemporary art I saw them and they didn't interest me as much and I didn't even reflect on them to an extent.

Q: Except I think you named that one, the Catholic Mystery as…

Mac: Oh yeah, that one.

Q: It was grabbing your attention?

Mac: Yeah, but with the majority of those ones in there [in that session] I didn't really move to them all [have a reaction].

Q: But would you say that one did get your attention?

Mac: Yeah.

Q: And if something like that had been in glass in the Cathedral?

Mac: I think it would have been expected to an extent because it's so traditional I felt it's kind of illuminating Mary to an extent and when we went down to the Cathedral and saw the glass windows the Annunciation just in the blue and centre and all the light and everything. I think it'd be expected, in a chapel.
[General agreement].

Q: Has it become easier for you to respond to the artworks?

Red: Yeah, I think it has. Like it's opened our eyes a little more in understanding I've noticed, even though I didn't go to the Cathedral yesterday, [there's been] a progression even from the very first session. I was very against the contemporary [artworks], I didn't really understand it, the abstract sort of things in the pictures and I was more into the traditional images. But I think that today on the computers it was all contemporary images and I liked them, I quite liked them, there were completely different messages in them and they were subtle and I've grown in affection towards them.

Q: And that's even though we haven't discussed them.

Red: Yes.

Q: So this is 'stuff' you're doing on your own?

Red: Yeah. I think I said in the first, in the very first meeting that I didn't really like them at all.

Mac: You started to learn to accept them I think, they weren't, in the lab they weren't as degrading or graphic.

Q: And you said that a lot about the first ones [in the classroom sessions]? You felt the <u>Last Supper</u>...

Mac: In the lab they weren't as graphical as the paintings [in the classroom] they were more…one I was looking at was about candy with images with bits of candy like stuff.

Gina: Yes, red and white.

Mac: And it was easier to look at in the contemporary sense.

Q: And do you think that the experiences of the past couple of weeks have helped you with that?

Mac: Yeah, it's made me see them a bit more.

Q: If we'd started with that kind of image how do you think you would have managed it?

Ryan: I don't think I would have reacted very well, I would have thought, what's this?

Q: So Ryan how have you noticed the change over the last couple of weeks, is there a change?

Ryan: Oh yes, it's a lot easier to look at something ― oh yeah, and get what it's trying to convey.

Q: So are you getting a value out of it?

Ryan: Yeah.

Q: Is that helping your spirituality?

Ryan: Oh yeah, just looking at everything we've been doing it's probably been a help ― I think a fair bit actually.

Q: Can you explain that?

Ryan: Well, it lets you reflect on what you believe, if you don't agree with something then you'll say, oh no, I don't agree with that, this is what I believe; but then you might think what does the other person, what's he trying to get? So you're looking at other peoples' beliefs and not just your own.

Gina: That's a bit we touched on, you know when we were talking about the perspective of the artist and around the table it was said you hadn't really thought about the opinion of the artist.

Ryan: Yeah like you weren't really thinking about it at the start.

Q: But now you find you're able to do that?

Ryan: Yeah.

Red: Just on accepting different art, I found that at the beginning there was, we had contemporary art in a traditional form of painting but in the art gallery there were a few sculptures and all that; and very old type of work. Today it was contemporary work in that contemporary form with the inter-net computers so it was a lot easier to accept and understand. That was sort of the norm you know, yeah just probably the form it came in yeah. Immediate.

Q: And do you think it's helped your spirituality?

Red: I think so yeah, I think that probably I've been able to accept more, a lot more and look into paintings and images and artwork and at a deeper level. Not just going on what I see, but what I feel, and probably connecting more some things I wouldn't have even considered had religious connections at all — and then I saw that, found that.

Marg: Can you tell me some of the things you saw on the inter-net site?

Red: There was a section of the candy one, just red and white colours and they had sort of…

Ryan: Pigeons.

Mac: And red and white little figures in it. And it was computer generated like the cartoons and a few movies have been made like the toy story ones.

Gina: It reminded me of Clockwork Orange a bit, that sort of style.

Marg: *And what was the site?*

Gina: It was the contemporary religious site and the fellow's living.

Mac, Red: yeah he made one in 2001

Marg: *So what did you get out of that candy one?*

Red: There were different ones, they had a type of chess players thing, a big group of them they were huge and a tiny little candy man at the bottom and I think it was meaning if you've got God on your side or what ever, no one can beat you.

Q: So you were reading that into it for yourself?
[all chimed in agreeing].

Red: I thought that was pretty good it was massive.

Gina: And having an art background myself, I can relate to what you're saying but there was no iconography in the image that would give us a key to its being religious. That makes your reading of this even more interesting, that you're able to go to this now, given the experiences you've had.

Ryan: Yeah, I thought it was good the first site didn't really do anything for me [a conventional site] that was just the more traditional.

Gina: And isn't that interesting. I deliberately gave everyone [the option of] a traditional site to start them off which was Massaccio, Giotto, Caravaggio,

Red: I didn't like that site at all [agreement].

Gina: No! And look how you've turned your discussion around. Your [Red] first comments were: I really like the traditional stuff, I'd like to be more modern but I'm back in the traditional stuff.
Mac, you didn't like 'aboriginal stuff" or any of this other 'stuff'.
It's terrific that, and there's no value attached [good or bad] it's just terrific that there's a shift there.

Mac: I think it's different if you're in a different space; you shift to different things. When you're looking on the Internet you don't really want to be looking up…

David and Ryan: Old stuff.

Mac: Yeah, old stuff.
[All laughing and agreeing].
You just don't want to be, you see a picture, like some chapel and it had the walls on the inside [Massaccio: Brancassi Chapel], and I looked at that and thought ah let's move to the next website. Then as in the chapel [meaning the Cathedral], when I went down there it was right to see the traditional painting you accept it. And at the art gallery you get the sculptures and a few bits of art, well different types of art that you can view if you want to.

Q: So does that work in with what you're saying about the classroom that it's probably the most limited experience you had and that works, as long as it's your starting place and not your finishing place?

Red: I think it was probably best we did the classroom first. It's best we get it over and done with because we went in with the seriousness that we wouldn't have had at the very end. At the beginning we were all serious, everyone because we hadn't done anything like this before even the other students who weren't in this little group and since the first time the change, yeah in comparison I wouldn't even want to sit in the classroom, I'd rather interact and go out and that sort of thing.

Q: Do you feel the same Ryan?

Ryan: Yeah, definitely.

Q: Do you think it has something to do with your own self-confidence now in viewing the artworks that you're a little bit less afraid to look at the artworks and maybe get something out of them?

Ryan: Yeah.

Red: Yeah, I think so because the first times it was quite simple. The artwork was there and it was like a warm up exercise and then it was quite different going out and trying different things and then putting it into society in relation to where we live. The inter-net, the computers are in your life that was strange to see religious art in there.

Ryan: I don't think for me it was confidence I just think it was an understanding. I didn't mind the contemporary art at first, I actually wanted to see it and it was just a bit of confusion to what the artist was trying to say.

Q: And now you're more at ease with that?

Ryan: Yeah

Mac: I'm just trying to open my eyes to accepting the different types of painting. I was rejecting it to start off with and I grew to accept it and learn about it.

Q: And I want to make this clear too, from my experience the fact of your greater ease at the end has not lessened your respect or your seriousness for what you're doing. You know just because you walked in like 'tin soldiers' for the first session and sat very still and very quiet – and you're free to comment about that), I don't think there's been a diminishing of respect for what you're seeking here. From my perspective there's just been a greater ease that seems to have happened.

Ryan: I think yeah, there's probably even a greater respect.

Q: If you think about the session you had with the computers if you'd had that session at the beginning and you'd just been given that art site with all its links, I wonder what would have happened if you'd gone into the computer first whether you would have stuck with the traditional sites? What you would have done with say the chessmen and the candy man?

Red: I think it would have been a bit harder for us because we wouldn't have developed as much. I know I didn't like it [to begin with] and now I do, but if it just came straight at me I don't know what I'd do. I think I'd only choose one way and then I wouldn't go back.

Q: Picking up on what you said before and in relation to society, can you see a different way that religious spirituality can be interpreted in society now? You get to connect with the net for a potential spiritual experience. Was your spirituality locked more into the church experience or in the classroom at school and now because you've tapped into the net you can see these contemporary expressions of something religious?
Mac: It has to an extent opened up my eyes to other peoples' interpretations of spirituality so that I'm not as conservative.
[Agreement].

Ryan: I'd say the same but you also wonder how far that extent would go, I mean how far you'd surprise yourself by keeping on doing all these different things until you just stop and understand everything. Like until you can't interpret anything more. Interacting also helps like when we were on the net we were also talking with the other students, talking about the art and maybe even getting distracted, we didn't have the lights off and there was a computer in front of us, there was a different feel.

Red: You look and press a button.

Q: So what about the dynamic with the group? I noticed there was lots of discussion between guys who might have disconnected in a regular context.

Red: We were sort of almost rabble, here, over there, someone would have a picture and we'd think I like that.

Q: There was a lot of interest?

Ryan: I think it was probably, for most people it was probably boring until we got to contemporary art and they, everybody thought hang on what's this doing here, is this religious art?

Q: Would you describe that as religious communication in the group?

Red: Almost I think. In the Gallery we didn't say hey, have a look at this everyone.

Q: Did you think that as well Mac?

Mac: Now that it's brought up, I kind of realise that it was I didn't acknowledge it at the time, think about it at the time.

Marg*: And after Red would say look at this, what did you do?*

Mac: You'd look and say what's this, what does it mean? Then you'd kind of discuss. And Red would go: ah I don't like that; then I'd say: well I do and I'd want to look at it, and he'd knock my hand and then it would be: I like this and this is what it means f and then I'd let Red decide if he still doesn't like it.

Gina: I bring that up because there was so much negativity to begin with. Period one, second last week of the last term, people who were against doing RE full stop. So close to the end of VCE just resenting giving the time; but I'd say by the end of that period nearly everybody was animated and engaged with what we were doing. I even said to one of the boys: how did that work for you? And he said it was okay. We'd had words at the start and I'd taken books away from him, and it had become okay without me having to do anything more.

Marg*: As it because you had the mouse and you did the controlling? You could pursue your own journey, your own spiritual journey, is that right?*

Ryan: Yeah, well you went to the ones that interested you if you didn't want to see it you wouldn't see it.

Q: In this whole series has it been important that you've had controls? Your autonomy has increased. Has that brought a value and what is it?

Ryan: More people in the group have been affected and achieved something to deepen their understanding in this and to acknowledge there's been a connection there, whereas some of those people would have just been at a loss if you'd just been dictating it "this is what it means", they wouldn't have wanted anything to do with it. Being able to interpret it yourself in your own rate and time a few of them have come on board as well.

Marg: *Have others said that?*

Ryan: Yeah.

Q: Out of the whole of the three weeks was there anything that gave you an experience of something beyond yourselves? And there may not have so don't feel compelled.

A long pause followed, the students looked through notes and then the tapes ran out, as did the time. From my notes of the remaining, brief conversation there was no expression of a strong experience of transcendence from Ryan, Red or Mac.

End.

Ian was absent from the above discussion he was away from schools for days because of glandular fever.

The following notes have been verified by him and were the result of a meeting and discussion conducted on 20 September 2002.

The Cathedral experience:

Ian was familiar with the windows as he goes to Mass there, this time he was looking more critically. He noticed differences in themes and symbols. He found them beautiful in terms of:
1. The story, previously he'd looked at them as colourful windows;
2. A different expression of art; and
3. The addition of 'light'.

According to Ian:
- The light made a difference because it could change/invest the figures with a kind of life and made them more alive.
- He didn't find them provocative but literal and traditional. "Maybe the light kept me looking longer, the light engages you more with the painting."
- [When asked about the space of the Cathedral] "the sacredness, silence, high ceiling of the space made the figures seem housed there."
- Comparisons between the classroom, Gallery and the Cathedral: the screening of artworks in class was less intimate. "Seeing the actual painting you feel/see the artist, what were they thinking? It was a better experience than the classroom."
- "At the gallery the question came — could that be religious [of any artwork] — and I looked for religious connections. Some of the religious artworks held nothing religious for me and I directed my own interpretations and searches."
- Ian thought that dedications [on plaques] called you to respect the artworks more and question the connection between a particular artwork and its dedication.

The website:
- "The candy pictures were the most interesting. They were modern and what was a set of shapes captured being alone. Sorrow."
- *Q: How does that make religious connections for you?*
- "It was as Jesus would have felt — alone. Nothing in it was beautiful. This was just shapes."

Q: Have you noticed a change in your viewing since the first series?

Ian: With less familiar images I still look for the religious and have seen many interpretations of the same event. Spirituality is how you feel about that event.

Q: What's the point of 'connection'?

Ian: My interpretation of things; people might not see my interpretation as perfect. Before this I hadn't really looked at art, now spirituality is what's inside us. Everyone can share it but in unique ways. You can't do that with many things, it's not like pop music. It's not like a rule/law that everyone does without interpretation/thinking. It's a benefit because it made me consider other's spirituality in trying to discover my own. Others can bring you to a greater understanding. That's what the art's doing.

The self-direction of looking was best at the art gallery and the website allowed freedom. The classroom offered less. The variety and scope is important and the images that were most abstract were most open to interpretation; they said more because you were left asking questions.

Q: Is there a value in this for the curriculum?

Ian: Yes. It's different to reading and writing [dictated]. The unsaid component of the art allows that you're shown something and not told what spirituality is.

Q: Have there been conversations arising from these experiences?

Ian: With some people, yes.

Q: Was there a particular image that worked a particular response in you?

Ian: On the Internet, the swing image. For me there was a feeling, a haunting response. I'll put the image on my wall.

End.

APPENDIX D

Appendix D

Condensed Version of the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives
(Krathwohl et al., 1964, pp. 176-185)

Affective Domain

1.0 Receiving (attending) — this level represents that at which the learner is sensitised to the existence of certain phenomena and stimuli, further subdivided into:

    1.1 Awareness

    1.2 Willingness to attend

    1.3 Controlled or selected awareness

2.0 Responding — at this level, beyond merely attending to the phenomenon, the student is actively attending with the following subdivisions:

    2.1 Acquiescence in responding

    2.2 Willingness to respond

    2.3 Satisfaction in response

3.0 Valuing — that a thing, phenomenon, or behaviour has worth. This abstract concept is due to the individual's own valuing or assessment but is much more a social product that has been slowly internalised. Behaviour categorised at this level is sufficiently consistent and stable to have taken on the characteristics of a belief or attitude. Valuing has the following subdivisions:

    3.1 Acceptance of a value

    3.2 Preference for a value

    3.3 Commitment

4.0 Organisation — as the learner successively internalises values, s/he encounters situations for which more than one value is relevant. This necessitates the organisation of the values into a system; the determination of the interrelationships between them; and the establishment of the dominant and pervasive ones. Such a system is built gradually, subject to change as new values are incorporated in the beginnings of the building of a value system. Organisation has the following subdivisions:

    4.1 Conceptualisation of a value

    4.2 Organisation of a value system

5.0 Characterisation by a value or value complex — at this level of internalisation the values already have a place in the individual's value hierarchy and the individual acts consistently in accordance with the values s/he has internalised at this level. The subdivisions for this level include:

    5.1 Generalised set

    5.2 Characterisation

End

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