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The role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents attending Catholic secondary schools

Richard Patrick Branson
University of Notre Dame Australia

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Chapter 2: A review of related literature

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the purpose of the study — to describe the role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents — was introduced and its origins in personal experiences of changes in the teaching of religious education in the Catholic school system in Western Australia over a 40-year period were outlined. The link between adolescence and religious conversion in the context of the mission of Catholic schools to evangelise was considered briefly and the research problem was stated in terms of the forces opposing the acceptance of Christian faith. Using this framework, three research questions were derived to give direction to the study.

In the present chapter, the themes represented by the concepts defined in the previous chapter became the focus of the literature review: faith, conversion, the imagination, religious education, catechesis, and approaches to research. Due importance will be given to the theoretical framework that was constructed to support the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in the analysis and discussion of the data that was collected. The impact of Catholic education on the faith development of the participants in the present study will be examined using a methodological framework that embraces epistemology, hermeneutics, phenomenology, structural-developmental theories and cognitive psychology. These six aspects or dimensions will be referred to as "movements" to help

convey the sense of deliberation that lay behind the research design. Although the six movements were considered independently in this chapter, they were not in fact mutually exclusive. Given the nature of the subject under investigation, conceptual overlap would be impossible to avoid. This will be evident in the subsequent chapters in the present study.

<div align="center">Faith</div>

Faith is a much-used word. It probably came into the English language via the Norman Conquest and was from the start linked to the notions of trust and belief (Hoad, 1996). While it pertains to the relationship between God and the human person, its domain is much more complex than is often assumed by those who use the word. The meaning of the word "faith" as it is used in the present study can be found in the *Letter to the Hebrews* (*11:1-3*):

> Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it. Faith is the reason we remember great people who lived in the past. It is by faith we understand that the whole world was made by God's command so what we see was made by something that cannot be seen (New Century Version).

As defined here, the word embraces what is called "human faith," "religious faith" and, given its use in the Christian scriptures, "Christian faith." These concepts require further investigation.

Human faith

Faith is a human reality. Segundo (1984) described faith as being "anthropological" (p. 32), that is, faith is experienced first in the relationship

each person has with his/her parents. Segundo engaged his readers in a reflection on the relationship between faith and trust and his analysis focused on the shortcomings of ideas about faith proposed by Pannenburg, who stated that "faith as a vital act is synonymous with trust, a trust that has to do with the fundamental and basic moments in any human life" (quoted in Segundo, 1984, p. 32). Segundo rejected Pannenburg's understanding of faith as trust. He proposed that faith is a meaning-structuring act that is directed towards "certain specific persons as its object" (p. 33). It is initially and always anthropological, that is, rooted in the everyday experiences of human living.

In his book *The Assurance of Things Hoped For* (1994), Avery Dulles critiqued Segundo's position and found that his "theology of faith contains many questionable elements"; however, he did not reject his arguments outright, but found merit in his attack on "a too passive understanding of faith as an acceptance of ready-made truths, under the illusion that they are simply handed down from heaven" (p. 161).

James Fowler (1980) called faith "a human universal" (p. 53), that is, every human person experiences faith. He stated that its principal function was "the making, maintenance and transformation of human meaning" (p. 53). In his book, *Stages of Faith* (1981), he said, "We all begin the pilgrimage of faith as infants" (p. 119). He described the faith of the infant as "undifferentiated" (p. 119) and called it a "basic faith" (p. 121), which is formed through experiences of the love and care or parents or other primary care givers.

Fowler acknowledged the influence of Erik Erikson (1902-1994) who developed an eight-stage model of psychosocial development. The first stage, which occurs from birth to about one year, was called Trust vs. Mistrust. This is mentioned here for two reasons. Firstly, central to Fowler's understanding of faith is the experience of trust. Secondly, The name Erikson gave to the first stage of his model suggests a dialectic. Fowler understood faith to be dynamic and subject to change, growth and development.

To convey to his readers the relationship between development theories and faith, Fowler (1981) constructed a fictional conversation between Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg. In his explanation of the first stage of his model, Erikson said, "Parents convey a sense of trustworthiness and rely-ability … by the quality and consistency of their care. … The child … feels an inner sense of trustworthiness and reliability that can balance the terrors of separation and abandonment" (p. 55). The words that Fowler put in Erikson's mouth were reminiscent of ideas promoted by H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) and Josiah Royce (1855-1916). Niebuhr was influenced by Royce's moral philosophy. He argued that morality was based on loyalty that is directed to the good of the community. Niebuhr's understanding of faith reflected this orientation towards being other-centred. He proposed a form of faith that exhibited a triadic relationship between the self, others and the cause that united them. In *Meaning of Revelation* (1941), he described faith as:

> … a dynamic interpersonal process in which there are not two terms simply, but three – the self, the other, and the cause; and in which there is

not one response (that of trust in the faithful, for instance) that maintains the structure, but where two responses are called for, trust and loyalty (quoted in Kliever, 1978, p. 87).

Fowler (1981) readily acknowledged his debt to H. Richard Niebuhr for the concept of faith as a triadic relationship. He constructed his theory of faith development on this understanding of faith and proposed that the "cause" consisted of people's centres of value. He explained what he meant: "We invest or devote ourselves because the other to which we commit has, for us, an intrinsic excellence or worth and because it promises to confer value on us" (p. 18). Fowler readily admitted that this centre of value can lead people away from what is of ultimate concern for all human beings and that this form of faith was illusory. Fowler is a committed Christian and his interest in faith development had its origins in his Christian faith. Even though he commenced his reflection with his understanding of human faith, it was evident throughout his writings that he understood that while faith was human it was also religious.

Religious Faith

Fowler (1981) discussed the relationship between the words "faith," "belief" and "religion." He stated that faith was often expressed through the symbols, rituals and beliefs of religious traditions (p.53). In *Weaving the New Creation* (1991), he defined religious faith as "the personal appropriation of relationship to God by means of a religious tradition" (p. 100). Fowler (1981) acknowledged the influence of Paul Tillich (1886-1965), H. Richard Niebuhr

and Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) on his ideas about religious faith. In *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1963), Smith pointed to the shifting meanings of the three words. He had also observed in *Faith and Belief* (1979) that the study of religious traditions revealed a variety of religious beliefs, but also marked similarities in the meaning of religious faith across traditions. He concluded that faith was "a quality of the person … an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe" and a way of seeing, feeling and acting "in terms of a transcendent dimension" (p. 139).

Groome (1991) held a similar view: "Religious faith of any kind affords a perspective for interpreting life, a way of making meaning out of existence, pattern out of chaos" (p.18). Smith (1979) also stated: "Faith is meant to be religious" (quoted in Fowler, 1981, p. 10). Niebuhr's life and his theology illustrated well Smith's understanding of the nature of faith. The loss of his father when he was only seventeen, the death of two students under his care at a youth camp, a nervous breakdown in 1944 led Niebuhr to conclude that evil could be conquered only by faith, which required him to walk the way of the Cross, with the commitment of Christ, in the face of relativity.

In Niebuhr's theology, relativity stood in opposition to what was ultimate, total and infinite, that is, the divinity, which was the object of religious faith. The concept of ultimacy, noted in the theology of Niebuhr, was found in the theology of Tillich (1951) who defined faith in terms of "ultimate concern" which he related to the Shema, a Jewish statement of faith (Deuteronomy 6:4). Tillich quoted the words of Jesus: "The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all our heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all

your strength" (Mark 12:29-30 New Century Version) and stated that "ultimate concern" had no other referent than what is "ultimate, unconditional, total, infinite concern" (p. 12). Dulles (1994) recognised that Tillich, like Niebuhr and Fowler, held that everyone has faith, "for it is impossible to stifle completely the relationship to the unconditional that lies at the heart of human existence" (p. 122).

Fowler (1981) argued for a different understanding of the "ultimate concern" of people. He wrote: "Ultimate concern may be invested in family, university, nation, or church. Love, sex and a loved partner might be the passionate center of one's ultimate concern" (p. 4). He constructed his understanding of a person's "centre(s) of value and power," on the recognition that what is shared in relationship is a mutual concern that can become of ultimate concern (p. 18). It was stated earlier in the chapter that Fowler recognised that when the ultimate concern did not pertain to a religious tradition, then faith was not religious in its character.

Fowler's understanding of religious faith was criticised by Dulles (1994) for the following reason: liberal theology — the category in which he placed the theologies of H. Richard Niebuhr, Smith, Tillich and Fowler — attempted to ground faith in human experience and the human condition and placed the origins of faith in the human search for meaning and significance. His position reflected the teaching of the Catholic Church: faith is grounded in God's self-communication and God's invitation to each person to be in relationship with the divine (*CCC*, para. 93).

Christian Faith

Christian faith was the third form of faith identified early in the present chapter. The name suggests that it is the faith that relates to the Christian tradition. The discussion that follows will present a Catholic understanding of Christian faith. The Catholic Church teaches that people are made children of God by faith and baptism for the purpose of giving praise to God in the celebration of the Eucharist (*SC*, para. 10). This Christian faith is both individual and communal and its goal of union with Christ can be achieved only through faith, the sacraments of faith and through "the cycle of celebrations in which, throughout the Church's year, the paschal mystery of Christ is unfolded" (*IC*, para. 6). The Church teaches that "… by faith, man freely commits his entire self to God, making 'the full submission of his intellect and will to God who reveals,' and willingly assenting to the Revelation given by him" (*DV*, para. 5). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) gives the following characteristics of Christian faith: Faith is a grace freely given by God (para. 153, para. 162), a human act (para. 154, para. 155), is intelligible (para. 156-159), a free act (para. 160), is necessary for salvation (para. 161) and the beginning of eternal life (para. 163).

Writing from within the tradition of the Catholic Church, Groome (1991) stated that faith is God's gift. It "reaches first to the inner core of a person and disposes toward a relationship with God" (p. 18). He emphasised the role of the Christian community in the development of an individual's faith. Groome also stated that faith is "holistic," that is, it involves the whole person and is not merely an intellectual assent to a body of truths. He described it as "a

threefold dynamic of historical activities: *believing*, *trusting* and *doing* (author's italics) God's will" (p. 18).

Holohan (1999, p. 13) used documents of the Catholic Church to give the following outline of Christian faith: firstly, since Revelation is God's act of self-communication, then faith involves the commitment of one's self freely to God (*DV*, para. 5); secondly, since Revelation presents God's truth, then faith involves the free assent to these truths (*DV*, para. 5); and thirdly, because the climax of Revelation was the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, Christian faith involves conversion to him and the commitment to discipleship (*GDC*, para. 53). Concerning the origins and development of Christian faith, Holohan (1999, p. 14) stated: firstly, Christian faith is a gift from God received through Baptism (*CCC*, para 153; *GDC*, para. 55); secondly, it "moves a person from within to wonder, to question, to seek greater understanding" (*CCC*, para. 158; *GDC*, para. 92); and lastly, for Christian faith to grow, it needs to be nourished through participation in the life of the Church (*CCC*, para. 162; *GDC*, para. 95, 96, 105, 122).

The understanding of faith that is presented by the Catholic Church stands in marked contrast to that presented by Fowler (1981) and the theologians from whom he has drawn his ideas about faith. Whereas the Catholic Church teaches that faith is a gift from God that presupposes revelation and is given in Baptism, Fowler's view is that faith is a "human universal" that develops from birth under the influence of human and divine initiatives (1981, p. xiii). The two understandings are like two sides of the same coin. They represent two contrasting theologies. Despite their

differences, both understandings of faith are relevant to the present study: to be human is to respond to God's invitation to be in relationship with God who takes the initiative in forming the relationship. The present study of the role of the imagination in religious conversion assumed that the following understanding of faith is true: God gifts people with faith and in Catholic schools, students are engaged in the systematic study of faith that is Christian and Catholic, the faith gifted to people through Baptism. As it was stated in chapter 1, and developed later in the present chapter, faith can develop and deepen, that is, the person can be drawn into a deeper and more intimate relationship with the Triune God through conversion.

Conversion

From the outset, this study was designed to cater for the possibility that some participants would not be Christian, nor even religious. Indeed, one participant regarded himself to be more Buddhist than Christian. Another was antithetic towards religion. For this reason, the more general term "religious conversion" was chosen as the focus. As a concept, it embraces forms of conversion related to the different religious traditions as well as non-confessional religious awareness.

Gillespie (1979) referred to the work of Christensen (1963), an American psychiatrist who described religious conversion as an hallucinatory experience that was sudden, intense and brief in its duration. This study presents a contrary position, namely, that religious conversion can be experienced in many ways that are not always sudden, intense or brief, but can be almost

imperceptible and over a long period of time. In support of this view, Conn (1986) stated: "Conversion is a highly confusing and controversial issue today largely because the term 'conversion' refers not to one reality but to an enormously wide range of very different human realities" (p. 7). Similarly, the Catholic theologian Rahner (1975) argued for a broader understanding of religious conversion: "Conversion to faith is always a process with many stages and these need not necessarily follow the same course in every individual…" (quoted in Rummery & Lundy, 1982, p. 34). These cautionary words need to be borne in mind later when the process of conversion is discussed.

James (1842-1910) published *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902. It was based on the text of the Gifford Lectures that he delivered in Edinburgh in 1901 and 1902. The opening sentence of Lecture IX revealed his understanding of religious conversion:

> To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities (1960/1902, p. 194).

James proceeded to explain the various physiological and psychological dimensions of religious conversion that he derived from accounts of experiences of religious conversion. Other researchers have considered the relationship between spirituality and conversion. For instance, like James,

Coles (1990), Hardy (1966; 1979), Hay (1979), Hay & Morisy (1985) and Robinson (1983) reported on profound experiences that changed people's lives. Hay, Nye & Murphy (1996) reviewed literature published on the theme of children's spirituality. They offered criticism of the cognitive theories of faith development, such as Fowler's (1981) theory of stages of faith development. They cited studies that explored biological (Hardy, 1966; 1979; Hay, 1994), cultural and linguistic influences (Nye & Hay, 1995) on spirituality. By extension, these influences might also be considered in studies of the role of the imagination in religious conversion; however, such consideration is beyond the scope of the present study.

Lonergan (1904-1984) stated in his book *Method in Theology* (1971) that "Conversion, as lived, affects all of a man's conscious and intentional operations. It directs his gaze, pervades his imagination, and releases the symbols that penetrate to the depths of his psyche" (p. 131). Babin (1965) considered religious conversion as an adolescent experience of giving "life a direction and meaning in relation to transcendent values" (p. 122). Working from within his theory of faith development, Fowler (1981) defined conversion as:

> a significant recentering of one's previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one's life in a new community of interpretation and action (p. 282f).

Fowler's definition does acknowledge the catalyst for conversion that was evident in Gillespie's (1979) model and also in Moran's (1983) model of

religious development. Moran considered the relationship between development and conversion. He proposed a three-stage model of religious development and named the stages as *simply religious*, *acquiring a religion*, and *religiously Christian* (or some other religious faith tradition). People experience conversion in the movement from one stage to the next and also within the second stage. Moran characterised conversion as the experience as "dis-belief," that is, as recognition that what was believed in the past is no longer tenable (p. 146).

Westerhoff (2000) proposed a similar idea of conversion. In his model of faith development, conversion is recognised in the movement from "faith given" to "faith owned" (p. 36). The former type of faith is that which is nurtured in the child by parents and by the Christian community. Westerhoff described nurture and conversion as a unified whole, but in tension, almost like a dialectic. He stated: "The converted life is a revolutionary existence over and against the status quo" (p. 37). Conversion is that experience of coming to make personal choices about what to believe and how to live out those beliefs.

According to Lonergan (1971), people experienced conversion in the intellectual and moral realms and both were causally dependent on religious conversion. A similar understanding was expressed by Groome (1991) who also referred to "social conversion", which is that form of conversion that can be observed in people who become "conscientised" and become active in relation to social justice issues (p. 130f). There are parallels that can be drawn between Westerhoff's (2000) understanding of conversion and that proposed

by Groome. The radicalising of faith that was identified in Groome's (1991) and Westerhoff's (2000) understandings of conversion is reminiscent of themes found in liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1973). Boff & Boff (1986) stated: "Liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor" (p. 3). Recall that in chapter 1 the imagination was defined as the intellectual faculty "that unifies the processes of the mind and heart" (Bednar, 1996, p. 169). It is presumed that the imagination can create a world in which justice reigns. Likewise, it seems reasonable to propose that the imagination has a role to play in intellectual, moral and social conversion, all of which are aspects of religious conversion.

Christian Conversion

Christian conversion is the goal of evangelisation. Pope Paul VI (1975) used statements like "transforming humanity from within," "interior change" and "seeks to convert … both the personal and collective consciences of people" to signal the Church's commitment to the religious and Christian conversion of those to whom the Gospel is proclaimed (*EN*, para. 18). Pope John Paul II (1991) stated the Church's mission more succinctly when teaching about its missionary activity: "The proclamation of the word of God has Christian conversion as its aim: a complete and sincere adherence to Christ and his Gospel through faith" (RM, para. 46). He described the nature and condition of Christian conversion as:

> a gift from God, the work of the Blessed Trinity … expressed in faith which is total and radical …. (It) gives rise to a dynamic and lifelong process which demands a continual turning away from 'life according to the flesh'

to 'life according to the Spirit' … accepting by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple (*RM*, para. 46). The Catholic Church based its call to conversion on the message of John the Baptist who was "baptising people in the desert and preaching a baptism of changed hearts and lives for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4 New Century Version).

The Church has identified three expressions of conversion: fasting, prayer and almsgiving and then listed some of the actions associated with Christian conversion, among which were "gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right" (*CCC*, para. 1435). The ways believers experience conversion is reflected in the Catholic Church's understanding of the process of conversion which has been outlined as follows: Conversion requires first an interest in the Gospel. This is a prelude to conversion, which is the second phase. The third and fourth phases include profession of faith, the commitment to prayer and the reception of the sacraments, as well as the practice of carrying out charitable works (*GDC*, para. 56). Martini's (1982) description of the four stages of Christian maturity reflected the teaching of the Church about Christian conversion. He identified conversion as the starting point and called it "the catechumenal experience". It is characterised by a crisis of faith that is resolved by "a change of horizon" and a "real transformation of subjects and their world" that is brought about through placing God, revealed through Christ, at the centre of their world (p. 62). Even though Martini's view pre-dates the release of the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998), his ideas about conversion are consistent with those

found in the Directory. The conversion experience that he described was both religious and Christian. The language he chose reflected ideas about the process of conversion also found in the writings of Conn (1986), Fowler (1981, 1991, 1996), Gelpi (1993), Lonergan (1971), Moran (1983), Rambo (1993) and others.

The process of conversion

Gillespie (1979) outlined the phases of religious conversion as being: (1) pre-conversion, with questioning, tension, anxiety, and stress; (2) crisis, with the sense of a greater presence, higher control, and self-surrender; and (3) post-conversion, with its relief, release, assurance, harmony, peace, and ecstatic happiness (p. 36f). Other writers described similar processes. For instance, Fowler (1981) described a seven-stage theory of faith development and proposed that the movement from one stage to the next could be considered conversion. He outlined his position in a lecture he gave at Boston College: "To become Christian means the conversion of our human faith towards Christian faith, and development in Christian faith involves the gradual conversion, by formation and *metanoia*, of our human faith toward faith mediated by companionship of Jesus Christ" (quoted in Osmer, 1992, p. 138). Fowler (1981) described conversion as a process embracing three movements that led to the transformation of a person's relationship with God by means of their imagination: Firstly, some experiences were revelatory, that is, they revealed God in ways that promised to be more fulfilling. These experiences acted as a sort of "solvent" to dissolve or disintegrate the old images of the human-divine relationship. The old became foreign, strange and

distant. It was no longer desirable. Secondly, the imagination constructed new images by which to understand and relate with God. Fowler proposed that Jesus' life and ministry provided a paradigm for this step in the conversion process. Thirdly, people developed and lived out a new chapter in their pilgrimage through life with these new images of their relationship with God (p. 276ff).

In *Faith Development and Religious Education* (1986), Dykstra discussed Fowler's understanding of religious conversion outlined a four step process: Firstly, there occurs an increasing sense of frustration with the inadequacy of the way meaning is constructed: the way one views reality is no longer satisfying. Secondly, there is an awareness of personal competence and a readiness to imagine or construct a new way of making meaning of life's experiences. The third step is seen in a person's willingness to struggle towards a new way of viewing life. The final step is evident in a person's act of appropriating new content and applying a new way of thinking about life (p. 264).

Rambo (1993) described the process of conversion that took into account aspects not dealt with directly by Gillespie, Fowler and Dykstra. For instance, he placed the process of conversion within the quest for meaning and purpose in life. He described the individual's quest as "an ongoing process, but one that will greatly intensify during times of crisis" (p. 56). Secondly, he emphasised the role of the "advocate" or sponsor whose interaction with the potential convert can be crucial to the process of conversion (p. 66). Thirdly, he described the parts played by rituals, rhetoric and roles in building what he

called an "encapsulated world" into which the potential candidate is invited (p. 104). Fourthly, he documented the characteristics of the process of commitment experienced by converts and listed them as "decision making, rituals, surrender, testimony manifested in language transformation and biographical reconstruction, and motivational reformulation" (p. 124). These aspects of the process of conversion will be examined in some detail in chapter 5 of the present study.

Religious conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. God works through those who proclaim the good news of salvation (*EN,* para. 18). The presence of God in the world is not haphazard. Dulles (1984) drew on the work of Michael Polanyi and "situates religious conversion within the framework of a logic of discovery" (p. 42). The "logic" of religious conversion is identifiable, even if there are different perspectives and differing understandings of it. Some theologians have identified structures or progressions within the experience of religious conversion. For instance, as stated above, Martini (1982) used the New Testament to describe religious conversion as a journey and outlined four successive stages of conversion. In the present study, it was not uncommon to find in a family some members who were "churched", that is, they were active in the life of their parish, and others who chose to reject religious practices, such as going to Mass on Sundays.

While some conversions are sudden and dramatic (Gillespie, 1979; James, 1960/1902), generally speaking, religious conversion is not an instant event, however, it is no less dramatic in its effect, even over a long period of time (Babin, 1965; Lonergan, 1971). Conversion has been referred to as a

"continuing" process that is lifelong (*GDC*, para. 56) and "a dynamic process … which advances gradually…" (*FC*, para. 9). Amalorpavadass (1983) stated that it was "a gradual but total transformation" (p. 342), a view also expressed by Fowler (1981, 1984).

The focus in the teaching of the Catholic Church is not just religious conversion, but rather, Christian conversion. Recall that it was stated above that Pope John Paul II (1991) made this very clear in his reflection on the missionary activity of the Catholic Church: "Conversion means accepting, by a personal decision, the saving sovereignty of Christ and becoming his disciple" (*RM*, para. 46). Faith and religious conversion are related. Faith, understood as trust and loyalty, is the outcome of conversion. The focus now shifts to what prompts a person to adopt a radical change of heart (conversion) with respect to the relationship that is their ultimate concern (to use Tillich's (1951) expression about faith). As explained above, Fowler (1981) argued that it was the imagination that prompted the change in a person's relationship with God.

<center>The imagination</center>

Disparaged by some philosophers, regarded with suspicion by some religious groups and feted by poets and artists, the notion of the imagination has had a troubled history. Yet it can be shown that it plays a significant role in promoting change. It does so by means of mental images derived from memories of objects and experiences, and by bringing together previously unrelated ideas, memories and experiences. Thus the imagination constructs mental images of the real and the possible. Central to the present study is the

notion that the imagination constructs the new to dispel the frustration and disillusionment experienced with the old.

The history of ideas about the imagination began in ancient Greece with Plato and Aristotle. While Aristotle (384-322 BC) credited the imagination with intellectual and ethical status, Plato (429-347 BC) regarded it with suspicion and denigrated its role in the search for truth. He described it as the lowest form of knowing. The *Republic* (circa 380 BC), his most well known work, recorded an argument between Socrates and a number of other people. In Book Seven, Socrates recounted the allegory of the cave in which he described the imagination as knowing that is shadowy and related to opinion rather than truth. The imagination, this view contended, did not deal with reality and so it could not be trusted.

In his philosophy, Aristotle referred to the imagination as *phantasia* to identify the process by which images were presented to the human mind. The Latin translation of the Greek word *phantasia* is *imaginatio*. Aristotle recognized the work of the imagination in people's efforts to recall objects not present (Thomas, 2002) and associated the imagination with desire: anything not immediately present to the senses must be communicated by means of an image of what is desired. In this context, desire is morally neutral.

In contrast to Aristotle's position, an ethical motif ran through the early history of the use of the concept of the imagination. It was present in both the Greek and Jewish understanding of the role of the imagination and, as will be shown, it influenced the Christian understanding of the nature and function of

the imagination. In the Jewish culture, the word *yetzer* was associated with the imagination. Blanchard (2005) wrote: "In traditional Jewish terms, the human imagination, our *yetzer*, good or bad, is our human self — creating alternative possibilities for responding to our personal situation" (p. 1). There are two forms of the word: *yetzer-ra* and *yetzer-tov*. The former term relates to the inner desire to satisfy needs and it can be inclined towards evil if not kept in check by *yetzer-tov,* which can be defined as the inclination towards the good.

The word *yetzer* relates to the divine act of creation. This meaning was considered by Kearney (1988) in his discussion of the Jewish understanding of imagination. He identified four characteristics of the imagination. As the Jewish use of the word *yetzer* suggests, it is *mimetic*, that is, the imagination is the human imitation of the divine act of creation. The imagination is also *ethical*: it has a significant role to play in choosing between good and evil. It is *historical*, that is, it is involved in determining possibilities that provide alternatives to the present and the past. Finally, the imagination is *anthropological*, which means it is an activity that is proper to people and is related to their freedom and development. Kearney's description of the imagination provided a useful framework for determining the role played by the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents. For instance, it will be shown that the participants' images of God revealed their creative imaging in anthropological terms of the God of their childhood and even of the God of their adolescence. Second, the participants were encouraged to engage in a form of narrative theology, that is, they constructed from memory the story of

their relationship with God. With those who had experienced some form of religious conversion, there was evidence of the ethical dimension of the imagination at work determining their relationship with the world and with significant others in their lives.

Keane (1984) identified imagination as "a non-discursive type of human learning and experience" (p. 21) and created an epistemological framework that contrasted the work of Plato, Augustine and Kant with that of Aristotle, Aquinas and Newman. His purpose for doing so was to find a basis for developing an "imagination-oriented moral theology" (p. 21). He argued that Aristotle, Aquinas and Newman "provide a stronger basis for an ethics of imagination" (p. 21). Since ethics relates to changes in beliefs and values, his ideas were relevant in a consideration of an epistemological framework for religious conversion. As noted above, Kearney (1988) also presented an argument for a relationship between the imagination and ethics. In the present study, it will be shown that the imagination functioned to create a religious ethic that maintained each participant's life world.

Sutherland (1971) drew attention to the disputed status of the imagination in philosophy (p. 1). For instance, the proponents of the English empiricist tradition did not view the imagination was not viewed favourably (Sutherland, 1971). Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the English philosopher, statesman and essayist, once wrote "Imagination was given to man to compensate him for what he is not; a sense of humor to console him for what he is." Yet he gave the imagination a place as part of rational behaviour when people try to decide whether to take action or not: "For sense sendeth over to

Imagination before Reason have judged; and Reason sendeth over to Imagination before the Decree can be acted; for Imagination ever precedeth Voluntary Motion" (Sutherland, 1971, p. 5). He seemed to be ascribing to the imagination a "filtering" function. A contrary view was expressed by English poets of the romantic era. For instance, in the Preface to his 1815 Poems, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) distinguished between invention and imagination. He described the value of the imagination as "giving insights into what is described" and assigned it as essentially an intellectual activity.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was passionate about changing people's understanding of the nature and function of the imagination. In his *Eleventh Lecture*, he outlined the role of the imagination and stated its importance: "The imagination is the distinguishing characteristic of man as a progressive being…" (Walsh, 1959, p. 25). Coleridge identified understanding and reason as two functions of the human mind and the imagination was the intellectual faculty that united them. Coleridge referred to it as a "completing power" and he coined the term *asemplastic* from the Greek "to shape into one" to describe its function (Bate, 1968, p. 158). In *The Statesmans Manual* he defined the imagination as:

> that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the reason in images of the sense, and organising (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanent and self-circling energies of the reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves and consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors (Bates, 1968, p. 160).

In effect, Coleridge highlighted the synthesizing role of the imagination. He posited its existence in the human desire to see things in their entirety and to discover their organizing principles.

Coleridge distinguished between primary and secondary imagination. The former he related to moral will. Salingar (1970) stated that Coleridge believed that the source of religious faith and of genuine perception were one and the same, namely the "divine spark" in each person. In an oft-quoted passage from his *Biographia*, Coleridge defined primary imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (p. 189). In summarising Coleridge's view of imagination, Bate (1968) stated that it was "a process of realisation" that unified reason and understanding (p. 159).

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a contemporary of Coleridge, believed that people were able to have an immediate and intuitive feeling of God. He came under the influence of members of the Romantic Movement and in 1799 published his most important work on the philosophy of religion: *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. Like Coleridge, Schleiermacher believed that the role of the imagination was to link God and people and so he argued for the primacy of the imagination in constructing reality, which it could do independently of the senses. The proposal that the imagination is the human faculty that provides access to God is a theme that can be found in scripture, literature, philosophy and theology. The breadth of this reflection is reflected in the writings of twentieth and twenty-first century writers, including Walsh (1959), Fischer (1983), Bausch (1984), Green (1989),

Hart (2003), Eckman (2005) and Levy (2008). It will be considered in greater depth in the section on religious imagination in this chapter and also in chapter 6 of the present study.

Kant (1724-1804), who was another contemporary of Coleridge, thought differently from him. Green (1987) called Kant an "epistemological reformer" and stated that he "helped to establish imagination as an important locus in modern philosophy" (p. 13). Harris attributed the popularity of the concept of *Einbildungskraft* to Kant – it was a concept that he borrowed from the psychological theory of Johann Nikolaus Tetens. In her work on the imagination, Warnock (1976) quoted Kant's definition:

> What is first given to us is appearance. When combined with consciousness it is called perception. Now since every appearance contains a manifold, and since different perceptions occur in the mind separately and singly, a combination of them *such as they cannot have in sense* is demanded. There must therefore exist in us an active faculty for the synthesis of this manifold. To this faculty I give the name Imagination (p. 28).

Kant was a man of his time. He shared with earlier Enlightenment thinkers the conviction that religion is essentially concerned with rational ideas – specifically with moral ones. Green (1989) stated that he defined religion as the "recognition of all duties as divine commands" (p. 13). Kant distinguished between pure rational faith and the historical phenomena known in the Enlightenment as "positive" religion. He drew a distinction between the pure motive of rational faith and empirical faith. Kant used images, such as the

kernel and the husk, as well as inner and outer concentric circles to communicate the difference between the two forms of faith and religion. He identified the latter form of religion as imagination.

According to Paton (1951), Kant associated the imagination with understanding, of which it is the servant and a manifestation of understanding derived from the synthesis of experience. But understanding can be purely intellectual, that is, transcendental, as well as empirical (p. 537). That is why Kant identified two forms of the imagination to correspond to the different forms of understanding. Warnock (1976) interpreted Kant's view in this way: the imagination lies between concepts that people have and sense experience. It joins these two elements and brings order to sense experience "according to certain rules, or in certain unchanging forms" (p. 30). The imagination also has the power to construct images that act as blueprints for future images; it enables people "to think of certain objects in the world in a new way, as signifying something else" (p. 197). Hart (2003) used "reordering, redescribing, transforming" as descriptors of the work of the imagination (p. 3).

Religious imagination

In *Models of Revelation*, Dulles (1985) wrote about the creative power of the imagination. In his explanation of his fifth model of revelation, which has its origins in nineteenth century idealism, he stated that Hart, an American theologian, "stresses the involvement of the imagination in the revelatory process" (p. 103). Dulles defined imagination as "the power by which we anticipate and construct our future …" (p. 104). Within the framework of this

model of revelation, Dulles also examined the ideas of Eugene Frontinelli, an American pragmatist philosopher. He stated that Frontinelli held that the imagination was "the organ through which ideals are constructed and possibilities are apprehended" (p. 104).

Dulles (1985) described Hart as one who saw imagination as essentially cognitive, whereas Frontinelli considered it to be non-cognitive. However, Hart stated that imagination was not cognitive. Nor could it be considered to be non-cognitive. He believed that it was "the irenic faculty of the mind, mediating between the active and passive phases of mental operation, conforming the mind to the object and the object to the mind" (p. 319). For Hart, the imagination was an operational faculty that engaged in a "plurality of operations" (p. 319).

Harris (1932-2005) lectured internationally about religious imagination. In *Teaching and religious imagination* (1987), she took Wheelwright's (1982/1968) four functions of the imagination and interpreted them in a religious sense, thus providing a structure for reflecting on religious imagination at work in the lives of the participants in the present study. Harris (1987) considered the imagination from the perspective of *valuing*, which carried with it "a sense of subjective involvement and participation in what [people] esteem or find desirable" (p. 11). Implicit in her statement was the existence of religious faith, that is, the valuing of and commitment to a personal relationship with God.

Fowler (1981, 1984), Leavey et al (1992), Treston (1993) and Bednar (1996) also wrote with conviction about the relationship between faith and imagination. They placed the imagination in the role of servant to faith and emphasised its active role in faith development. Fowler (1981) described the relationship between faith and imagination in a generic sense: "In faith, imagination composes comprehensive images of the ultimate conditions of existence" (p. 30). Parks (1992) was critical of Fowler's failure to develop the contribution of this relationship to faith development theory (p. 111); however, there is sufficient in his reflection on synthetic-conventional faith (1984, p.59) to provide insights into the role of the imagination in faith development.

In his description of the movement from synthetic-conventional faith to individuative-reflective faith, Fowler drew attention to the change from a *tacit* faith to one that was *explicit*. There were echoes there of Bate's (1968) comment about Coleridge's understanding of the role of the imagination in constructing reality: the imagination assists in the awareness-raising activity of the mind. It is suspected that some adolescents have already begun this part of their faith journey by the time they reach the final year of secondary school.

Bednar (1996) wrote about the contribution of Fr William Lynch, SJ, (1908-1987) to understanding the relationship between the imagination and faith: "it is the task of faith to imagine the real" (p. 79). Treston (1993) agreed with this view of the imagination and identified the purpose of the relationship between the imagination and religious education: "The role of imagination in religious education is to open our consciousness to new horizons of being and God imaging" (p. 12). Keane (1984) lent weight to this argument by stating

"Imaginatively, we can be open to experiences of faith and trust in God, experiences that would not be possible at the level of systematic philosophical or theological discourse" (p. 25).

In their research into Australian adolescent girls' religious faith, Leavey et al. (1992) made statements that suggested that some adolescents use their imaginations with greater skill than others. Concerning one student, they reported: "Deeply immersed in her religious culture, she uses a variety of images derived from that culture and possibly from her own inner experience" (p. 145). About another student, they wrote: "She can integrate images both from the Catholic tradition and from an understanding of nature to produce what she calls her 'simile or parallel to God'" (p. 145). Elsewhere they commented on yet another adolescent's religious faith implicitly in terms of imagination when they described that person's faith as being "enlarged with the new perspectives born of advanced competencies" (p. 145).

Both Keane (1984) and Harris (1987) affirmed the view of Paul Ricoeur (1978) who described the imagination in terms reminiscent of Kant's productive imagination. Keane (1984) summarised Ricoeur's understanding of imagination in three points: the imagination "enables us to form vision, to see reality as a whole on a conceptual level"; it helps us "to form pictures or figures … out of which our vision can spring"; and it helps us "suspend judgment in conflictual situations … and find new meanings in reality" (p. 58). Drawing on Ricoeur's views, Harris (1987) described the religious dimension of teaching in the following way: "For we teachers, at our best, can shape and reshape subject matter in order to present, to institute, and to constitute what

is, has been, and might be humanly possible" (p. 3). Embedded in her statement was her understanding of the imagination as the power to shape reality. It is that power, so stated Bednar (1996), which "produces things as a synthesis of both meaning and presence" (p. 59).

The imagination draws together in an intelligent way the disparate elements of a person's life that impact on their relationship with God. It proposes new images of the relationship that promise a greater sense of trust and value. How does the Catholic Church provide opportunities for those new images to be formed and the imagination to be stirred? One area for investigation is how the two elements of religious education and catechesis are incorporated in the lives of adolescents attending Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia.

<div align="center">Religious education and catechesis</div>

The evangelisation process has two elements, one being Christian witness and the other being the ministry of the word. It is the latter that is of particular concern in the present study. Ministry of the word refers to the use of human words by any baptised believer to speak of the works of God and of those whose lives reflect faith in God (*GDC*, para. 50). This is the context for considering religious education (and catechesis) as an essential element in the present study of the role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents attending Catholic schools.

The school subject referred to as "Religious Education" in Western Australian Catholic education curriculum documents is intended to contribute

to the Church's mission of handing on the faith by imparting knowledge of the faith. It is part of the process of evangelisation outlined in the previous chapter. In 1971 and again in 1998, the Catholic Church published general guidelines for the teaching of religious education, titled *General Directory for Catechesis*. A brief history of the origins of the two documents was presented in the introductory chapter of the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998). The first directory — *General Catechetical Directory* — was published as an outcome of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Its contribution to the growing understanding of the catechetical work of the Church was stated and the missionary thrust of the Church was acknowledged. The significance of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to the theme of evangelisation in the contemporary world in 1974 was stated and the work of Pope Paul VI, who published the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Evangelisation in the Modern World) in 1975, was noted with due deference. The work of Pope John Paul II was outlined succinctly. Reference was made to the twelve encyclicals that he wrote, "which constitute in themselves a synthetic corpus of coherent doctrine with regard to the renewal of ecclesial life decreed by the Second Vatican Council" (para. 5).

This considerable global effort over a period of nearly forty years was in response to changes in the world. The impact of "crises, doctrinal inadequacies, influences from the evolution of global culture and ecclesial questions derived from outside the field of catechesis" on religious education and catechesis (*GDC*, para. 2) required a response from the Church that would provide direction for its members. The Introduction also stated that the

document represented a serious attempt to address and keep in balance two requirements: the first being "the contextualisation of catechesis" in evangelisation as envisaged by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; and the second being "the appropriation of the content of the faith as presented in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*" (*GDC*, para. 7).

In giving consideration to what The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) stated about the nature and purpose of religious education, it should be noted that the document's authors referred to "Religious Instruction" (*GDC*, para. 73). In Australia the term "instruction" has connotations that are different from the meaning given to the word in Europe (Holohan, 1999, p. 9). As a consequence, while the Church in Australia has adopted the language of the new directory, it has retained the use of the term "religious education." Regardless of the term that is used, the focus is on learning the content of the faith.

Religious Education

In a book intended for teachers new to the task of teaching religious education in Australian Catholic schools, Ryan and Malone (1996) explained that the term "religious education" entered the common language of Catholic schools in Australia in the 1970s. They described it as "an umbrella term that covers all aspects of student learning about religion, as well as the processes of becoming more religious" (p. 7). Treston (1993) described the subject as "a meeting point between religion and education, and implies a conversation between learning and the whole experience of the phenomenon of religion" (p.

32). Concerning the impact of religious education on the learner, Treston observed that it "empowers participants to think religiously and to acquire skills to analyse religious questions" (p. 12). Holohan (1999) limited the use of the term to denoting the curriculum taught in the classroom. He used the term "catechesis" to refer to what happens outside the classroom, such as liturgical celebrations, retreats, community service and the activities of Catholic youth groups, such as Young Vinnies and the Young Christian Students movement. The distinction between the two forms of evangelisation, that is, religious education and catechesis, will be discussed below.

Religious education is "a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines" (*GDC*, para. 73). The focus is on having students able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the teaching of the Church (*RD*, para. 69). Religious education engages in dialogue with the other disciplines that together with it make up the curriculum of the Catholic school. The Bishops of the Catholic Church in Western Australia mandated their schools to teach religious education. The importance they placed on this educational endeavour was illustrated clearly in their *Mandate* (2001), hereafter referred to as *M01*. They acknowledged the validity of the concept of "learning area" promulgated by the State Government. Given the primacy of the teaching of religion in Catholic schools, the Bishops directed that religious education be the first learning area of the Catholic school curriculum so it was placed at the head of the eight learning areas addressed by the curriculum designed for all schools in Western Australia. Thus, in the curriculum of Catholic schools in Western

Australia there are nine learning areas and religious education is the first learning area. In their letter, the Bishops identified the principal function of religious education: "It aims to share Catholic faith by promoting knowledge and understanding of the Gospel as it is handed on by the Catholic Church…" (*M01*, para. 43). The context of this statement needs to be understood in order to appreciate what it means in terms of curriculum and pedagogy.

The Catholic Church's analysis of the state of its missionary activity led to the formulation of new concepts that have changed the shape of religious education in Australia. Pope John Paul II (1990) introduced the concept of "new evangelisation" to identify that aspect of the Church's mission to evangelise which involved communities of baptised Christians who had "lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (*RM*, para. 33).

The Catholic Bishops of Western Australia acknowledged the reality of new evangelisation. They recognised that teachers in their schools would be promoting faith in students who had little or no interest in the Church (*M01*, para. 24). A paper written by Bellamy & Castle (2004) based on the results of the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) conducted in 2001 showed a 13% decline in Catholics attending weekly Mass. In 2001, 15% of Australia's five million Catholics attended Mass weekly. A study of youth spirituality in Australia (2003-2005) identified confusion about what to believe and a lack of interest in organised religion (Hughes, 2005).

The Catholic Bishops of Western Australia (*M01*, para. 44) addressed the relationship between religious education and new evangelisation. They described religious education as part of their strategy to promote the religious awakening of the students attending Catholic schools in Western Australia. Catholic schools were mandated to "ensure that students understand the foundational Christian belief that Jesus Christ is Saviour, as well as the Christian Promise of Salvation" (*M01*, para. 44). The religious education curriculum was to provide students with the opportunity to learn about the implications of the promise of salvation for their lives and how their deepest longings could be satisfied by the Gospel message (M01, para. 44).

One of those consulted by the Bishops in the preparation of their *Mandate* was Fr Gerard Holohan (currently the Bishop of the Diocese of Bunbury, Western Australia). Following the release of the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998), the National Catholic Education Committee (NCEC), acting on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference Education Committee, published a monograph written by Fr Holohan, who was at the time a Deputy Director of Catholic Education in the Western Australian Catholic Education Office (CEOWA) and Director of Religious Education. His monograph was titled *Australian Religious Education – Facing the Challenges* (1999). He applied the language and categories found in the *Directory* to the teaching of religious education. He asked the question, "What is religious education?" and then answered it: "Religious education seeks to help students to learn the teachings of the Gospel (and) to develop 'a sense of the nature of

Christianity' and of 'how Christians are trying to live their lives' (*RD*, para. 69)"
(p. 27).

Catechesis

Pope John Paul II defined the word "catechesis" as "the whole of the
efforts within the Church to make disciples" and he stated that it involved the
education and instruction of its members, thus building up the body of Christ
(*CT*, para. 1). The making of disciples is a formative process and not just
instructional. The belief of the Catholic Church is this: "By meeting Jesus
Christ and by adhering to him, the human being sees all his deepest
aspirations completely fulfilled" (*CT*, para. 55).

Catechesis is the responsibility of the whole Catholic community
(Saker, 2004, p. 10). The Catholic Bishops of Western Australia (2001)
acknowledged the need for Catholic schools to be involved in catechesis,
particularly for students whose families do not participate in parish life (*M01*,
para. 39). They identified the ways that schools offered catechesis: "school
and class liturgies, school and class prayer, retreats and Easter and
Christmas celebrations;" they included ways of celebrating Mary as a model of
Christian discipleship, "the lives of the saints and martyrs" and the use and
appreciation of "Christian symbols, practices and customary signs of respect,
particularly for the Eucharist." (*M01*, para. 47). Holohan (1999) included the
liturgical year, homilies, sacramental programmes, social service groups and
specific actions arising from reflection upon ways of imitating Christ (p. 37).

Catechesis is an interactive process involving those who proclaim the Gospel, those who hear the word of God and the Holy Spirit who stirs the hearts of all who seek union with God. *It is a life-long process of initial conversion, formation, education, and on-going conversion. Through word, worship, service and community, it seeks to lead all God's people to an ever-deepening relationship with God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. To this end, catechesis takes many forms and includes the initiation of adults, youth and children as well as the intentional and systematic effort to enable all to grow in faith and discipleship. Religious education is part of this effort.

Religious education and catechesis are considered to be distinct, yet complementary. Holohan (1990) placed religious education in the context of catechesis when he defined it as "a form of catechetical instruction that is concerned with developing in students 'a living, explicit and active faith, enlightened by doctrine'" (p. 6). Saker (2004) described the difference between religious education and catechesis: "Catechesis is the faith development of the student whereas religious education aims to instil the knowledge component of faith development" (p. 9). The history of religious education in Australia is about the confusion between religious education and catechesis, a confusion that seems to be pervasive in some sectors of the Catholic school system in Australia (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

In his monograph, Holohan (1990) provided a more detailed statement of the differences between religious education and catechesis by means of a table (Table 2) that features nine points of difference (p. 32).

Table 1

The differences between catechesis and religious education

	Catechesis	Religious Education
AIM	To promote maturity of Christian faith	To promote understanding of Christian beliefs and practices
PROCESSES	Formation	Education
METHODOLOGY	Reflects the divine pedagogy	Catholic educational pedagogy
LOCATION	Mature family, parish and Catholic school faith communities	School community
READINESS	Depends upon stage of conversion	Depends upon religious learning readiness
PRINCIPLES	Catechetical principles	Catholic educational principles
RECEIVERS	Groups at same stage of conversion	Students within the same school Year Level
INCULTURATION	Gospel presented in an inculturated way	Content inculturated in a context with the same systematic demands and rigor as other school disciplines
DEPTH	Needs to be appropriate to the receivers' level of conversion	Same depth of knowledge as other school disciplines

After Holohan (1999), p. 32.

Holohan (1999) also provided an historical overview of the differences between the two forms of evangelisation. The Second Vatican Council drew a distinction between "doctrinal instruction in schools" and "catechetical instruction." Pope John Paul II was emphatic about the distinction and the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) repeated his statement: "… there is an absolute necessity to distinguish clearly between religious instruction and catechesis" (*GDC*, para. 73). Holohan continued:

Its importance is so great that religious education and catechesis have been made the responsibilities of different Vatican Congregations – religious education being the responsibility of the Congregation for Catholic Education and catechesis, the Congregation for the Clergy. (p. 30)

Holohan outlined areas of agreement and difference between religious education and catechesis. Catechesis presupposed a commitment freely made to learning about the mystery of Christ. It was built on a willingness to

learn about and be nurtured by the revelation of Christ that is "stored in the depths of the Church's memory and in Sacred Scripture, and constantly communicated from one generation to the next by a living active *traditio*" (*GDC*, para. 66). On the other hand, religious education did not require faith commitment on the part of students but it was included in the curriculum because the Church wanted to promote Christian faith and conversion of minds and hearts to a deeper commitment to Christ.

Religious education is an educational activity and is distinct from catechesis, which has as its objective faith formation of individuals and communities. But religious education also complements catechesis: both are activities of ministry of the word, which joins with Christian witness to form the evangelisation process. It will be shown in later chapters that both religious education and catechesis are used by the imagination in the experience of religious conversion.

Approaches to research

To arrive at a research method that will do justice to this study of the role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents, a number of factors were considered. First, there were the different approaches to research that have emerged over time. Second, there were the antecedents to be considered, that is, the research already conducted that was relevant to the present study, for instance, previous research into Catholic education, particularly with respect to evangelisation. These were like other voices, apart from those of the participants in this study; once introduced here, they will be

invited back at a later stage to participate in the interpretation of the data. Third, there was the question of knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the participants in the research. The research method adopted would have to allow for the opportunity to scrutinise the characteristics of the ways people know things and to draw conclusions about the role of the imagination in how knowledge is received and processed. To this end, the work of Belenky et al. (1986) was examined and their model of four ways of knowing was adopted. Fourth, the method would have to allow for the interpretation of the data. This led to a consideration of hermeneutics. Fifth, there needed to be a way of allowing the participants' perceptions of their personal religious life to emerge and to be accepted without judgment, which suggest a phenomenological approach to the design of the research, one that draws together hermeneutics and phenomenology. Sixth, the interpretation of the data would be undertaken with the assistance of understandings derived from theories of human development. These factors were considered to be like movements that came together to work in harmony for the purpose of showing the role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents. The method that facilitated this approach is called Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Contrasting research methodologies

There were two basic approaches to research that could have been used to explore the role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents: quantitative inquiry and qualitative inquiry. The differences between the two approaches reflect the decisions that are made about what is

worth researching. The fundamental difference lies in the position adopted by the researcher: quantitative research views reality from the outside (Bryman, 1988), whereas qualitative researchers typically try to "walk in the shoes" of those who participate in their research projects (Burgess, 1988). It can be like an intimate sharing between the participant and the researcher, or a "dialogue with difference" (Barnacle, 2005, p. 48), or, as Finlay (2006) has described it, a relational dance.

Another major difference between the two approaches is the issue of verification. It is commonly accepted that the results of quantitative research methodologies can be verified through replication studies (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). On the other hand, qualitative research methodologies do not provide answers that are easily defended because of the epistemological assumptions that underpin such methods, namely, that there is no objective reality, and that the knowledge that is produced through the research process is context specific (Ary et al., 2006; Heaton, 2004; LeCompte, 2002; Lyons, 2008). Reliability and validity are much more crucial than verification in qualitative research (Allan, 1991). In the present study, replication was not considered to be of concern because the purpose of the research programme was to show how the imagination assisted faith development and conversion, but not how often. The study was not concerned with the frequency of responses, or other such quantitative measures.

The belief that behaviour is context-bound underpins the efforts of qualitative researchers (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 1985). This belief was echoed in Catholic Church documents on evangelisation and education

(*Christian Education*, 1965; *The Catholic School*, 1977; *Lay Catholics*, 1982; *The Religious Dimension of Education*, 1988; *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 1997; and the *Mandate* of the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia, 2001, 2009). For instance, the work of evangelisation is contextualised. Consider some of the sub-headings used in part 1 of *The Religious Dimension of Education* (1988): "Young people are well-informed" (*RD*, para. 8); "… but they lack religious and moral points of reference" (*RD*, para. 9); "Many young people find themselves in a radical instability" (*RD*, para. 10); "… and are deprived of good human relationships" (*RD*, para. 11); "They are worried about the future" (*RD*, para. 12). These factors were derived from research and those who are responsible for Catholic education in a particular locality are urged to conduct their own research to determine the characteristics of the lives of the youth they educate (RD, para. 7).

Qualitative research is descriptive. Qualitative researchers assume that human behaviour is influenced by spiritual and social factors, including its historical, political and cultural dimensions. When they study human behaviour in a "qualitative" way, they take into account this context (Ary et al., 2006). The dimensions of human behaviour contribute to the meaning and significance of lived experience of both the researchers and their subjects. On the other hand, as Ary et al. (2006) explained, quantitative researchers typically engage in "context stripping" when they analyse their data (p. 453).
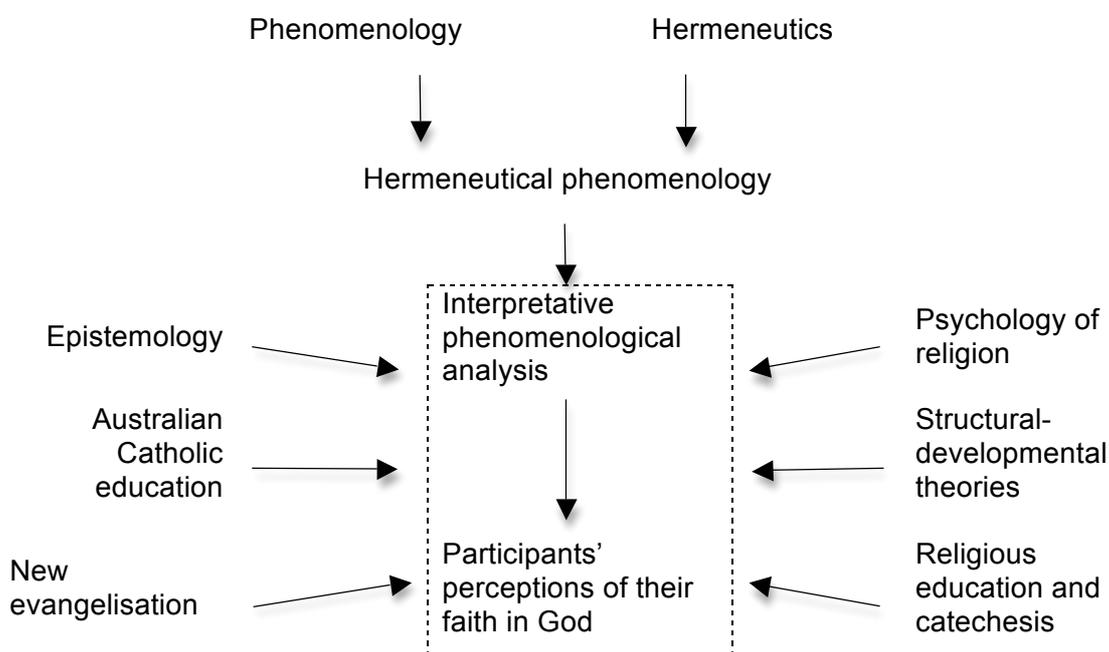
As will be made clear below in the description of the research design, qualitative research is more concerned with process than with outcome. The

focus is on understanding human behaviour and lived experience rather than on the frequency of particular behaviours. Bogdan & Biklen (1985) stated: "questions developed to guide a qualitative study need to be more open-ended and concerned with process and meaning rather than cause and effect" (p. 156). Rather than entering the research situation with a pre-determined set of factors, as is common in quantitative research designs, qualitative researchers typically allow the factors to emerge (Ary et al., 2006).

In qualitative research, understanding and insight emerge out of the data. Researchers use an inductive process that can be described as being like doing a jigsaw puzzle (Bogdan & Biklen, 1985), or like a "discovery process" (Marton, 1988), or moving up conceptually (Green, 2005). Allan (1991) commented that in the early part of a qualitative study, it could take on a messy and impressionistic character. On the other hand, it can be highly stylised, like a dance, and be enthralling and absorbing to the observer.

Finally, qualitative research is concerned with meaning, both the meaning that the researcher brings to the project, and the meaning that the participants gain from their experiences that they share with the researcher. Many of the forms of qualitative research are designed to communicate the meaning people give to their experiences by facilitating the task of understanding that experience from the participant's perspective, thereby making it possible for others to understand the experiences from the participants' perspectives. As with a symphony, the process of illumination can be understood as a series of movements (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Theoretical framework for research

Phenomenology   Hermeneutics

Hermeneutical phenomenology

	Interpretative phenomenological analysis	
Epistemology		Psychology of religion
Australian Catholic education		Structural-developmental theories
New evangelisation	Participants' perceptions of their faith in God	Religious education and catechesis

Movement one: Researching Catholic education in Australia

The research context of any field of study is complex and varied. Many studies of religious development have been undertaken. The researchers have used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies designed, in many instances, to add to the body of knowledge about the religious development of adolescents in a classroom, school and cultural setting. For instance, Fahy (1992) used a Christian faith scale designed to give measures of "the unique effect of classroom religious education upon faith measures when compared to home, peer group, personality and other school factors" (p. 106). Francis, Kay & Campbell (1996) compiled 27 reports on empirical research in religious education, most of which employed quantitative methodologies. Those studies that employed quantitative methods presented participants with a pre-

determined number of variables to which they could respond in a limited number of ways. Their responses could then be analysed statistically to provide conclusions that could be verified through replication studies.

A major focus of research into Catholic education in Australia has been the effectiveness of Catholic schools, particularly in the transmission of knowledge of the teachings of the Catholic Church and its culture. Flynn (1972, 1979, 1982, 1993), Fahy (1992), Flynn & Mok (2002) and, more recently, Saker (2004) made use of quantitative methods to gather data for analysis. Their research was conducted for the purpose of interpreting Catholic education and with a view to suggesting ways of improving on what was already characteristic of Catholic schools in Australia.

Marist Brother Marcellin Flynn (1932-2004) collaborated with Magdalena Mok to publish *Catholic Schools 2000* (2002) that documented the findings of Flynn's longitudinal study of Year 12 students in Catholic schools in Australia (1972-1998). In the Preface, they reported: "Catholic schools today have not only survived the many crises of past decades, but have a renewed sense of vitality and vision" (p. xi). Quantitative methods were used to gather data and analyse it. Questionnaires and multilevel analysis of the data provided them with a clear view of the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Australia. Qualitative techniques were also used. Saker (2004) used both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data from 133 Catholic university students enrolled in Education courses at a Western Australian University. His conclusions highlighted the deficits of Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia in providing effective religious education.

Movement two: Epistemology

In his study of the effectiveness of Catholic schools, Fahy (1992) stated his hopes for the use of quantitative research methods in determining the effectiveness of religious education: "Only the ultimate mystery of God can give meaning to the faith journey of the parents, staff and students of Catholic schools but the empirical procedures can at least track some of the footprint edges of that journey" (p. 31).

One "footprint edge" is knowledge of Catholic beliefs and practices (Fahy, 1992), however, it is not knowledge in the form of statements from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), but knowledge that is the product of students' perceptions of Catholic beliefs and practices. The study of women's ways of knowing, by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) provided a descriptive model that was consistent with the epistemological framework of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Belenky et al. used a qualitative methodology to establish a four-stage model of ways of knowing: received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. Their analysis of transcripts of interviews yielded many conclusions, one of which was particularly pertinent to this study. They stated: "At the positions of *received knowledge* and *procedural knowledge*, other voices and external truths prevail" (p. 134). The philosophy of Catholic education places knowledge as the aim of the Catholic school (*CS*, para. 37; *RD*, para. 69). Knowledge that is owned in this way is constructed knowledge and Belenky et al. (1986) described it as the "effort to reclaim the self by attempting to integrate knowledge that they felt intuitively was personally

important with knowledge they had received from others" (p.134). The movement from received and procedural forms of knowledge to constructed knowledge in the realm of religion would or could act as a sign of religious conversion.

In this study, the researcher wanted to give participants the opportunity to respond more freely to questions about aspects of their religious development. Their perceptions of their religious life were considered to be more important than their knowledge and understanding of aspects of Catholic faith because it was believed that data collected about perceptions of personal faith would reveal signs of the imagination at work helping the participants to construct their beliefs about God and their relationship with God. These purposes required a qualitative method, that is, one that focused on meaning ascribed by the participants to their experiences. The method would have to accommodate the role of the researcher as interpreter and be open to the participant as the interpreter of personal experience. The method that was sought would encompass the use of hermeneutics.

Movement three: Hermeneutics

In Greek mythology, the god Hermes mediated between Zeus and the mortals. He was responsible for taking messages from Zeus down to mortals and explaining them. This was not an easy task. First, Hermes would have to question Zeus in order to make sure he understood what Zeus wanted him to tell the mortals. Then he would have to find the right words to convey Zeus' message. In other words, Hermes had to "interpret" Zeus' message to the

mortals. Palmer (1999) described Hermes' action as bridging "an ontological gap, a gap between the thinking of the gods and that of humans" (p. 2). So the Greeks came to use the word *hermeneus* to refer to those who interpreted messages.

In Egyptian mythology, Thoth was considered to be the heart and tongue of Ra. Thoth translated Ra's will into speech. He was credited with the invention of writing and the alphabet. The Greeks realised that Thoth was similar to their god Hermes. In time, they came to merge the two gods. One of Thoth's titles was "three times great." It was translated as *Trismegistos* and used to describe Hermes Trismegistos (the thrice powerful Hermes) who became the author of all human knowledge. Both the Greeks and the Egyptians came to believe that knowledge can be "captured" in written texts and released only by divine mediation.

Aristotle used the word "hermeneutics" in his work *Peri hermeneias* ("On Interpretation"). His approach to interpretation was essentially logical and carried out for the purpose of distinguishing truth from falsehood. The word and its cognates were used throughout the ancient Greek world to denote various types of interpretation: *oral interpretation*, *translation*, and the *exegesis of texts*. It is the third form of hermeneutics, which is the exegesis of texts that is of interest in this study.

The word gained currency in the sixteenth century when scholars, having translated the Bible into English, then had to interpret it for those who were confused by what they were reading. The Reformation brought with it the

battle for the right to interpret the Bible without the aid of Tradition. Central to Luther's argument was the belief that all that was needed for interpretation of the Scriptures was the text itself. Thus the science of hermeneutics was born out of the struggle to ensure that the Bible was not interpreted in ways based on personal whim or fancy.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) has been credited with being the founder of modern hermeneutics. He rejected the excessive rationalism of the Enlightenment and was drawn to romanticism, the influence of which is seen in his understanding of hermeneutics. Schleiermacher believed that the creative power of feelings was paramount. He emphasised the importance of lived experience. This was evident in his favourite analogy of the hermeneutical process: the intuitive understanding between two friends.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1989) stated that hermeneutics developed along two paths: one was theological and the other was philological. Both paths were related to the battle to escape from the stranglehold that the Catholic Church had on scholarship in all its forms. As a field of study, hermeneutics came to be linked closely with theology. Eventually, hermeneutics were being applied to both law and literature also. By the nineteenth century, it was being used in all fields of study. For many scholars, it was the cornerstone of all academic disciplines (p.165).

The focus in the present study is on the interpretation of the words used by the participants to tell their stories of faith. The interpretation will happen in a "hermeneutic circle" which holds more than the text and the

interpreter. The voices mentioned earlier as contributors (in the sense of ideas impacting on the act of interpretation) to the second movement will be part of the circle.

Movement four: Phenomenology

Creswell (1998) described five traditions within the field of qualitative research methodologies, one of which was *phenomenology,* which as Hammond, Howarth & Keat (1991) stated "involves the description of things as one experiences them…" (p. 1). Phenomenology is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "the science of phenomena as distinct from being (ontology)." Thus it could be said that phenomenology is the study of phenomena, that is, appearances. As Finlay (2001) stated, it is the study of "the way things appear to us through experience, or in our consciousness" (p. 1). It is a study of perceptions of reality, rather than reality itself.

Phenomenology was the child of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), an Austrian mathematician and philosopher. It was the outcome of his attempt to turn philosophy into a science and he argued that it rightly had its place alongside ontology. Burch (2002) stated: "Phenomenology strives systematically for essential insights, for demonstrable universality, and for theoretical self-transparency, seeking to communicate, not just ideas and information about everyday experiences and matters of concern, but also the manner of our participation in truth" (p. 194). The significance of Burch's statement will be clarified in the comments about bracketing that will be made later in the chapter.

Husserl took the notion of intentionality from Brentano, who was his mentor. Brentano understood intentionality to be the main characteristic of psychical phenomena. It distinguished psychical phenomena from physical phenomena. In Husserl's philosophy, intentionality was essential to consciousness: if we are conscious, we have to be conscious of something. The phenomenological method derived from his philosophy was founded on the belief that all mental and spiritual realities exist independently of the physical world.

Therefore, in coming to understand another person's perception of what is real for them, it was necessary to "bracket" the physical world (of which the researcher's memories as well as attitudes and emotions are parts thereof) so as to focus attention on the perception itself. This means putting aside the parts in order to look at the whole of a person's experience (Mott, 1993, para. 8). Willis (2001) referred to bracketing as "attempting to focus on the phenomenon and allowing it as it were, to 'declare itself'" (p. 11). Bednall (2006) highlighted the complex reality of the researcher's efforts to bracket personal involvement in what is being researched.

Research design: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The search for a way of describing the role of the imagination in religious conversion has arrived at the meeting of the movements described above: qualitative research design, hermeneutics and phenomenology. The methodology that allowed for this meeting is known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a recent development in qualitative

methodologies that was designed for use within the field of psychology by Jonathan Smith (2007, 2008). Its application has been widened to include research in health, clinical and social psychology, and also in education, both in the United Kingdom and in other countries, including Australia.

This research approach is a form of hermeneutical phenomenology (Bar-Tzur, 1999; Conroy, 2003; Laverty, 2003). IPA focuses on the researcher's interpretation of participants' perceptions of their lived experiences and it deals with the meanings those experiences hold for them. Because their accounts of their lived experiences are central to the research process, the method is phenomenological in nature. At the same time, it is also interpretative because the researcher has to enter each participant's world indirectly by means of his or her own understanding of what that world might mean to the participant. Thus each account requires a detailed analysis to arrive at a faithful perception of the participant's experience.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants the opportunity to give their own account of their experiences. It also gave the researcher the freedom to ask questions in order to understand better what the experiences mean to the participant. This flexibility and attention to detail required that the interviews be taped and transcribed verbatim before being analysed in detail. It was the researcher's task to recognise the themes that framed and gave shape to the experience for the participant.

The method of analysis that is associated with IPA has a number of steps: Firstly, one interview transcript is read a number of times with the

intention of uncovering the themes that are inherent in the text of the transcript. Initially, the themes are taken straight from the text. Secondly, the themes are examined to determine if there are any underlying themes that draw together themes that have already been identified. The image of a hub with spokes would be an appropriate way of describing the building of superordinate, or major themes (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 67ff). Thirdly, the major and minor themes are applied to the other texts until the researchers are satisfied that there are no further themes to be identified. Lastly, the texts are subjected to interpretations drawn from the texts. In the present study, the bringing together of the qualitative analyses of the religious life of fifteen participants made it possible to describe how the imagination functioned in their worlds.

The task of researching the role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents has brought together diverse worlds: history, philosophy and research methodologies. Their meeting helped to define the task with greater precision and led to the adoption of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as the research method for this study. The analytic dimension of IPA was enhanced by including aspects of structural-developmental theories of Piaget and Fowler as well as insights gained from studies in cognitive psychology in the hermeneutical circle that was created for the interpretation of the text of each participant's story.

Movement five: Structural-developmental theories

The fifth movement consisted of selected theories belonging to the structural-developmental paradigm that were brought into the hermeneutic circle to assist with the interpretation of the participants' perceptions of their experiences of God. As the name "structural-developmental" implies, central to the paradigm is the notion of human development exhibiting a stage-like character. Piaget's (1958) theory of cognitive development, Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development, Kegan's (1982) model of human development with its emphasis on adult development, Kohlberg's (1969) theory of moral development and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs: these are but a few of the theories and models belonging to the structural-developmental paradigm. The understandings of human development found in the writings of Piaget and Fowler were significant influences on the interpretation of the data gathered for the present study.

Streib (2004) offered a critique of Piaget's reliance on the notion of invariant sequential stages in cognitive development (p. 2). He cited studies by Bjorklund (2000), Gerrig & Zimbardo (2004) and Subbotsky (2000) that pointed to the inadequacies of a rigid model of development, such as that used by Piaget. However, there were aspects of Piaget's theory of cognitive development, particularly his concepts of assimilation, accommodation, equilibration and disequilibration that proved valuable in the present study. They are not dependent on the validity of his arguments that have been used to explain cognitive development.

Although Fowler (1981) chose to work from within the structural-developmental paradigm, and has been criticised for the inadequacies of his theory, Streib (2004) has highlighted Fowler's readiness to acknowledge that faith development is subject to more factors than those acknowledged in his original work (*Stages of Faith*, 1981). Even so, according to Streib, Fowler's theory and faith development theories in general, are "restricted to the analysis of cognitive operational structures in faith" (p. 4) and a single-mindedness in the search for evidence of stages of faith (Day, 2001). These limitations were not an issue in the present study because the decision was taken to include Fowler's faith development theory in the hermeneutic circle for his focus on cognitive structures. What was of particular interest was the movement from Stage 3 (synthetic-conventional faith) to Stage 4 (individuative-reflective faith). It will be shown that the terms Fowler used to name these stages in his theory of faith development reflect characteristics of the faith described by some of the participants in the present study.

Movement six: Psychology of religion

Finally, the sixth movement became a complex set of steps in a dance with the psychology of religion. The search for interpretative "tools" uncovered Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and information processing theories. These were placed with the various theories of conversion that were alluded to earlier in the chapter, particularly Rambo's (1993) description of the process of religious conversion. These theories will play an important role in the interpretation that will take place in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The participants in the present study reported on the changes in their faith that they experienced as adolescents. Four participants — Mikaela, Elizabeth, Kevin and Stephen — experienced some form of conversion. Ullman (1989) had concluded that adolescent conversions were psychological states and had little to do with religious faith. Because this was a possibility, the decision was taken to include aspects of psychology in the hermeneutic circle established to interpret the text of the participants' stories about their faith development. The work of Babin (1965), Granqvist (2003), Rambo (1993) and Thomas (1999) provided the basis for considering the role of the imagination in religious conversion from a psychological perspective.

Ethical considerations

De Voss (1982) drew attention to four ethical limitations that he addressed in his investigation of the life experience of three student teachers. The problems he encountered were relevant to this study. They were:

- Acquiring permission from school principals to approach selected students to participate in the study and cooperation from the students and their parents
- The limits dictated by subjects' rights to privacy
- Conflict of interest
- Researcher bias.

The first ethical concern related to acquiring permission from the principals of selected Catholic secondary schools to conduct the study their schools. The procedures used in the conduct of the collection of date will be

outlined in chapter 3; it is sufficient at this point to note that the names of students willing to participate in the study were obtained from those members of staff directed by their principals to deal with the researcher. They allowed the initial interview to take place so that the purpose of the study could be explained to the selected students with a view to eliciting their participation in the study.

The University of Notre Dame Australia, through its Ethics Committee, provided regulations with respect to involvement of human subjects in research. Guided by the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research involving Humans* (1999) which was published by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the Ethics Committee made the following statement that was relevant to this study:

> It is required that before the research is undertaken the free consent of the subject must be obtained. The researcher is responsible for providing the subject, at his or her level of comprehension, with sufficient information about the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconvenience and discomforts of the study. Consent should be obtained in writing unless reasons, submitted to and approved by the Ethics Committee, apply. If consent is not obtained in writing, the circumstances of consent being granted should be recorded. The subject must be aware that he/she is free to withdraw consent at any time.

The students who had been approached were still minors and so parental or guardian permission was required as well as their own consent. Therefore,

the following documents were given to each student who expressed interest in participating in the study:

- a letter to the student (Appendix 1)

- a letter to parents/guardian (Appendix 2)

- an acceptance form (Appendix 3)

The Ethics Committee detailed the information that must be presented in writing to the students and their parents. Therefore, documentation provided to them included the title of the project, the names and addresses of those responsible for the project, the nature and general purpose of the study, a brief description of the data collection method and a statement about the precise extent of participation by the subject, including the length of time required of the participant and the location of the interviews. The document emphasised the importance of responding to questions only if the response would not cause discomfort. It also provided participants with the option of withdrawing at any point if they wanted to without having to provide any explanation. Were that to happen, all references to the participant would be removed from the thesis and copies of transcripts (both typed and electronic formats) would be handed over to the participant. The documentation given to the students outlined also how the data would be stored and that it would be kept confidential.

The acceptance form that was used provided the name, address, phone number and email address of the researcher. It included a statement of acceptance that detailed the involvement of the student and the use of information provided through the interviews and the journal. It also contained

a permission statement that required the parent or guardian to give their permission for the student to participate. They were offered access to the development of the thesis by indicating if they wanted to receive a report from the researcher. Finally, the acceptance form asked the student to provide a contact address, phone number, email address and a pseudonym.

The second problem, namely the limits dictated by people's rights to privacy were more difficult to deal with. In this study, participants were asked to reveal intimate details about the religious dimensions of their lives. They were told that aspects of their faith would be subject to analysis and would be reported on in publications. People's concerns with respect to privacy were handled in three ways. Firstly, while it was important for the researcher to know who the respondents were, their names and other identifying characteristics, such as the names of schools, names of teachers and localities were changed when the interviews were transcribed. This was done to provide them with anonymity. Secondly, those who chose to keep a journal controlled the writing process. They were made aware that they should reveal only what they felt comfortable writing about in their journals. If they revealed details that would identify them, those details were altered when the journal was typed. Lastly, they were reminded at the outset of each interview that they had the right to decline to answer any questions, which they considered to be too personal.

The third ethical problem related to the pitfalls of collaborative research, particularly with respect to those participate in the research. Bonzelaar (1983) warned that there was a danger of conflict of interest

influencing what was said in an interview and recorded when the interviewer and interviewee were known to each other. So, is there a danger of research being invalidated because of what might be called 'collaborator bias?' Hutchinson (1988) argued that the subjects would be too concerned with their daily tasks to be "paying attention to, pleasing, or playing games with the researcher" (p. 131). Her comment was made in reference to teachers. With students it can be a different matter. Most Year 12 students lead very busy lives and generally they are quite mature (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007). The successful use of interview and journal writing methods was based on the development of a relationship of trust between the researcher and the subject. Every effort was made to develop such a relationship with subjects in the time spent with them.

A fourth ethical problem concerned researcher bias. Miles & Huberman (1984) made the point that the human mind finds patterns "so quickly and easily". They warned that the downside was resistance to anything that does not fit. Yardley (2000) constructed a schema that was adopted in the present study to ensure that it would not be affected by personal bias. She identified the following elements of good qualitative research: "sensitivity to context", "commitment and rigour", "transparency and coherence" and "Impact and importance" (Coyle, 2007, p. 22). These elements were addressed in the methods employed in data collection and data analysis in the following ways: Firstly, all recorded data was transcribed as faithfully as possible. Secondly, during the data analysis (which included the process of transcribing the interviews and typing the journals), the researcher made note of the personal

effects of the data. These notes became more detailed as the data analysis became more detailed. This was considered a responsible way of dealing with bracketing the researcher's perceptions so that the focus would be the perceptions of the participants. It was conceded that in phenomenology bracketing is the ideal that must be sought vigorously while acknowledging that it would not always be achieved perfectly. The issue of researcher bias was addressed again when conclusions were drawn about the role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents. Lastly, the data, the analysis and the conclusions were used in a responsible and honest manner.

Summary

In this chapter, the concepts of faith, religious conversion, imagination, religious education and catechesis were described and their relevance to the study explained. While faith may start out being a universal human concern, the writers considered in this chapter acknowledge the religious and Christian dimension of faith. Some view Christian faith as potentially its ultimate form. Related to religious faith is the experience of conversion that ushers in the ever-deepening and intimate relationship with the divine. Some writers credit the imagination with a significant role in religious conversion. Finally, consideration was given to determining a research method appropriate to the task of describing the role of the imagination in religious conversion. In chapter 3, the methodology will be explained in detail, the research participants introduced and the major and minor themes of their accounts of their religious lives will be identified.