Chapter 7: Religious education, conversion and the role of the imagination in evangelisation

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the second research question was addressed: *What evidence can be found of the imagination assisting students in developing a relationship with God?* This research question focused on the much broader issue of faith development, of which religious conversion was the aspect under consideration in the present study. A model of how the imagination assisted faith development and religious conversion was presented and applied to the data gathered from the participants in the present study. Insights from information-processing theories, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Thomas' theory of perceptual activity, Perlovsky's neural modelling field theory and Harris' model of religious imagination were used to provide the detail needed to describe the work of the imagination in the faith development and religious conversion of the adolescents who participated in the present study.

In this chapter, the third research question — *What school activities and events do students find most effective in engaging them in the act of reflecting on their relationship with God?* — is examined. The *Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2915*, from the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia replaces the earlier *Mandate* that was referred to in earlier chapters of the present study. The differences between the two documents relate more to production values than to the content. The additions of content and changes in wording have been taken to be responses

to questions of clarification of concepts, such as new evangelisation, primary proclamation and initiatory catechesis. The current *Mandate* (hereafter referred to as *Mandate* and abbreviated as *M09*) was used as a reference in the analysis of participants' statements about how their schools, teachers and religious education classes assisted their faith development, including religious conversion.

In the previous chapter, the imagination was defined as the process of synthesising cognitive and affective experiences to produce new meanings. Pertinent to the discussion in this chapter is the understanding that the power to synthesise that is known as "religious imagination" produces images that promote faith in the divine. As it was stated in the previous chapter, to imagine is to touch the Holy, to reach out beyond the material, to experientially affirm that "... what we see was made by something that cannot be seen" (Hebrews 11:3 New Century Version). This chapter will present an argument for considering religious conversion as the work of the imagination which is stirred by school related experiences to engage in the dialectic of "reaching back" into memory while "leaning forward" to chart a course into the future. It will be shown that in the present study, the dialectic was promoted through teachable moments experienced by the participants both in school and outside the school environment.

Catholic education in Western Australia

The Catholic Church has always believed that it was instituted by Jesus Christ who gave it the mission of proclaiming the Good News of salvation to all people and to baptise those who believed. Recall that in

chapter 1 of the present study, it was stated that Pope Paul VI (1975) used the word “evangelisation” to name the mission of the Church. He defined its mission as the task of seeking “to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs” (*EN*, para. 18). Each Catholic schools was founded as “a privileged place” (*CS*, para. 26) to help with carrying out the mission of evangelisation.

The Catholic Church’s understanding of its mission developed as it sought to respond to the various cultures it entered through its missionary work, as well as to the development of societies in the face of political and technological developments and the changing circumstances of people’s lives. Fowler (1991) listed five factors that impacted on human life globally in the twentieth century: liberation movements, global communications developments, a renewed interest in the ecology of the earth, the growth of global economics and an intercultural awareness of creation spirituality. It was the Church’s awareness of the stirrings of these forces and energies that prompted Pope John XXIII to call for a Council “to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century” (*EN*, para. 2). On the tenth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI (1975) recalled the direction of the Bishops of the Catholic Church who at the closing of the Council directed the Pope to provide “a fresh forward impulse, capable of creating within a Church still more firmly rooted in the undying power and strength of Pentecost a new period of evangelisation” (*EN*, para. 2). He was referring to “new

evangelisation" which was defined in chapter 1 of the present study as the evangelisation of "entire groups of the baptised [who] have lost a living sense of the faith, or [who] even no longer consider themselves members of the Church and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (*RM*, para. 33).

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) focused on "a crisis of values" that was evident in the rise of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism, as a major contributing factor in the decline of religious belief and practice in developed societies and consequently of the need for a renewal of evangelisation (*CSTTM*, para. 1). The Catholic Bishops of Western Australia acknowledged the "formidable challenges" facing Catholic schools in Western Australia. They recognised that in many Catholic families "God, religion, and religious people, all too often are perceived as irrelevant" (*M09*, para. 29). Even though about 80% of students attending Catholic schools in Western Australia have been baptised most do not have regular contact with a parish community and are not active within the Church. Their inability to integrate faith and culture as well as faith and life presents a serious challenge to Catholic schools and parishes alike.

The Catholic school was described in the *Mandate* as having two characteristics: first, the Catholic school focused on being a "good" school; and second, it taught its students how to integrate faith, culture and life. With respect to the first characteristic, the Bishops defined "good" by stating the aim of Catholic education: "The school must begin from the principle that its educational program is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person" (*M09*, para. 19). Concerning the second characteristic, the Bishops

stated: “Learning to integrate faith and culture will help students develop a Gospel vision of Australian society. It will also help them to work out practical ways of promoting that vision to others” (para. 21). Two basic elements of the process of evangelisation that characterised the work of Catholic schools were named: Christian witness and ministry of the word. By the former, the Bishops meant being “a *Christ-like* presence and a *Christ-like* love to others” (para. 18); and by the latter, they meant that the Catholic school “uses words to proclaim the Good News in the same ways as did Jesus” (para. 18).

While all the participants reported on their experiences of being evangelised, four were chosen to illustrate how evangelisation by means of Christian witness and ministry of the word takes place in the various settings described in the study, that is, in the school environment, in the home and in the parish. If more participants were included, then the richness of the individual participant’s experiences would be lost in the restrictions placed on the discussion by having to report on all the participants. Conversely, to limit the discussion to a consideration of the experiences of just two participants would lessen the perception of the breadth of experiences of evangelisation that was evident in the data. So the decision was taken to consider the testimony of four participants: Luke, Glynna, Frank and Sophie.

Luke was chosen because he described well a range of experiences of evangelisation that included home, school and parish. Sophie attended the same school as Luke, but she was two years his junior. Her experiences provided some interesting highlights rather than contrasts to the experiences reported by Luke. To provide a balance, Frank and Glynna were chose

because they went to the same school together but were in different classes and came from families that were markedly different from each other. Frank grew up in a large family; Glynna was an only child. There were some interesting contrasts in parental and school influences reported by Frank and Glynna that held the promise of some valuable insights into evangelisation.

It was hoped that bringing the four together in a discussion about how Catholic schools evangelise would bring further light to bear on how the imagination assists religious conversion in Catholic schools. To further the discussion, the experiences reported by other participants will be included when needed to develop the insights gained from reflecting on the experiences of Luke, Glynna, Frank and Sophie. Moreover, in the deliberations about initiatory catechesis, the experiences of Mikaela, Kevin, Elizabeth and Stephen will be included. Recall that the religious experiences of these participants were interpreted to be examples of religious conversion.

Christian witness and faith development

Pope Paul VI (1975) called Christian witness the “initial act of evangelisation.” He referred to Christians’ “capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good” and called Christian witness as “a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one” (*EN*, para. 21). It was volunteered by many of the participants that the witness to Christian beliefs and values by their schools and teachers was a positive influence on their faith development, but not always the most important influence.

In his first interview, Luke stated: “School’s had a big influence on me … yeah, school’s been a good influence” (lines 233, 238). He developed this theme by referring to the influence of his peers and also his religious education teachers. Luke’s focus was on listening to them and learning from them. He paid tribute to his peers who influenced him in his relationship with God. In his first interview, he acknowledged their positive influence on him in his religious education class: “… you get to hear everyone’s views and you can either reinforce yours or it can sorta make you think about it and delve deeper into it” (lines 234-236). However, it was the influence of his friends in the parish youth group and also in the liturgy bands in which he played that exerted the greatest influence. In his second interview, he explained their influence on his faith in the following way: “I’ve got some friends that are in the groups with me and they’re really good. I always go to them” (lines 118-119). In his first interview, he stated that his faith in God developed because of the company he kept — “just being with other people in the same sort of circumstances” (lines 191-192) — that is, he associated with people who were committed to developing their Christian faith. In his second interview, he explained:

> … you can get so much guidance and good advice from them and just to be with people who feel the same way that you do helps you just so much to understand new things, like you have problems understanding, some doubts maybe, and just to talk them through with people, you just feel that so much better, like you fill in gaps (lines 71-76).

Apart from the influence exerted by his parents and the support of his parish priest who taught him how to pray, Luke acknowledged the influence of

the adults he met through playing in the liturgy band from an adjoining parish. In his journal, he wrote:

> … there is one person who convinced me that God exists. I met up with this person through the band that I play in at Church and him and his wife are just awesome. They are like perfect people and will do anything to help you. This person is always happy and just has the perfect attitude to life. He has the ability to talk to people and make them feel really good about themselves and is just always so genuine. I just love being with him and his wife. They are just beautiful people (lines 45-52).

The approach adopted by these "beautiful people" epitomised the ideal Christian witnesses "who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good" (*EN*, para. 21). Their attitude and their influence on Luke exemplified also the ideal proposed by the Bishops in their *Mandate* (2009):

> Young people need encouraging Christian witness from their fellow parishioners. In particular, they need to feel welcomed, supported and recognised. As members of the parish community young people need to be inspired and engaged by the parish community today (*M09*, para. 80).

Glynna's experience of the influence of her school on her faith development was quite different from that reported by Luke. She admitted that peer pressure at school turned her away from expressing her faith in God:

> Initially, it made me like less inclined to be like all religious-like, which is, you know, which wa – isn't cool. An' I s'pose I kinda gave in to like the peer pressures type thing, y'know, I sort of (pause) like and I got into

> witchcraft an' stuff like, like I was always interested in that type of stuff (lines 353-357).

She acknowledged that her attitude changed in Year 11, but did not attribute it to the influence of her friends, or her teachers. It seemed to come from her desire for autonomy and integrity: "… going to Church, and, y'know, being a Catholic, like not just in name, y'know, but by my actions an' stuff that would make me like a better person, y'know" (lines 370-372). Recall that in chapter 4 it was revealed that Glynna had lost one of her friends when she was in Year 10. He died as a result of a car accident. She stopped going to Mass for about a month. Glynna recounted the occasion of going to "Christmas Mass" a few months after the death of her friend. She realised at Mass that "there was this whole community of people that like would support me if I needed it" (lines 323-324).

That she was offered the opportunity to become a Special Minister of Holy Communion, which she accepted, was a sign of the support and influence of the school, particularly the College chaplain who prepared her for the role. Glynna also spoke about the influence of her teachers. As with Luke, her references were to learning from them. She was critical of her Year 11 religious education teacher: "I really hated her at the start because she was so arrogant. And like I just thought, y'know, aw, how could someone be so like ignorant. You know, she refused to believe in evolution, y'know" (lines 396-399). Despite this, and for reasons that will be discussed below in relation to religious education, she concluded that it was the best religious education class that she had ever been in. Her Year 12 religious education teacher was a "really nice lady an' stuff, but sometimes she gets angry and

we don't really have class discussions" (lines 427-428). Glynna's religious education teachers kept her thinking about her faith.

Frank also spoke about the impact of his school, his peers and his religious education teachers on his relationship with God. In his first interview, he acknowledged the "pretty big" impact of the school that he attended. Frank said very little about his friends: "Most of my friends aren't very practising Catholics" (line 125). He described them as "good blokes" who did not criticise or ridicule him for his faith in God (lines 129-130). In his second interview, he drew attention to the support he received from those friends who were in his Year 12 religious education class: "We always have conversations like that, not your ordinary eighteen year-olds talk" (lines 46-47).

Frank spoke about the influence of his religious education teachers, particularly his Year 12 teacher who provided her class with opportunities for reflection on personal problems. In his first interview, he said she "helps you to keep calm and — um — maintain that relationship with God" (lines 212-213). Frank drew attention to the good example she set her students: "… the way she lives her life. Um — when she has a problem, she —ah — turns the other cheek…. She's so strong in her faith" (lines 227-228, 232).

Sophie attended a state government primary school before enrolling in a Catholic school in Year 8. She acknowledged the difference between her state school and Catholic school experiences in terms of religious beliefs and values. Two comments by her were significant indications of the reality of Christian witness in her own faith development. First, she reflected on the impact of being in a learning environment where religious beliefs were shared:

"… being at a Catholic high school has changed because – um – just like you learn a lot from other people an' their beliefs an' stuff like that" (lines 41-43). Second, she discovered that in her Catholic secondary school, people's Christian beliefs were practised as well as being taught: "Everyone wants to help, everyone – um – an' jus' that a– that sort of atmosphere has – um – has changed my faith because it's more demonstrated than – um – taught" (lines 273-276).

While Sophie's comments about the influence of her peers were very general, unlike the descriptions given by Luke and Frank, her statements about her teachers were quite detailed. She reflected on the faith that they shared with her and other students:

> Actually a few of — a few teachers — um — the stories of their lives — um — an' how they've coped, how they've — um — their belief an' faith in God have helped them through. That sort of — um — just gives you inspir– more inspiration to believe (lines 244-248).

In her interview, she spoke about being inspired by some of her teachers because they shared the stories about their faith with her. For instance, Sophie spoke about "Mr Bruce, just talking to him and his stories an' stuff, an' how he only came about his faith" (lines 303-304) when he was a young adult, a story he shared with her on her Year 12 retreat.

Just as Sophie and Frank were influenced in positive ways by some of their religious education teachers, so too was Luke. In his first interview, he was asked about their impact on his relationship with God. He responded with a comment about their "views" becoming his "views":

> Um — I find that their views become my views. Things they say you'll remember and you'll — just one day you'll be thinking about that in the context and you'll think back and say, "I remember someone said that." And you'll think about it. "Mm, that makes sense now." It might not make sense at the time of the RE lesson but later on you'll think back and "Yeah, I realise that now" (lines 267-273).

The changes in his faith were not immediate; they were gradual and subtle. His explanation identified the work of his imagination working with his memories to construct his belief system from his life experiences that included the witness his teachers gave through their religious education lessons. It can be concluded from his statement that Luke respected his teachers. He was happy to learn from them, a point that will be developed further in the discussion about the impact of religious education on faith development. In his journal, he summarised the impact of others' influences on his faith development:

> This is what is encouraging: to be around so many people that are just like me. I will try to be around people like this so that I can feel good and it reminds me of what is important in life. When I am with them I don't think about other things in life. I just think about them and how good it is being with them (lines 90-94).

The encouragement that Luke, Glynna, Frank and Sophie received from their friends and teachers reflected the support of Christian witness as described in the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* (1965). The authors of the decree identified the place of "sincere and patient dialogue" in the task of

freeing people from within (*CS*, para. 29) so that they can be brought “once more under the dominion of God the saviour” (*AG*, para. 11).

Evidence of the role of the imagination in constructing images of faith from the witness of people of faith

The work of Luke’s imagination was evident in the images that he constructed of his faith in God being confirmed by the witness of his parents, who created a loving family environment, and his friends who went to Church with him and who valued his friendship and shared their faith with him. Luke’s image of God affirmed his faith within the structure of this supportive environment. His was very much a stage three model of faith as described by Fowler (1981), a conventional Catholic faith that was confirmed also by the witness provided by the religious orientation of his school environment and by his teachers who explained theological concepts to him in ways that helped him to understand their relevance to his life eventually, if not immediately. Luke’s account of his faith showed how his imagination engaged in reaching back to his memories of things his teachers said to him about God-related matters that provided him with understanding of his life that allowed him to lean forward towards his future with a sense of well-being.

The same can be said of the experiences of Glynna, Frank and Sophie. Like Luke, they drew on their memories to validate their perceptions of God as a loving creator. Glynna’s faith in God was influenced by images of faith drawn from memories of her mother’s faith and the witness of her school and parish communities, however, the evidence did not show that the witness of her school and parish influenced her to cease blaming God for the death of

her friend. Despite her dismissal of her mother's faith as being "a bit of an idiot" (line 522), Glynna constructed her image of God from memories of her mother's practice of faith at home and memories of her father's rational and pragmatic approach to life. The witness of her parents provided her with memories from which she used her imagination to construct a relationship with God that would support her as she prepared to move away from the structures of home and school into a more independent and more autonomous way of life associated with being a university student.

Frank's account of his life presented a similar pattern. He acknowledged the importance of the witness of family, parish and school in his faith development. Frank imagined God to be friendly towards him and towards those whom he loved. It was shown above that his parents, his teachers and his friends behaved towards him in ways that supported and contributed to his image of God. References to the good example of his mother and his Year 12 teacher were made in previous chapters. The descriptions he gave of his experience of their behaviour towards him reflected and validated his description of God's behaviour: "… knows all. Um – friendly, obviously. There for help. Ah, to make sure everything runs smoothly. Creator" (lines 4-5).

In her interview, Sophie spoke about being inspired by her teachers and supported in her religious education classes by her peers who shared their understanding of life. They helped her to create a positive self-image. Sophie focused more on action rather than reflection: what people did, that is, the faith to which they witnessed, spoke to her with greater power than what

they said. Early in her interview, Sophie revealed that she constructed her faith from memories of faith lived in her family and her school:

> … as I grow up, or grew up, um — I pulled bits from my background — my fam– ’cause my family being Italian — um — the Catholic sort of f– um — faith and belief: from that — um — an’ I just constructed — Also my surroundings, like my school, I just constructed different pieces of what I form in my religion my faith… (lines 14-19).

Sophie’s faith was based on images of faith drawn from what she saw around her rather than on what she constructed from ideas. She opened her interview with the following statement: “I sort of construct the idea that if you believe in God, you shouldn’t question” (lines 3-5).

The faith development of Luke, Glynna, Frank and Sophie happened with the support of significant people in their lives, namely, their parents, close friends and teachers. The witness of close friends and of family, particularly parents, appeared to be more significant overall than the witness of teachers, however, it must be remembered that the work of the imagination, as Kant (2007/1781) observed, is often unnoticed, therefore, it was likely that not every significant influence was recalled by the participants. Moreover, as Luke recognised, what his teachers taught him was not always relevant immediately, but often became relevant later when he needed what he had been taught to make sense of his situation. It will be shown later in the present chapter, that the participants’ friends, parents and teachers contributed to the participants’ imaging of their relationship with God through teachable moments.

Christian witness and conversion

Religious conversion is an aspect of faith development and the goal of evangelisation. With respect to Christian witness, the difference between examples related to faith development and the examples related to conversion was one of degree rather than nature or even structure. In her first interview, Mikaela attributed much of her growth in faith to the school-based youth group to which she belonged and to the Catholic school that she attended: “I think it’s been through YCS and – just being around – being at St Clotilde’s probably played a big part” (lines 188-189). In her journal, she wrote: “The major point in my life where I really came to know God was when I first came to St Clotilde’s” (lines 64-65). She identified the motivation for change through the following statement:

> Up to this point I used to shut myself away from the world and mostly through the hurt that I had felt as a result of my parents break up and the continual abuse that I suffered from my Dad’s abusive and negative behaviour (lines 65-68).

The theme of her parents’ divorce and its impact on her faith in God was developed in previous chapters. It was argued in chapter 5 that Mikaela experienced a crisis that sent her in search of salvation. The witness to Christian beliefs and values that some of her teachers and a few friends gave her at her secondary school provided her with a way through her self-pity and low self-esteem. She acknowledged the support she received from Joan at a time in her life when she was looking for the experience of belonging. Mikaela wrote about Joan’s influence in her journal:

> Joan has strong faith and with her strong faith I came to believe that I too could have faith exactly like her. Joan though she didn't know it was the person I placed my getting Catholicism on. I needed her to help me to guide me and give me advice when a lot of my other friends turned me away from the right path (lines 35-39).

Joan was identified as the advocate of the Catholic faith that Mikaela felt drawn to embrace. Their friendship provided Mikaela with the haven that she needed while she came to understand and accept her self and her place in the world in which she lived.

The crises experienced by Kevin, Elizabeth and Stephen were described in previous chapters. It was shown that they perceived their crises as being crucial to their relationship with God. Recall that it was stated earlier that Kevin realised that his friends in the youth group to which he belonged were happy and that their happiness was related to their faith in God. His unhappiness was the catalyst that motivated his search for the inner peace he witnessed in his friends — "I was struggling with my faith then and — um — I was st- — starting to doubt because — doubt that I was any good in myself so I was — yeah, looking for other ways. But each time I did I was like unhappy" (lines 19-22). Just as Mikaela was prompted by the Christian witness of her best friend Joan to seek a personal relationship with God, Kevin, too, had a similar experience which confirmed for him what he felt was the solution to his unhappiness. He revealed in his interview:

> I felt God calling me to join this community and he did this in like in a way that one of my friends, my be- — closest friend came to me said he had a

> strong feeling that God wanted me to join this community and so I felt this was the right thing (lines 36-40).

In both instances, close friends who acted as mentors, interpreted the experiences that Mikaela and Kevin had of being drawn into a relationship with God.

Elizabeth admitted to being negative about religious education during her time at secondary school. In her journal, she wrote:

> I'm sure that there must have been times when I could have learnt something that would enrich my faith, but to tell you the truth, I went into almost every religion lesson with the attitude that it was a waste of time, and that any Catholic belief that differed from my own was wrong and outdated. Wrong, yes I know. I regret this, and wonder what I could have got out of religious education if I really tried. However, my faith has been challenged and changed and has grown due to many different people teaching me about my faith (lines 146-153).

Her final statement was a reference to the influence of people in the Lutheran Church, particularly those who attended the youth group to which she belonged. Yet, she admitted that her teachers influenced her. In her second interview, she was asked to comment further on their influence. She named one teacher but could not say in what way she had been influenced. "Um – but that doesn't mean that the teachers didn't influence me because some did. … I think of Miss Smith but I can't say what" (lines 124-125, 128).

Despite her negativity about religious education, Elizabeth acknowledged: "… that doesn't mean that the teachers didn't influence me

because some did" (lines 124-125), however, she was not able to identify just how she was influenced by them. It was reported in the previous chapter that Elizabeth testified to the support of her friends at a time when she had decided to end her relationship with God. Their faith was an important factor in her decision to seek God's forgiveness for her lack of trust. In her journal, she wrote: "My Christian friends have taught me by example how to make God a huge part of my life and have helped me through some difficult issues in relation to God" (lines 87-89). She also experienced the support of a close friend who acted as a mentor and who also interpreted her behaviour as a sign of God's presence in her life. Elizabeth wrote in her journal: "… my relationship with God was strengthened because I doubted but came back to him. My friend Serica said that that shows real faith" (lines 215-217).

Whereas with Mikaela, Kevin and Elizabeth, the support and witness came from peers and, in particular, from close friends who acted as mentors, Stephen's support came from his parents. In previous chapters, it was reported that his crisis of faith occurred because of his cousin's surfing accident. Recall that in chapter 4, the theme of parental influence was identified as a significant factor in faith development and Stephen's relationship with his parents was explicated. In his first interview, he outlined the basis for his friendship with his father: "… we like both love cars. He's a surfer, I'm a body boarder, so we both love the waves. Footy. Just heaps of stuff. I've sorta grown into him. It's just all things he likes I like" (lines 386-389). He described his father as a man of faith who went to Mass regularly and who was "a pretty big influence on my thoughts" (line 53). It was his father to whom he turned when his cousin suffered her accident and his father gave

him “so much good advice” (line 382). The relationship that he had with his father became the image of his relationship with God and he changed his belief about the relationship between God and creation to fit with his image of God. In this project of his imagination, Stephen was influenced by the witness given by his father to the power of faith in God.

Evidence of the role of the imagination in constructing images of the possibility of conversion from the witness of people of faith

Mikaela constructed the possibility of conversion from memories of experiences that motivated her to seek a radical change in her life. Considering the imagination as the dialectic of “reaching back” and “leaning forward,” the following interpretation was found to be warranted by the data. It has already been shown in previous chapters that in her account of her life, Mikaela presented two sets of memories that were diametrically opposed. The first set related to her parents’ divorce. She associated these memories with her low self-esteem. In her first interview, she referred to that part of her life as being a time of “low faith” (line 186) when she rejected the Church. The other set of memories became her source of hope. They pointed to a way out of her situation and the way to a positive future that was characterised by a strong faith in God and a sense of belonging in the Church. The “leaning forward” action of her imagination was represented by the realisation that she could become a Catholic and live with the sense of hope for herself that her friend Joan witnessed to in her life. It was Mikaela’s perception of her life that the definitive influence on her decision to become a Catholic was her friend Joan; however, she did not deny the influence of her school, nor her teachers.

It was stated above and in earlier chapters that Kevin attributed his conversion to becoming aware that the solution to his unhappiness lay in becoming a member of the charismatic covenant community to which his parents belonged. His realisation was constructed from memories of the witness of his friends in the youth group. What he remembered of the witness of his teachers to their faith was that it confirmed the decision he had made to develop his relationship with God and to place his trust in God and not in himself, or in any other means.

The role of Elizabeth's imagination in her conversion was described in detail in the previous chapter of the present study. She acknowledged the support of her friends in the youth group to which she belonged and also the help she received from her family, especially her parents. These people witnessed to their Christian faith. In describing her conversion, she drew attention to the significance of the witness they provided. In her first interview, she reported that she was negative about the value of the religious education she received at her school: she was a Lutheran attending a Catholic secondary school. As she perceived her faith, she was unaware of the witness to Christian faith that her teachers gave. In her journal and during her second interview, she expressed regret about her negative attitude towards Catholicism, but her comment was directed more towards the theological content of what was taught in religious education rather than about the Christian witness of her teachers.

Stephen's conversion was discussed at length in chapter 5. One of the factors that were considered was the influence of his parents on his image of

God and his faith development. Stephen did not comment on the witness of his teachers to their faith, although he did acknowledge that they motivated him to think about his relationship with God through what they said and taught. So his images of his relationship with God were drawn from memories of his parents' love for him and teachable moments at school. He spoke and wrote about two religious education teachers, but he was referring to their skills as teachers and what they taught, but not to their faith. If they did influence him through witnessing to their faith, he was not aware of the impact of their witness on him. The significance of this to his religious conversion will be discussed below.

The stories of conversion recounted by Mikaela, Kevin, Elizabeth and Stephen pointed to the importance of Christian witness in their experiences of conversion; however, the stories did not highlight the role of the witness of teachers to Christian faith. As it was stated in chapter 4, for Mikaela, Kevin, Elizabeth and Luke, the significant sources of Christian witness were their friends and the youth groups to which they belonged. The witness provided by teachers confirmed for them the validity of their beliefs. In Stephen's case, as also with Glynna, Frank, Sophie, Kevin and Elizabeth parental witness was significant factor in their faith development.

Christian witness, faith and adolescent psychological development

The stories of the eight participants under consideration in the present chapter have been recounted to draw out a fundamental difference between the two groups into which they were placed: Mikaela, Kevin, Elizabeth and Stephen experienced significant crises of faith that represented turning points

in their lives. Erikson (1978) used the word “crisis” to describe the search for identity that is characteristic of adolescence. By “crisis,” he meant “a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (p. 5). While Glynna had to deal with the death of her friend, as was described in the previous chapter, it did not produce a significant change in her faith. As she described the situation, her awareness of the support of fellow Catholics was increased, but her relationship with God did not undergo any change.

Saker (2004) stated that adolescents who negotiate their identity crisis successfully “have a strong sense of the values and directions (that are consistent with their beliefs) and are generally at peace with who they have become” (p. 31). This was definitely the case with Mikaela. In her second interview, she spoke about the struggle she experienced in maintaining her relationship with God in the face of pressure from her friends. She admitted: “I wanted to be a sheep and they didn’t go to Church and so I didn’t go to Church” (lines 19-20). Eventually, she decided to be her own person. She said: “… they were dictating how I, where I should be. And finally I thought, “Nup! I’m gonna go out on my own” and got away” (lines 23-25). Her choice to think for herself and not to be dictated to by her friends reflected the emergence of her sense of personal responsibility identified by Paloutzian (1996) as characteristic of adolescence:

> Adolescents begin to develop a sense of separateness and responsibility. They come to realise, perhaps only intuitively or unconsciously, that they are separate people subject to the same fundamental existential aloneness as every other person is. Along with this, however, come the

> sense of individual responsibility for facing life and the dilemmas it poses (p. 127).

His view of adolescence provided an insight into the psychological dimension of Christian witness that was relevant to understanding the importance to Mikaela of Joan's witness to her faith and to the faith development of adolescents in general. In the examples of faith development given above, the Christian witness that they experienced provided Luke, Glynna, Frank and Sophie with validation of their faith. Sophie felt "inspired" by the witness of her mother and her teachers, while Frank, Glynna and Luke reported on the encouragement that they received and on being motivated to think seriously about their relationship with God. Their statements demonstrated their awareness of their responsibility for the relationship that they formed with God and the maintenance of that relationship.

In the case of religious conversion experienced by Mikaela, Kevin, Elizabeth and Stephen, the awareness was of God's invitation to a relationship as well as of their personal responsibility for maintaining it. Mikaela acknowledged her dependence of Jesus as her saviour. It was stated above that Kevin was aware that God wanted him to join the charismatic covenant community that ran the youth group to which he belonged. Elizabeth became aware of the mercy of God and the call to seek forgiveness for breaking God's trust. Stephen expressed awareness of the moral responsibility for creation that people shared because of their humanity. He attributed his awareness to his faith in God. The increased awareness of their responsibilities as individuals was a consequence of their relationship with God. Those relationships changed and developed because of the witness

given by parents, peers, teachers, and institutions, such as the Catholic school. It was shown above that the influence of peers, particularly close friends was highly significant, particularly in cases of religious conversion. At the crucial moment in their lives, it was the witness of people who were close friends that counted. The Christian witness associated with the Catholic school provided a much-needed support for faith development, but there was no evidence of schools and teachers being significant factors in religious conversion. Ultimately, of course, it must be remembered that conversion is the work of God and not of people.

Ministry of the word and faith development

In the *Mandate* (2009), the Bishops identified the following forms of the ministry of the word as being integral to the curriculum of a Catholic school: primary proclamation, initiatory catechesis and religious education (*M09*, para. 43). They are thought of as moments "that are essential and different from each other, and that must be kept in view simultaneously" (*CT*, para. 18). The Bishops also distinguished between religious education and catechesis; they defined the latter as "an apprenticeship in the faith" (*M09*, para. 62).

Primary proclamation and faith development

The Bishops stated that primary proclamation was an essential part of the curriculum offered by a Catholic school and was required for the faith development of adolescents. They defined primary proclamation as the call to "accept (an) initial personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Saviour" (*M09*, para. 44). Holohan (1999) outlined three contexts for this call to occur in

the curriculum of a Catholic school: first, when students are helped to "become more aware of God through creation;" second, when students are helped to realise that the desires for happiness, freedom, inner peace, goodness, personal meaning can be "satisfied fully only by the One who created the human heart;" and third, when students are helped to become aware that God offers to heal people from sinfulness and forgives sin through Jesus (p. 20). All three contexts can be found in the religious education curriculum mandated by the Bishops of Western Australia as well as in other areas of the curriculum of the Catholic school.

According to the Congregation for the Clergy (1998) primary proclamation "is addressed to non-believers and those living in religious indifference" (*GDC*, para. 61). All participants but Emily expressed belief in God and recognised Jesus as being the same as God or different from God in some way. For instance, in his first interview, Luke stated that Jesus was different from God. He imagined Jesus "with the beard, always smiling, his long hair — ah — white robe, all that" (lines 49-50). In his second interview, he said that this was the image that he remembered from holy cards. Luke believed that the power to change resided with God. He expressed uncertainty about the role of Jesus and did not make any statements about Jesus as saviour.

Glynna expressed a similar view about Jesus as that presented by Luke. She believed that "God controls like everything" (line 58). She described Jesus as "the compassionate, like really caring, like emotional side, you know, the part that's capable of rage and anger and disgust and all that kind of stuff"

(lines 59-61). She recognised the humanity of Jesus, but did not express any views about his divinity, or of his role as saviour. Frank did not see any difference between Jesus and God. In his first interview, he admitted that “the Trinity’s a very, yeah, confusing thing” (line 35). He did not ascribe any role to Jesus. Moreover, when he prayed, his focus was God, not Jesus. Sophie stated that Jesus and God “were a bit different” (line 55). She described Jesus as “the physical form of God” (line 52). Unlike Frank, she prayed to Jesus, but she also prayed to Mary and “to family members that are passed away” (line 88).

The four participants did not reveal awareness of the role of Jesus as saviour. At the time of their interviews it was not perceived by them to be a part of their relationship with Jesus or with God. While belief in Jesus as saviour was part of the religious education programme at every year level, they did not allude to it in their comments about their experiences of religious education. Although they did not acknowledge his role as saviour, there was evidence to show that they had heard the call to acknowledge him as being divine as well as human. They did not make any statements that indicated that they recognised the handiwork of God in creation, but their stories were about their reliance on God. They relied on God in a Christian way. This was evident in their accounts of their lives. Luke, Glynna, Frank and Sophie were Catholics. Their religious lives included going to Mass in their parishes. Luke and Glynna went to Mass in their parishes regularly. Their involvement has been alluded to in previous chapters. While at school, Frank went every Sunday with his family. He stated that he had become less regular in his attendance after he left school. Sophie commented on “going to Church” (line

364) as part of her religious life. Finally, all four participants stated that their faith had grown stronger during their final year at school. Frank expressed the reason for this most forcefully in his first interview:

> … it's been reasonably strong I'd say in the last twelve months 'cause, I mean, tryin' to get through the TEE — um — hasn't been easy. I've had a lot of — there's a lot of deci- decisions to be made around this time, like y' future, what to do, um — so I been — I been askin' God "What about that work? What — what am I supposed to do? What's my — my calling?" Um — yeah — it would be growing — would be pretty strong at the moment (lines 190-197).

To conclude, the evidence pointed to the participants' lack of awareness of primary proclamation occurring in the schools that they attended. This does not mean that it did not take place. It has been shown that they had already responded to primary proclamation at some time in the past. The accounts of their lives that they shared indicated this. What they referred to in their stories that related to faith development was likely to be catechesis. This matter will be dealt with below.

Primary proclamation and conversion

Because primary proclamation is a call to conversion, it would be reasonable to expect that it had been part of the experiences of Mikaela, Kevin, Elizabeth and Stephen, the four participants who experienced some form of religious conversion. In her first interview, Mikaela explained the difference between Jesus and God in the following way:

> Jesus, he's our saviour. God, he's — he's — well, he's heavenly Father. Jesus came to this earth. He changed a lot of people. He brought religion, the Catholic Christian religion to the earth. He was — yeah — he gave his only — he gave his life up for everybody else, which not many people would do (lines 61-65).

At the time of her interview, Mikaela had come to accept Jesus as her saviour. She wrote later in her journal: "Jesus is my saviour and I thank God that he was here to help me remove the plank and see what was wanted for me" (lines 164-166). The source of her understanding was not evident from her interviews or her journal. All she could say was that she had started thinking in this way earlier in the year, her final year of secondary school.

It was stated above that the three ways that primary proclamation can be delivered were evident in the religious education curriculum of the schools attended by the participants. Therefore, Mikaela would have been exposed to primary proclamation in some form through her religious education classes, however, her account stated clearly that it was the influence of her friend Joan that helped her turn once again to God for help.

Kevin's conversion was discussed in a number of chapters of the present study and from different perspectives. In relation to primary proclamation, his account of how he became a member of the charismatic covenant community to which his parents belonged provided an insight into the way primary proclamation works. Kevin explained that when he was in Year 10, that is, when he was 15 years old, he started to understand what motivated his friends in the youth group to which he belonged. It was stated

above that what his teachers witnessed to at school confirmed his own faith in God. In his comments about what he studied in religious education, he referred to the conflict between his beliefs and values in relation to marriage (a topic studied in Year 12) and the beliefs and values of some of his peers. By that time, he had become a student “evangelist” who engaged in primary proclamation in his religious education class.

Elizabeth‘s story presented a valuable insight into the relationship between primary proclamation and conversion: the movement from on stage of faith to the next stage, as in Fowler’s (1981) theory of faith development involves primary proclamation as part of the catalyst for change. The details of Elizabeth’s background were stated above and in earlier chapters. Recall that she grew up in a faith-filled environment. Something happened to her that caused her to want to have nothing more to do with God. Her friends convinced her to turn back to God and to seek forgiveness. Their actions amounted to primary proclamation. Elizabeth reported that she had begun to reflect on the place of forgiveness in her life. This was part of her response to the call to accept Christ as her saviour.

The references to forgiveness in the stories shared by Mikaela and Elizabeth point to a central theme in Christian conversion. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) described conversion as “the movement of a “contrite heart,” drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first” (*CCC*, para. 1428). The desire for forgiveness, which was evident in the account given by Elizabeth, comes in response to primary proclamation. Mikaela’s desire to forgive those who burgled her mother’s

home was a response made by one who was confident that God was calling her to be a Catholic. That call was the first — primary — proclamation that she heard as an adolescent. It made sense to her and promised her a happy life. Her response was to forgive her trespassers.

Stephen's story was recounted from various perspectives in previous chapters of the present study. He described two events that contributed to his conversion. The first was the fly incident and the second was his cousin's surfing accident. Regarding the fly incident, his Year Ten teacher's comment challenged him about his attitude towards life. Her words were like a primary proclamation; they cut through his arrogance to cause him to re-evaluate his relationship with God. In the following year, when his cousin suffered her surfing accident, he had changed. In his first interview, he described his father's words to him as "so much good advice" (line 382). Whereas Mikaela and Elizabeth responded from the heart to the call to forgiveness, Stephen's response was seen in the change in his understanding of how God related with people and helped them. Stephen reported his change in attitude towards God from being arrogant and blaming God when things went wrong in his life to recognising that God offers to strengthen people spiritually and emotionally to help them cope with adversity.

In chapter 5, Stephen's conversion was discussed. It was stated there that his conversion was religious and moral, but not Christian. Part of the evidence given in support of that assertion was the focus of his prayers. Stephen thanked God and also asked God to protect his family and friends. He did not express sorrow for his wrongdoing, or pray for forgiveness for

others' wrongdoings. Repentance was not part of his perception of his relationship with God. His recollection of the fly incident was a significant indicator of how her perceived his relationship with God. Miss Scott, his teacher, was compelled by what she believed and valued to speak out against his behaviour. He did not perceive her rebuke to be Christian in orientation. As he reflected on his life, his imaginative reconstruction linked her words with Buddhist beliefs but not with the words of Christ. If primary proclamation was part of the curriculum of his school, he had not received it in its completeness. Recall that in the opening statements of the present discussion of primary proclamation, reference was made to Holohan's (1999) division of the curriculum of primary proclamation into awareness of God in creation, the recognition of the need for God to be happy and fulfilled in life, and the need for Christian salvation. Stephen's response reflected his acceptance of the message about God's presence in the world. His faith was like that of the Jewish people waiting for the coming of the Messiah, or like that of the followers of the Buddha.

Primary proclamation was described by Pope John Paul II (1979) as an essential moment of evangelisation that differs from other moments, such as initiatory catechesis and religious education (*CT*, para. 18). It was shown above that Stephen responded to primary proclamation as the call to accept God's presence in the world as its creator whose concern for people was reflected in the help that they received to deal with life's challenges. Of the other participants considered in the discussion of primary proclamation, only Mikaela showed awareness of Jesus as saviour.

The accounts given by Kevin and Elizabeth tended to understate the role of Jesus in their lives, although their perception of their deeper commitment to their relationship with God was evident in what they revealed through their interviews. Using the words of Pope John Paul II (1979), it would be rash to say that they appeared to be “hesitant … about committing their whole lives to Jesus Christ” (*CT*, para. 19). It would seem to be more reasonable to argue that the participants were not aware of hearing the call to “change your hearts and lives and believe the Good News” (Mark 1:15, New Century Version).

The same could be said of the other participants in the present study. For instance, Alexandra constructed a theology of a transcendent divinity who worked through people to help those in need. Jesus was merely a messenger. Alyssa showed more interest in Gandhi and his values than she did in the life of Jesus and his role as saviour. Cameron’s believed that God was a silent presence who kept him company while he reflected on his life. Jesus was not important in that process. Cecil acknowledged the importance of his girl friend in leading him to reflect on his Christian faith. He admitted that he had not given much thought to who Jesus was or what his role was in his life. Emily had rejected the possibility of God existing and so Jesus was irrelevant. Gunter was attracted by images of the stigmata that appeared to be more important to him than any message about the redemptive role of Christ that was conveyed in the movies he watched. Like the others, Morgan did not show “any explicit attachment to Jesus Christ” (*CT*, para. 19). When she was asked to explain the difference between God and Jesus, she said: “Jesus was

just there to bring out his word" (line 26) and she referred to Jesus' role as the one who re-stated God's laws, such as the Ten Commandments.

The discussion of primary proclamation as a moment in evangelisation commenced with the following definition from the *Mandate* (2009): primary proclamation is the call to "accept (an) initial personal relationship with Jesus as Lord and Saviour" (*M09*, para. 44). It has been argued in the present study that the participants' relationships with God were constructed by the imagination in a dialectic process of "reaching back" into memory while "leaning forward" to compose a reality that Fowler (1981) described as truthful in representation (p. 30). Apart from Mikaela, the participants did not describe Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. It was concluded, therefore, that with reference to the participants in the present study, the methods used by the schools attended by the majority of the participants failed to raise the participants' awareness of Jesus' promise of salvation. The methods might have been effective with other students, but that is not known from the sample used in the present study.

Initiatory catechesis

Initiatory catechesis was defined in the *Mandate* (2009) as the first stage of catechesis, the central activity of evangelisation. They stated: "Initiatory catechesis aims to help people mature from the initial conversion to Jesus Christ that results from fruitful primary proclamation, to deeper personal relationship with him" (*M09*, para. 52). Drawing on statements in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998), Holohan (1999) listed six interdependent tasks that comprised initiatory catechesis:

- “to promote knowledge of the faith”
- “to promote liturgical participation”
- “to promote moral formation”
- “to teach how to pray”
- “to educate for participation in Church community life”
- “to promote missionary initiation” (p. 22).

These tasks were mandated by the Bishops to be included as part of the Catholic school’s curriculum. Holohan (1999) quoted the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) to the effect that each catechetical theme included in the curriculum “has a cognitive dimension as well as moral implications” (GDC, para. 87). All three forms of the ministry of the word can be present in the same curriculum event, even during a religious education lesson, however, as the Bishops stated, initiatory catechesis is broader than the religious education lesson. It can be found in the inclusion of retreats, classroom and school prayer, liturgies, Christian service learning programmes, apostolic action and the celebration of feast days (*M09*, para. 58).

The majority of the participants in the present study described experiences of initiatory catechesis. These experiences were related to Church attendance, youth groups and school activities, such as school retreats. Membership of youth groups was discussed in previous chapters. Because most Catholic secondary schools in Western Australia conduct retreats for their senior students, it was decided to examine references to

retreats to determine the contribution they made as a form of initiatory catechesis to the faith development of the participants in the present study.

Cameron spoke enthusiastically about his experience of his school's retreats conducted for Year 11 and Year 12 students. He claimed that they had a big impact on his faith. He stated:

> … you go onto the retreat as one person and you definitely come out as someone else, someone that — um — you know better yourself an' that you like more — um — yeah, you definitely undergo changes and you work out who your real friends are an' you work out what you want out of life an' how you're gonna achieve that (lines 249-254).

The focus is on himself and his personal development. He did not perceive the retreat to be about his relationship with God, or with Christ. Holohan (1999) described retreats as catechetical experiences, that is, they are about how to live like Christ. Therefore, those who conduct retreats for students are meant to draw on the content of the six tasks of initiatory catechesis that were listed above. That means the retreat becomes a way of reflecting on life from the perspective of the Christian message. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) described the work of the catechist in the context of the relationship between human experience and catechesis; its words were used as the measuring stick for students' experiences of school retreats:

> … experience, assumed by faith, becomes in a certain manner, a *locus* for the manifestation and realization of salvation, where God, consistently with the pedagogy of the Incarnation, reaches man with his grace and saves him. The (retreat leader) must teach the person to read his own lived experience in this regard, so as to, accept the invitation of the Holy Spirit

> to conversion, to commitment, to hope, and to discover more and more in his life God's plan for him (*GDC*, para. 152).

If this was the intention of those who conducted the retreats to which Cameron referred, then in his case, their objectives were not achieved.

A similar statement could be made about Frank who spoke about retreats during his interviews. During his first interview, he listed the benefits of his retreats as the "time to reflect," to "listen to what everyone is saying" and "time to relax" (lines 306-310). In his second interview, he described his Year Twelve retreat as "an opportunity for – for growth within people and to – to meet them to speak to them, to find – ah, to find out, y' know, who they are" (lines 257-259). Like Cameron, Frank did not describe the retreat as a religious experience that strengthened his relationship with Christ.

Cecil's experience of his Year 12 retreat was quite different. He reported on the power of the witness to faith given by one student and how it changed him:

> There was one session when — um — people would get up and say — like in front of everyone — how they — where they see God in their lives. An' they go through everything for some —. One girl who was saying she lost seven close people — um — to cancer in one year — an' she wouldn't have been able to get through it without praying. And then it kind of clicked after the retreat that I could do that too (lines 16-22).

In his interview, Cecil spoke about two defining moments in his faith. The first was the experience that he described above. The second was the support of his girl friend who was active in her parish and encouraged him to participate

as well. He became her apprentice. She was his evangelist and catechist. While the school assisted his faith development through the retreat and through its religious education programme, he attributed the re-awakening of his relationship with God and his catechesis to his girl friend's influence and his involvement in parish life, which included participation in the parish-based YCS (Young Christian Students) group.

Gunter also spoke about his Year 12 retreat experience in terms quite different from those used by Cameron and Frank. He referred to a liturgy that was conducted as part of the retreat: "… last year on Retreat — um — Mr Anderson conducting the liturgy. The way he conducted it sort of made everything sound really true an' I think that was very good the way he did that" (lines 349-352). His use of the expression "made everything sound true" reflected Fowler's (1981) observation stated above, that the imagination constructs reality truthfully; Gunter's perception of the liturgy was of a prayer that reflected what he considered to be true about faith and life.

Sophie reflected on her experiences of retreats in Years 11 and 12. She contrasted her experience in Year 11 with what happened to her on her Year 12 retreat that helped her to grow closer to God:

> I had a — a brilliant time on the Year 11 retreat, like it was — it was one of the best times in my life, but at — it really didn't associate very much with — like it did with God, but it's just because all my mates were on it an' it was just a really good time. I think Year 12 retreat because at first I didn't think it would live up to Year 11 retreat but it so it is so spiritual it didn't matter — oh the surroundings were lovely because it was very quiet, very

> peaceful, but — um — I think because I saw God in other people an' that really, really shocked me, like some people I've known a majority of my life and I didn't actually know them (lines 221-231).

Sophie's experience of her Year 11 retreat was similar to that described by Cameron and Frank. The focus was on personal and social development. She did not associate God with the experience of the retreat. Her Year 12 retreat was significantly different. Like Cecil and Gunter, she regarded it as a religious experience. Sophie commenced her interview with a statement about constructing her faith from "my background … my family … my surroundings, like my school" (lines 15-19). Included in her image of faith in God was the realisation that she could not know people until she recognised God dwelling within them. Her discovery implied its inclusion in the content of the retreat programme.

The structure of the interviews reflected the thrust of initiatory catechesis for the purpose of discovering how the imagination assisted the process of conversion through evangelisation. The *Mandate* (2009) drew on the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) to describe the work of initiatory catechesis. Using statements from the *Directory*, it is proposed that school retreats should be conducted to promote:

- "an authentic following of Christ, focused on his Person;"
- "education in the knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith;"
- enrichment of the whole person "at his deepest levels" by the word of God; and
- transformation of the person to take responsibility for professing their faith "from the heart" (*GDC*, para. 67).

The discussion conducted in this part of the present chapter focused on the extent to which participants' perceptions of their retreat experiences reflected the aims of initiatory catechesis. It was concluded that for some participants there was awareness of the Christian focus that school retreats are expected to promote, whereas others perceived retreats to be experiences oriented towards personal and social development. Such a conclusion needs to be viewed in the light of the words of Pope Paul VI (1975): "Techniques of evangelisation are good, but even the most advanced ones could not replace the gentle action of the Spirit. … Without the Holy Spirit the most convincing dialectic had no power over the heart of man" (*EN*, para. 75).

Religious education

Of the three forms of ministry of the word, religious education was mandated as the first learning area in the Catholic school curriculum. The content of the subject was outlined in the *Mandate* (2009):

> Religious Education will contribute to the development of a sense of the sacred, a religious awakening in students. It will seek to ensure that students understand the foundational Christian belief that Jesus Christ is Saviour, as well as the Christian promise of Salvation. It will draw out the implications of this promise for students' lives. It will aim to show at all times 'how the Gospel fully satisfies the human heart', particularly its deeper questionings and yearnings (*M09*, para. 64).

The Bishops described it as "an activity of evangelisation in its own right" (M09, para. 62). It complemented catechesis. However, as the Bishops stated in their *Mandate*, "many young people today receive little, if any,

apprenticeship in the faith in their families and parishes" (*M09*, para. 58) and so initiatory catechesis in Catholic schools becomes a crucial part of evangelisation in the educational setting. Through religious education and catechetical activities, such as "liturgies, prayer, retreats and Easter and Christmas celebrations" (*M09*, para. 58), Catholic faith is shared. Thus the curriculum of the Catholic school promotes "knowledge and understanding of the Gospel, as it is handed on by the Catholic Church, and of how those who follow Christ are called to live this Gospel in today's world" (*M09*, para. 62). It also promotes reflection on catechetical experiences that form part of the life of the school as a Christian community to help students identify, understand and appreciate what the mystery of Christ offers believers (*M09*, para. 59).

While religious education and catechesis, particularly initiatory catechesis, are distinct yet complementary moments of evangelisation, they can and do occur simultaneously. Classroom topics about the Eucharist are not the same as a Mass celebrated with the class. Yet the catechesis that takes place through the celebration of Mass can also become part of the classroom for those who ready to apply what they are taught in relation to what they experience. In its role of complementing catechesis, religious education "strengthens catechesis students have received already, reinforces catechesis they are receiving currently and prepares for catechesis to be received in the future" (*M09*, para. 62). In reality, that is, in the course of teaching religious education, catechesis takes place when students are ready to learn more about the relationship they have formed with God through Christ. Some participants in the present student reported that their faith was strengthened through the experience of their religious education classes: the

lesson has become for them a form of catechesis.

Recall that in chapter 2 of the present study, the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) described religious education as “a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines. [It] underpins, activates, develops and completes the educational activity of the school.” (*GDC*, para. 73) If this is the nature of the subject called “Religious Education” its purpose was stated clearly in the *Mandate* (2009): along with Christian witness and catechesis, religious education “expresses ‘the divine power of the Message’ (*M09*, para. 62). The data was examined to determine first, the attitude of the participants towards religious education, and second, what they remembered about the content of religious education. Third, statements about the importance of religious education were identified to determine whether or not the participants who made those statements considered religious education a significant contributor to their relationship with God.

Students’ perceptions of religious education

The participants were asked to reflect on the part that religious education played in their faith development. They were asked: “Has there been anything happened or been said in RE that has influenced you in your faith?” Some participants responded negatively, but the responses were generally positive. Luke was most positive about his experience of religious education classes. During his first interview, he offered the following comment: “You always come out of an RE lesson knowing something else, feeling that way, which is good” (lines 251-252). Glynna contrasted her

experience of religious education in Year 11, which she enjoyed, with her experience in Year 12:

> … we were all really close and we felt really comfortable discussing like personal issues and this year I'm in the INSTEP class and like with — like it's like segregated … and we don't really have class discussions an' stuff. So, it's really different (lines 424-429).

In general, she enjoyed her religious education classes when she was challenged to think. She acknowledged that some of her peers preferred not to be challenged in class: "… it kind of made me realise that some people just can follow something mindlessly and that like that is not a good thing" (lines 450-452).

Frank spoke positively about his experiences of religious education, particularly his Year 12 class. During his second interview, he revealed his attitude through the following comment:

> Um — jus' thankful for those RE classes, yeah. It's a protected environment — um — where everybody's openly — they just talk about issues of life an' — it was — it's fantastic! I'm — I'm really glad that I went to a Catholic school and had that opportunity (lines 127-130).

Sophie also spoke positively about her experiences of religious education classes. She was inspired by some of her teachers and found the interaction with her peers stimulating: "… you definitely learn things from — um — others' experiences, others' challenge– others — like their challenges" (lines 314-316).

After leaving school, Mikaela admitted during her second interview, “I miss RE. Really do miss RE” (line 136). However, as she reflected on her experience of religious education at her school, she stated: “… last year’s RE was pretty boring” (line 137). Prior to that, the experience was positive and she revealed that she “enjoyed Year 11 most” (line 139). Kevin said very little about his experience of religious education classes. He learned about his faith from his parents, from attending his youth group and through participating in the life of the charismatic covenant community that he joined. He stated: “Most of the stuff, I’d been taught. It just like reminded (me)” (line 205) presumably of what he had learned about God and his Catholic faith outside school.

Elizabeth was negative towards religious education at her school. She admitted to being closed to anything her teachers had to say about Catholicism or what she construed to be Catholic teaching. She was Lutheran and her religious faith was grounded in her family’s religious affiliation. In her journal, she described her attitude towards religious education in the following way: “I can honestly say that I have never heard anything in RE that I didn’t already know. If I didn’t know it already I down right disagreed with it” (lines 144-146). As she developed the skills she needed to articulate her faith, she also recognised that her father, a Lutheran minister, was more open to Catholicism than she was and so she came to regret not having been more receptive in class. In her second interview, she stated: “… I probably should have and I could have like learnt something….” (lines 123-124).

In his journal, Stephen wrote: “Religious Education (has) not dramatically changed my religion. There are no real lessons challenging my faith” (lines 70-71). His use of the word “dramatically” did not negate the impact of religious education on his relationship with God. In his first interview, Stephen spoke positively about his experiences of religious education in Years 10 and 11. As a Year 10 student, his “ideas hadn’t developed” (line 313), but in Year 11 he was challenged by the teachings of the Catholic Church on stem cell research and abortion that were presented as part of the religious education programme. He found himself engaged in a struggle to form his own beliefs and values that would help him deal with his cousin’s accident. The passion of his involvement in his religious education class was evident in his struggle to understand why his cousin should have to endure her paraplegia. As a participant in the present study, he was invited to reflect on and write about the religious education he experienced in secondary school. He wrote in his journal:

> Most people agree with the treatment of cancer through technology, even though it is prolonging life. Even down to colds and flue. We take medicine to get over it. Why shouldn’t people like Andrea be able to get over their spinal injuries (lines 89-93)?

The success of religious education as an evangelising activity depends in part on the attitudes of students. The 15 participants in the present study displayed a range of attitudes from dismissive comments made by Emily to the appreciative comments of Mikaela. Recall that the Bishops (2009) stated that religious education “expresses ‘the divine power of the Message’” (*M09*, para. 62); therefore, students’ positive attitudes towards religious education

are likely to assist religious conversion. The success of religious education depends also on the pedagogy of its teachers.

The pedagogy of religious education

Holohan (1999) described religious education as “a form of the ministry of the word” that facilitated the acquisition of knowledge that would “enlighten students’ experiences so that they are enriched by them” (p. 27). Teachers make use of various types of strategies to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. The strategies that they use form what is known as “pedagogy”. In relation to religious education, teachers make use of the “pedagogy of faith”. Pope John Paul II (1979) used the term “pedagogy of faith” to explain how catechesis should be enacted. He called for the development of a way of teaching about Christian faith that was based on the way God teaches through Revelation, that is, the divine pedagogy that can be found in both the Old and New Testaments, especially in the Gospel (*CT*, para. 58). This theme was developed further in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998): “… the Holy Spirit works through people who receive the mission to proclaim the Gospel and whose competence and human experience form part of the pedagogy of faith” (*GDC*, para. 52).

The data gathered from the participants showed the confidence they placed in many of their religious education teachers whose competence in communicating the content of faith was not questioned. For instance, in his second interview, Luke gave his perception of the competence of his religious education teachers:

> … they definitely help understand the concepts. They can explain things in a good way that priests can't. They're – priests I find are very formal in their talking and they often talk about the old ways and put it in the old context, the Bible and stuff. But the RE teachers can put it in modern day terms for us and that's a lot easier (lines 107-112).

In his first interview, Stephen recalled his Year 10 religious education teacher. He said that she "had the same sort of thoughts that I had." He described her as "a really good RE teacher" and then explained why: "A lot of things she said I could relate to. She sort of spoke to us on our level like belief" (lines 304-306).

The task of putting the teaching of the Church in language that is accessible to teenagers was acknowledged by Pope John XXIII (1962) in his opening address to the Second Vatican Council: "What is needed is that this certain and immutable doctrine, to which the faithful owe obedience, be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms". Pope John Paul II (1979) reiterated this theme. He encouraged teachers "to speak a language suited to today's children and young people in general and to many other categories of people" (*CT*, para. 59). This process of "inculturation" (Holohan, 1999) was described in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) as one of the greatest challenges faced by those engaged in evangelisation (*GDC*, para. 21).

Evidence of inculturation working in a religious education class was found in the account Luke gave of his experience of religious education. He

spoke about his teachers in a general way and acknowledged their influence on him. In his first interview, he stated:

> Um – I find that their views become my views. Things they say you'll remember and you'll – just one day you'll be thinking about that in the context and you'll think back and say, "I remember someone said that." And you'll think about it. "Mm, that makes sense now." It might not make sense at the time of the RE lesson but later on you'll think back and "Yeah, I realise that now" (lines 267-273).

Luke reported that his teachers made him think. Other participants made similar comments. For instance, Glynna stated in her interview that her Year 11 religious education teacher "refused to believe in evolution" (line 399). This upset her, however, as the year progressed, she changed her mind about her teacher: "An' like I kind of realised how like I don't know if she was doing it on purpose to make us question ourselves more" (lines 404-405). Glynna came to the conclusion that because of her teacher's approach, she thought more about her faith. Sophie did not say that her teachers made her think, but they did inspire and encourage her to be more faithful to God.

It was clear from the story that Mikaela told that she thought deeply about her faith. In her first interview, she said:

> I've had pretty good RE teachers as well. Miss Jones, a very good RE teacher. Mr Smith was — like Miss Jones gave me like that little push I needed. She go "Talk to the Father. He's pretty good about stuff like this." And then Mr Smith made me think, like "Why am I thinking this about

> God?" "What has happened to make me think about God like that?" (lines 366-371).

Mikaela reflected on what her teachers said in her religious education classes. Her desire to become a Catholic became the measure of what she experienced in class. The questioning alluded to above in her comment about the impact of her teachers on her faith was just one aspect of the thinking she engaged in through her participation in her religious education classes. She also arrived at judgments based on what she heard and her own thinking. For instance, she reported on a lesson in her journal. Based on her teacher's comments to some students who were misbehaving in class, she concluded:

> I began to think what Jesus would do. Would he tease someone if they deserved it when the majority of the people teased didn't deserve to be teased? … Miss Jones then began to tell them that teasing was due to people having a low self-esteem. This made me think that people with a low self esteem may also have low faith in God and be pretending to be Christians for their parents but not for themselves (lines 102-109).

What the teacher intended to be a statement of appropriate behaviour, presumably from a Christian perspective — it was delivered in a religious education class — could be considered to be primary proclamation, however, for Mikaela, who had already expressed belief in Christ as her saviour, it was a form of catechesis.

Kevin also acknowledged the influence of his teachers on the way he viewed his faith in Christ. Like Sophie, his teachers encouraged him to continue developing his faith through his involvement in all those activities at

school that were related to the practice of his faith, such as attending Mass in the College Chapel and being involved in the liturgy choir. In the following statement, Kevin referred to the witness to their faith that his teachers gave. Their experience of faith in Christ validated his experience:

> … their impact is quite significant because I see the — how religion has affected my RE teachers' life an' stuff an' so I take that into account. And it really inspires me to like be more like Chri- — yeah, like Christ (lines 208-211).

Stephen was also challenged by his religious education teachers to think about his faith. In his first interview, he referred to "a few class debates which evolved my thoughts" (lines 314-315). The debates provided him with opportunities to think about ethical issues related to his cousin's paraplegia:

> If I was asked what year challenged my faith, I would have to say that Mr Jones Year 11 class challenged me. There were many heated debates; the two main ones would have been abortion and stem cell research (lines 72-74).

He rejected the Church's teaching on abortion and stem cell research but remained focused on the sacredness of life, particularly the lives of people whom he knew.

Religious education methods

Pope John Paul II (1979) gave directions about methods to be used in catechesis. Heeding the call from the Fourth General Assembly of the Synod of Catholic Bishops (1977) "for the restoration of a judicious balance between reflection and spontaneity, between dialogue and silence, between written

work and memory work" (*CT*, para. 55), he stated that the principle of "fidelity to God and fidelity to man" had to be used in determining which methods to use. In the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1998) it was stated "method is at the service of revelation and conversion" (*GDC*, para. 149), that is, catechesis:

> … requires a process of transmission which is adequate to the nature of the message, to its sources and language, to the concrete circumstances of ecclesial communities as well as the particular circumstances of the faithful to whom catechesis is addressed (*GDC*, para. 149).

Even though catechesis is distinct from religious education and generally found in the Catholic school curriculum outside of the religious education class, nevertheless, both moments of evangelisation require methods that serve revelation and conversion and that often find the two moments occurring simultaneously, or in tandem. Many of the teaching methods employed in religious education can be found in use in catechetical activities that focus on reflection and dialogue. Following the Fourth General Assembly of the Synod of Catholic Bishops (1977) and Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), Nichols & Cummins (1980) described three modes of teaching that could be used in catechesis and religious education: presentation mode, search mode, interactive mode (p. 23ff). Examples of these modes were found in the transcripts of interviews and journals provided by some of the participants.

The presentation mode makes use of didactic methods, such as lectures and talks, including the use of audio-visual aids, such as music, songs, pictures, graphics, video clips and the use of the Internet. It was

characteristic of the accounts given by most of the participants that they could not remember much about what their teachers said in class. Most participants did not share any memorable statements or phrases given in religious education classes. However, there were some exceptions that pointed to the importance of the presentation mode in religious education and the contribution of people's input to evangelisation.

Recall the example cited above of Mikaela's account of her Year 10 religious education teacher who confronted some of her students in class about their attempts to justify their bullying of another student. The teacher's lecture about the injustice of bullying was an example of the presentation mode used for the purpose of evangelisation. The incident caused Mikaela to think about her own attitude towards people and to recognise that she needed to change her beliefs about people to fit in with her faith in Christ:

> My belief I now find to be wrong is that some people have NO good in them. But Miss Jones proved it through a story about a saint who began his life stealing and then converted his evil ways into Catholicism and then before he died became a priest (lines 111-114).

The presentation mode can be used creatively as the example above has illustrated. Storytelling is a valuable aid in the pedagogy of faith as Mikaela attested in her journal entry. Her story communicated clearly how catechesis takes place through the agency of religious education: when the religious education teacher presents Christian teaching clearly, those students who have accepted faith in Christ are likely to reflect on the message and apply it to their lives.

The search mode teaches through discovery. When used well, it encourages students to become independent learners. It is characterised by flexibility in learning styles, that is, the learner can use a variety of means to assist learning, such as reading, listening, or doing. For instance, Elizabeth reported in her second interview that she had been reading a book about the languages of love. She had concluded: “I know that my love language is touch” (line 11). In the interview, she applied her discovery to her enduring image of God as a loving father who held his child’s hand, her hand. Elizabeth’s “spiritual” reading was a form of catechesis that took place out of school and was related to her involvement in her youth group. Recall that she had admitted that her negative attitude towards religious education prevented her from being engaged in thinking more about her faith as a result of the class she attended.

The search mode can be thought of as attitudinal rather than merely intentional, that is, rather than being used by the teacher, it is the activity of the student who seeks answers. For instance, in her journal, Alexandra reported that the most important religious education lesson that she could remember was the talk given by a visiting speaker whose message was about making the most of opportunities in life. She wrote:

> The speaker taught me to always try to see the brighter side of the problem, because you could be worse off and all problems can be seen as a lesson that makes and shapes the person you are at the end (lines 60-63).

It was stated earlier in the present chapter and also in previous chapters, Alexandra used what she learned in this lesson to confirm her belief that God

worked through people to take care of those in need. She saw herself as God's instrument in supporting her mother. Alexandra's perception of the event did not present any evidence that revealed her school's intention for including the guest speaker in the religious education curriculum. Information from outside the boundaries of the data provided by the participants indicated clearly that the guest speaker was a motivational speaker who was engaged by Alexandra's school to encourage its Year 12 students to strive to make the most of the opportunities afforded them through their curriculum. Alexandra interpreted the experience in a religious sense. She called it "a religion lesson which changed my view of my faith" (line 57). It was a form of catechesis, admittedly, at a basic level, which strengthened her faith in God. She did not link it with her belief that Jesus had the power to save her. What the school proclaimed about Christ through its religious education programme and its catechetical activities had not yet prompted her to consider her life in the light of her stated relationship with Jesus which she expressed as "Just like to pray and ask for mercy and for- to — to forgive, for forgiveness" (lines 10-11).

The interactive mode in religious education includes such strategies as discussions, debates, role-plays. Of the three modes of teaching this was the one that the participants referred to most often. For instance, Stephen enjoyed debating, discussing and arguing. He wrote in his journal that in Year 11 "there were many heated debates" (line 73). In his first interview, he stated that the debates "evolved (his) thoughts" (line 315). The debates that interested him the most were those about abortion and stem cell research. He said:

> I disagreed with a lot of the Catholic beliefs, but yeah, pretty much most of them. I agreed with a lot of them and disagreed with a lot of them, but I found that there was no middle ground with me (lines 321-324).

The experience must have affected him deeply. The debates took place in the early part of Year 11 and he recalled them more than twelve months later in the context of his cousin's surfing accident that was referred to earlier in this chapter and in earlier chapters. His accounts of the debates in his first interview and also in his journal indicated that he had heard the Christian message about the sacredness of life and had accepted it, as he understood it. What he rejected was the Catholic Church's teaching about the rights of the foetus and the limits to the human power to make decisions about life and death.

In this part of the discussion, the illustrations of the methods employed by religious education teachers were drawn from the accounts given by Mikaela, Alexandra and Stephen. Any set of participants could have been formed to provide illustrations of the methods used in religious education. These were chosen because they went to the same secondary school, and experienced the same religious education programme. Mikaela and Stephen were in the same cohort, but their stories were quite different and they each took from their religious education lessons different sets of ideas that helped them to form and develop their relationship with God and to articulate it for the purposes of the present study. What was obvious in the perceptions of the three participants chosen was the uniqueness of each person's call and response. Evangelisation is the mission of the Church; conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Teachable moments

The impetus for the Catholic Church's renewal of its understanding of evangelisation came from the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1974. In response to the direction the Synod gave to future reflection on evangelisation, Paul VI (1975) stated clearly the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of evangelisation. He wrote:

> It must be said that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelisation; it is he who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is he who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood…. Through the Holy Spirit the Gospel penetrates to the heart of the world, for it is he who causes people to discern the signs of the times — signs willed by God — which evangelisation reveals and puts to use within history (*EN*, para. 75).

What the participants perceived to be true of themselves and the world, that is, what their imaginations constructed for them as the reality of God's presence in their lives and in the world, is what the Church presents as the work of the Holy Spirit. It was established in the present study that there were particular moments in the lives of the participants that proved to be turning points or times of great significance to them in their relationship with God. These can be called "teachable moments." For instance, the fly incident recounted by Stephen was a teachable moment for him.

Educators acknowledge the existence of "teachable moments" in curriculum events, that is, unplanned moments that arise when a teacher has the opportunity to share insights or explain concepts that students are willing

and motivated to learn. In the previous chapter of the present study, the concept of disequilibration was introduced to help explain how the imagination assists faith development. From a cognitive perspective, teachable moments occur when people experience disequilibration with or without the conscious intervention of the teacher. Fortosis & Garland (1990) quoted Piaget's (1950) definition of disequilibration: "The state of tension or disturbance in which elements of a person's world no longer seem to fit the "reality" which he has created" (p. 633). As it was explained above, Mikaela learned from the lecture about bullying that her teacher delivered that she could no longer condemn any person as bad. The lesson that she described in her journal was a teachable moment for her.

Teachable moments generally are serendipitous. Often they occur without teachers being aware of them. Recall the discussion about Stephen and the fly earlier in the present chapter. He reported: "I caught a fly and tied a bit of hair around it and Miss Scott said, "It's got as much right to live as you do." And I've never done it since" (lines 92-94). The change in Stephen's attitude towards life and the development of his faith happened away from the class, but the catalyst was that one moment and an unplanned rebuke from his teacher. It was truly a serendipitous event in his life that changed him profoundly. A chance encounter with Stephen three years after he had left school revealed that he had just returned from a trip to Asia where he had participated in filming a documentary on endangered species.

Teachable moments can be engineered by creating disequilibration in the lives of students. Fortosis & Garland (1990) advocated the use of

Scripture to show students that God nurtured people by allowing them to experience disequilibration that occurred naturally and sometimes by intervening to disturb their equilibrium. They referred to the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:5-42). Jesus disturbed the woman out of her apathy by speaking with her, a violation of Jewish law that forbade him to speak with Samaritans, about life with God. To restore her own sense of equilibrium she accommodated what he said by declaring to her friends: “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Do you think he might be the Christ” (John 4:29 New Century Version)? The story that Mikaela’s teacher told her class in the course of her lecture on bullying had much the same effect on Mikaela.

In its action of reaching back into memory and leaning forward to shape the future, the imagination creates what Fowler (1981) referred to as the “best fit” which does not have to resonate with the prevailing worldview. For example, consider the conversion of St Paul. He was engaged in ridding the world of the heretics who followed Jesus of Nazareth. In one teachable moment, when he was rendered physically incapable of fighting off an unseen enemy, he was converted and became one of the heretics:

> So Saul headed toward Damascus. As he came near the city, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"
>
> Saul said, "Who are you, Lord?"
>
> The voice answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up now and go into the city. Someone there will tell you what you must do." (Acts 9:3-6 New Century Version).

Saul's Damascus experience changed his life changed radically as the rest of the story told in the *Acts of the Apostles* attested.

It was shown in chapter 5 of the present study that the religious conversions experienced by Mikaela, Kevin, Elizabeth and Stephen came through the experiences of "teachable moments". For instance, Mikaela described attendance at her Catholic secondary school and joining the Young Christian Students group at school as her "Damascus" experience. She heard God's call to become a Catholic through that experience. Kevin's teachable moments were not school-related but were centred in his youth group experience. Elizabeth had a similar experience. Stephen's "Damascus" experience happened in a Year 10 class. His understanding of God that he constructed with the insights gained from that experience, helped him to deal with his cousin's paraplegia.

The teachable moments that were reported in this chapter were experiences of being evangelised. Those moments sometimes involved Christian witness, such as Luke's encounter with a family involved with the liturgy band in his parish. In his journal, he wrote: "… there is one person who convinced me that God exists. I met up with this person through the band that I play in at Church and him and his wife are just awesome" (lines 45-47). He also described his encounter with his parish priest who taught him how to pray and the support he received from his friends in the youth group: "He taught me how to pray properly and generally being with other people who are not afraid to pray helps you" (lines 196-198). These were teachable moments in his life that confirmed for him the truth of the faith that his parents had shared

with him when he was growing up, a faith that was supported by his parish and the schools he attended.

Just as teachable moments contribute to the work of the imagination as it creates a reality that is Christian, they can contribute also to the creation of a reality that is religious but not Christian. The teachable moments that occurred in Stephen's life confirmed for him the existence of God, but were part of his imaginative construction of a worldview that seemed to him at the time he explained it to be more Buddhist than Christian. He said in his second interview: "My religion is Catholicism, but my faith – like I said before, I have many beliefs of different religions, like Buddhism, reincarnation, so therefore I use them differently" (lines 86-88). He experienced a religious conversion that was moral and ecological and he remained open to being Christian and Catholic.

Summary

In chapter 6, the imagination was described as a dialectic action of "reaching back" and "leaning forward" to create new realities that guide people into the future. In the present chapter, the understanding of evangelisation presented by the Catholic Bishops of Western Australia in the *Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009-2015* was used as a structure to examine how the imagination assisted the faith development and religious conversion of some of the participants in the present study. The two elements of evangelisation, namely, Christian witness and ministry of the word were used to examine the participants' perceptions of the impact of their school experiences on their relationships with God.

Many of the participants in the present study identified Christian witness as a powerful agent of evangelisation in their lives. It was shown that for most of the participants the significant experiences of Christian witness were not located in the schools they attended. For four participants, the witness to their faith by close friends and teachers assisted the process of conversion. The ministry of the word, in the form of primary proclamation, initiatory catechesis and religious education, was shown to be part of the process of evangelisation that the participants experienced. Religious education was acknowledged by the participants to be a valuable aid in their faith development. The competence of their religious education teachers was acknowledged by most of the participants. They provided experiences for them that helped them to grow in faith through a process of personal reflection that seemed to happen away from the classroom experience. The participants also described catechetical experiences, some of which seemed to happen simultaneously with the teaching of religious education. Finally, it was shown that the concept of “teachable moments” was helpful in coming to understand how the imagination assisted the faith development and conversion of the students involved in the present study. It was found that the imagination made use of memories of the experience of teachable moments to construct the reality of the participants’ relationship with God. Most of the participants reported that reflection on those moments of evangelisation led to the strengthening of their relationship with God.

The final chapter is a summary of the overall study with recommendations being made for the improvement of the evangelisation of adolescents attending Catholic secondary schools and for further research.