

ANOTHER EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY:  
FOSTERING DIALOGUE ABOUT RELIGION AND GOD IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS  
WITH MULTIFAITH STUDENT POPULATIONS

BY

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.



I am greatly indebted to the generosity of  
Dr. John Stapleton, Dr. Denis Bracken,  
and especially,  
Dr. David Creamer, SJ

To all those who continue to inspire me,  
I give you thanks.

## Abstract

This study seeks to articulate how and to what extent the religious-education programs, faith formation, and spiritual ethos in Catholic schools can cultivate dialogue about and foster experiences of religion and God in light of the diversity of faith traditions present in the student population. The methodology involves demographic and document inquiry, participant observation, and individual, semistructured interviews using an analytical framework inspired by Thomas Groome's seminal work on a shared Christian praxis. Research was conducted between November 2004 and March 2005. One school in Canada, one school in the United States, and two schools in India were observed, and 15 interviews were completed. What was demonstrated most clearly is that specific dialogue about religion and God is not a primary focus in any of the schools. Rather, their approaches seek to foster character development and religious tolerance based on the principles of moral and values education that are rooted in the experiences of the students. This study is useful for schools that desire to stimulate religious expression and dialogue that are rooted in, but not limited to, the narrow language of a single faith tradition.

## CONTENTS

Copyright .....	ii
Dedication .....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Background .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	2
Limitations .....	3
Number of Schools .....	3
Time Constraints .....	4
Quantity of Interviews .....	4
Personal Bias .....	4
Glossary of Terminology .....	5
Framework .....	6
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
Philosophical Foundations .....	10
Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) .....	10
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) .....	12
Jürgen Habermas (1929– ) .....	15
Paulo Freire (1921–1997) .....	16
Educational Responses .....	19
Public Responses .....	19
Religious Responses .....	21
Catholic Responses .....	24

Jesuit Responses.....	29
Current Discourse.....	32
Catholic Education in the New Millennium.....	32
Shared Christian Praxis.....	35
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY.....	40
Anonymity and Confidentiality.....	40
Institutional Styles.....	41
Demographic and Document Inquiry.....	43
Participant Observation.....	44
Individual, Semistructured Interviews.....	45
Obtaining Permission in the Schools.....	47
Data Analysis.....	48
CHAPTER IV ST. MICHAEL’S HIGH SCHOOL.....	50
Introduction.....	50
Focusing the Dialogue.....	51
Two Different Approaches.....	51
Classroom Content.....	53
Cool to Be Catholic.....	55
Naming.....	56
A Limited Diversity.....	56
Building Tolerance.....	56
Missed Opportunities.....	57
Students Speaking to Each Other.....	58
Making Available the Common Story and Vision.....	58
A Clear Identification.....	58

The Ring .....	59
Grace Cannot Be Quantified.....	60
Striking the Right Balance.....	61
Integrating and Responding .....	62
CHAPTER V CAMPION HIGH SCHOOL.....	64
Introduction.....	64
Focusing the Dialogue .....	65
The Foundational Document.....	65
The First Five Minutes .....	67
Naming .....	69
The Retreat Programs .....	69
The Freshman Retreat.....	69
The Junior Encounter .....	73
Fostering Diversity.....	74
Campion Latino Club .....	75
Working on Real Diversity .....	76
Making Available the Common Story and Vision.....	79
Freedom to Choose.....	79
Integrating and Responding .....	80
CHAPTER VI LOYOLA COLLEGE .....	82
Introduction.....	82
Focusing the Dialogue .....	83
Intrinsically Religious .....	83
Values Education.....	83
Naming .....	86

Religious Celebrations.....	86
Being a Hindu-Catholic .....	87
Making Available the Common Story and Vision .....	89
Prayer on the Campus.....	89
Catholic Education for Catholic Students.....	90
What Makes a Catholic School? .....	91
Integrating and Responding .....	93
CHAPTER VII ST. ISAAC JOGUES SCHOOL.....	95
Introduction.....	95
Focusing the Dialogue .....	96
Technology in the Classroom .....	96
Asking Questions without Giving Answers.....	97
Training the Teachers .....	98
Naming .....	99
Secularisation and Moral Development .....	99
Holidays and Religious Diversity .....	101
Making Available the Common Story and Vision.....	102
Adapting Catholic Teaching .....	102
Values Education Leading to Religious Expression .....	103
Hindu Philosophy in Catholic Teaching.....	104
Small Human Communities.....	105
Integrating and Responding .....	105
CHAPTER VIII DISCUSSION .....	107
Foreword.....	107
Focusing the Dialogue .....	107

Inspiring the Students .....	107
Catholic Symbolism .....	108
Student Class Input.....	110
Intellectually Stimulating.....	111
Teaching Styles .....	112
Reliance on Textbooks .....	113
Naming .....	114
The Admissions Process .....	114
Religious Education versus Faith Formation.....	115
School Facilitated Prayer.....	116
Finding the Right Place .....	117
Religious Expression .....	119
School Calendar .....	119
Retreat Experiences.....	120
Making Available the Common Story and Vision.....	121
Authentic Christian Witness .....	121
Teacher Formation .....	122
Catholic Ritual .....	123
Integrating and Responding .....	124
Religious Integration .....	124
Follow-Up Programs .....	124
Post-Graduation Relationship .....	125
Alumni Organisations.....	125
University and College .....	126
Conclusion .....	127

Recommendations for Further Research .....	128
Epilogue .....	130
NOTES.....	131
REFERENCES.....	133
APPENDICIES	
Appendix A – Ethics Board Approval Certificate .....	138
Appendix B – Demographic Enquiry.....	139
Appendix C – Letter of Contact for Participant .....	140
Appendix D – Participant Consent Form.....	142
Appendix E – Interview Protocol.....	143
Appendix F – Letter of Contact for Interviewee .....	144
Appendix G – Interviewee Consent Form .....	146
Appendix H – Letter of Contact for Chief Administrator .....	147
Appendix I – Chief Administrator Consent Form.....	149

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

*Introduction*

There is a Jewish axiom that suggests if you put three good rabbis into a closed room, you will get four perspectives. Although entertaining, the saying expresses an important educational principle. Individuals can carry on a dialogue in such a way that the conclusions drawn by each of them can be entirely new points of view that do not negate any one perspective.

*Background*

One of the major subjects with which the global community has become increasingly familiar is the relationship between culture, politics, and religion. Although the Canadian media have covered the conflict between the United States and Iraq as though it were a unique global phenomenon, the cultural, political, and religious clash in Iraq is not extraordinary. Indeed, major strife in other countries such as Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories, Israel, Northern Ireland, and Sri Lanka has demonstrated the affiliation that exists between religious expression and conflict. Today, more than ever, students need to learn that interpersonal and international relationships are seldom without religious undertones. Educational programs that address the relationship between religion and contemporary socio-political issues must be a priority in schools. Unfortunately, such dialogue rarely takes place in a forum where students of different faiths are able to converse about their understanding of religion and God in light of their experiences.

On some level, our schools are simply microcosms of a larger global reality. If the complex road to peace is linked to religious understanding and tolerance, such tolerance must be operational in our educational institutions.<sup>1</sup> With many schools in large urban areas educating students from a multitude of faith traditions, educators have the opportunity to create a society of citizens who are truly sensitive to the faith perspectives of others. However, these important perspectives will never be gained unless students are given the opportunity to articulate their faith experiences free from the constraints of an overarching and institutionalized sectarian bias.<sup>2</sup> Dialogue between students of different religious traditions, in ways that are not limited by faith or culturally based expectations, must be fostered in our schools.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

I was a teacher and director of admissions in a Canadian, Catholic boys' high school, operated by the Society of Jesus, from the fall of 2001 until the spring of 2004. During this time, I observed a large increase in the number of non-Catholic and non-Christian applications to the school. Despite the explicitly Catholic nature of the high school, students from a variety of faith traditions—such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism—were interested in attending.

Having completed a degree in comparative religions at the University of Regina in 1997, I was interested in the ways in which these different religious groups expressed their traditions in light of the Catholic ethos of the school. Over time, I became aware of the lack of opportunities these students had to speak to each other about their faith experiences. While the school had recognized the importance of admitting students from a diversity of faith traditions, the religious-education and faith formation programs were

only recently being adapted to allow opportunities for these students to speak about their experiences of religion or God.

As a response to these perceived lack of opportunities, the research for this thesis sought to explore and articulate how and to what extent the religious-education programs, faith formation, and spiritual ethos in Catholic schools cultivate dialogue about and foster experiences of religion and God in light of the diversity of faith traditions present in the student population.

It was expected that a methodological study into Catholic schools, which have a diversity of faith traditions as represented in the student population, could lead to new approaches in developing, implementing, and sustaining similar programs in other schools that lack such structures.

#### *Limitations*

Four limitations have been identified in this study insofar as the number of schools selected, the time constraints for each evaluation, the quantity of interviews carried out, and personal bias is concerned.

#### Number of Schools

Because of financial limitations associated with travelling for the purpose of research, only four Jesuit schools were examined. Though a larger sample size would have resulted in more data on the diversity of programs in Jesuit schools, an expanded evaluation was not possible. Had time and resources allowed, it would have been desirable to research Jesuit schools in China, which have large Confucian and Buddhist populations, as well as those in the Middle East, which have large Muslim populations.

Despite this limitation, it is presumed that the location and type of each school contribute a unique and valuable perspective to this study.

#### Time Constraints

An extended period of study in each school would have been preferable, but time constraints were a powerful limiting factor. Because the research for this thesis was undertaken between November 2004 and March 2005, each school was observed and evaluated only from seven to twelve days. A longer observation time could have revealed more subtle nuances in the religious-education programs as well as the spiritual climate of the schools.

#### Quantity of Interviews

Because the evaluation and analysis of large amounts of data demand a sustained and lengthy focus—which, because of time considerations, was not possible—the individual, semistructured interviews were limited to four per school. Although additional interviews would have revealed more clearly the types of programs that were found in the school as well as the personal attitudes and opinions of the faculty, teaching staff, and administration, it was supposed that too much data resulting from the individual, semistructured interviews would have negatively affected the completion of this thesis. Therefore, recognizing that more interviews would have been preferable, the study was limited to a maximum of four interviewees from each educational institution, with the recognition that informal discourse might also yield similar information.

#### Personal Bias

From 2001 until 2004, I worked as a Jesuit in a school operated by the Society of Jesus. During this time, I had an opportunity to meet with a variety of Jesuit educators

and administrators from around the world. Because of the extended contact that I had with individuals from different Jesuit institutions, it is possible that certain presumptions and declarations found in this study find their legitimacy in previous personal experiences and not necessarily in the specific research. Although every effort has been taken to remain neutral in the collection and synthesis of the data, it is recognized that no qualitative study is absolutely free of personal bias.

### *Glossary of Terminology*

The following glossary contains words that are particular to this thesis and—while the meaning of each word could be expanded upon or disputed entirely—the listed definitions are helpful for clarifying some of the more commonly used language.

∞ *Catholic* – Of or involving the Roman Catholic Church (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *Christian* – Professing belief in Jesus as Christ or following the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *Church (the)* – A specified Christian denomination [namely, the Roman Catholic Church] (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *Faith* – The body of dogma of a religion (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *God* – A being conceived as the perfect, omnipotent, omniscient originator and ruler of the universe, the principal object of faith and worship in monotheistic religions (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *Jesuit* – A member of the Society of Jesus.

∞ *Magisterium* – Specifically pertaining to the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church as related to matters of faith, morals, and doctrine.

∞ *Non-Catholic* – Any individual who is a member of a Christian denomination other than Catholicism, including Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and less mainstream Christian organisations. The use of this term does not include non-Christian individuals.

∞ *Non-Christian* – Any individual who is a member of a religious group that does not identify itself as Christian. This includes Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, as well as individuals who profess no religious affiliation at all.

∞ *Protestant* – A member of a Western Christian church whose faith and practice are founded on the principles of the [16<sup>th</sup> century] Reformation [of the Roman Catholic Church] (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *Religion* – Belief in and reverence for a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator and governor of the universe (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *(Roman) Catholic Church* – The Christian church characterized by an Episcopal hierarchy with the pope as its head and belief in seven sacraments and the authority of tradition (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

∞ *Society of Jesus* – An order of regular [Catholic] clergy, founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in 1534, that is strongly committed to education, theological scholarship, and missionary work (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

### *Framework*

This thesis is divided into eight major chapters: introduction and purpose, literature review, methodology, findings—which are four separate chapters—and discussion.

The introduction and purpose contains a general introduction to the study, a contextualized background, the statement of the problem, an outline of limitations, a glossary of terms, and this framework.

The literature review is divided into three sections, with each section focusing on a different approach concerning either religious expression or *faith* formation.

The first section of the literature review explores the work of Kant, Hegel, Habermas, and Freire. It seeks to put the process of religious dialogue into a philosophical framework. Drawing upon Kant, it shows that *religion* is a fundamentally inherent aspect of the human condition. It explores Hegel in light of his position surrounding the dialectic as a means of coming to a new perspective through a meaningful dialogue between two diverse and contrary views. Habermas is investigated, insofar as his concept concerning the necessity of dialogue that is free from ideology and hierarchy is relevant. Finally, Freire's proposal that learning can only truly take place within the context of an authentic dialogical exchange is assessed. While they do not make up an exhaustive list of philosophical thinkers, these four philosophers raise the key points surrounding questions about how dialogue on religion in *Catholic* schools with multifaith student populations can be achieved.

The second section of the literature review provides an opportunity to reflect on four distinct responses to questions surrounding interfaith dialogue in schools. First, an experimental religious-studies program put forth by the Board of Education for the City of Toronto is examined in light of the inherent limitations associated with the methodological academic study of religion in the public sector. Second, a general survey of some key religious reactions to the topic is undertaken, in order to identify more easily

current perspectives pertaining to questions of religiosity and secularism, and the need for educational programming that can address both. Third, recent Roman Catholic documents relating to the nature and practice of religious expression in Catholic schools are explored. Finally, an assessment of recent Jesuit documents articulates the mandate by which the religious order presumes to integrate its pedagogy with religious development.

The third and final section of the literature review focuses on recent works associated with processes of inquiry concerning Catholic education in the new millennium. In particular, Thomas Groome is examined, as he contributes an important approach through which the religious-education programs and faith formation in Catholic schools can be evaluated. Indeed, his methodology concerning a shared Christian praxis has heavily influenced the development of the organizational framework.

The methods used in this study involved demographic and document inquiry, participant observation, and individual, semistructured interviews. The demographic and document inquiry was used as the primary means of gathering quantitative data from each school. Participant observation was the chief manner by which a thematic understanding of the school's social, cultural, and religious ethos could be more clearly articulated. The individual, semistructured interview was the principal approach through which individuals with a direct involvement in the religious-education programs could speak freely and comprehensively about the religious education and faith formation in the school. Questions used for the individual, semistructured interviews were based loosely on Thomas Groome's work.

The findings for each school are organized into five categories using Groome's methodology concerning a shared Christian praxis as the primary framework:

*introduction, focusing the dialogue, naming, making available the common story and vision, and integrating and responding.* Each chapter contains a general overview and is intended to facilitate an understanding of the particular approach that the institution takes, insofar as its programs provide a means for dialogue and explore the diversity of faith traditions between students in the school. Although there is always much more that could be written in each chapter, the salient points are highlighted.

The discussion, also organized into Groome's categories concerning a shared Christian praxis, concentrated on the existing religious-education programs, faith formation, and religious climate in the four schools. The presumption is that an analysis can lead to new approaches in developing, implementing, and sustaining similar programs in other schools that have moved, or are experiencing a shift, toward a diversity of faith traditions. While the study itself focused on a specific set of schools, the findings are not necessarily limited to these Jesuit schools or even Catholic schools.

## CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Philosophical Foundations*

Philosophical reflection is an important means by which the relationship between dialogue and authentic understandings of religion and *God* can be clearly articulated. Perhaps no four philosophers have done more to advance the cause of religious tolerance based on the principles of dialogue than Georg Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Jürgen Habermas, and Paulo Freire. Each thinker has contributed a unique philosophical perspective that serves to provide a rationale for an entirely new model of religious dialogue in our schools. Kant asserts that religion is an inherent part of being human. Hegel claims that two viewpoints can always lead to a greater, more complete understanding without negating the reality of the original perspectives. Habermas suggests that authentic dialogue must begin, not on the level of ideology and hierarchy, but rather in a forum that is completely separate from personal and institutional bias. Finally, Freire claims that learning can occur only when teachers engage students in dialogue and healthy debate as co-operators in the process of learning. The four philosophers have laid the foundation upon which religious dialogue in schools can transcend the traditional discussion of doctrine, rituals, and rites without devaluing individual expressions of faith.

## Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

Kant's contribution to authentic dialogue between diverse faith traditions is his theory concerning the relationship between faith and religion. Unlike earlier philosophers who were bound to various forms of apologetic philosophy, Kant transcended his sectarian bias. In fact, his understanding of the transcendence of a singular religion laid

the groundwork for much of today's inter-religious dialogue. Concerning the existence of religion, Kant claims, "There is only one (true) religion; but there can be faiths of several kinds" (Kant, 1960, p. 98). Building upon his belief that religion is something that transcends individual faith traditions, he continues, "Even in the various churches, severed from one another by reason of the diversity of their modes of belief, one and the same true religion can yet be found" (98). For Kant, true religion goes beyond the particular notion of individual faith traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.

Kant understood religion as a wholly non-rational, incomprehensible mystery.<sup>3</sup> Although he refers to this mystery as *religion*, it must not be taken as an equivalent term for *faith*. Indeed, religion and faith are two distinct concepts in his philosophical framework. Religion is non-rational and beyond human comprehension, whereas faith is a rational and finite construct: religion encompasses faith. However, faith is the singular means through which human beings seek to encounter and to articulate religion. Therefore, the various faith traditions are limited and insufficient expressions of a higher singular reality. Though no single faith can express the fullness of religion, faith is a necessary means by which we attempt to understand religion. Without faith, we have no other means through which we can approach the incomprehensibility of religion.

With respect to interfaith dialogue, Kant's philosophy is important, because it recognizes the legitimacy of diverse faith traditions. If no single faith adequately expresses the reality of religion, then no single faith can claim to encompass the fullness of religious truth. In fact, if different faith traditions only partly illustrate the truth about religion, each faith has a valid, albeit limited, claim to at least some authority. Therefore,

dialogue between different faiths must be undertaken with the recognition that no faith tradition holds an absolute claim to the truth about religion or God. Indeed, there is a great gulf between finite human experience and the infiniteness of religion, and no faith tradition can adequately transcend this gap. A conversation about God that is limited to the narrow constraints of one faith tradition will never adequately articulate a reality that “is not only supreme, but complete, which embodies in its perfect holiness all the conditions which the moral law implies” (Knight, 2003).

Kant’s insights into the difference between the singularity of religion and the plurality of faith radically challenged the religious culture of his era. However, like many philosophers, Kant’s ideas were ahead of his time. His philosophy concerning the means by which different faith traditions express diverse attributes of the same reality conflicted with the orthodoxy of his *Protestant* roots. Like many 18<sup>th</sup> century *Christian* denominations of his time, he believed it held the primary claim to the fullness of religious understanding. Had Kant’s theory not been built upon by subsequent philosophers, it may have simply remained within the realm of theory and not of practice. However, in light of Hegel’s notion of the dialectic, Kant is confirmed in his presupposition that all faith traditions are valid, though limited, expressions of the singular and higher truth of religion.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831)

According to Hegel, the dialectic is ultimately a dialogue and discussion between individuals of conflicting points of view that lead to a greater and, presumably, higher understanding of truth. Therefore, the reality of any given situation can never fully be known if an individual is unwilling to explore other perspectives. It is only when one is

freely willing to consider the perspective of another that any real insights into the bigger picture can be known. With respect to the expression of faith, the true nature of religion and God can never fully be understood unless individuals of different faith traditions are willing to dialogue and debate matters of importance to their particular mode of religious expression. W. T. Jones clearly illustrates the nature of the dialectic with the following example:

Suppose that Mr. A. looks at a colored patch and calls it red. Mr. B, looking at the patch, replies “Oh, no; that’s blue.” So far A and B are in contradiction—a situation in which too many men often find themselves. Perhaps A and B continue to insist dogmatically on their original assertions; but if they are willing to “return upon and reconsider” the colored patch that they have observed, they may agree that the color is a royal purple—a bluish red or (if one prefers) a reddish blue (Jones, 1975, pp. 109–110).

For Mr. A and Mr. B, the dialectic can show them that there is a third and more focused reality that exists while still allowing for the authenticity of their original postulations. In a very real sense, they are both right, but not entirely right, in claiming that the patch is of a certain colour. In philosophical terms, their propositions are true, but not sufficient. Hegel would assert that dialogue, as it is embodied in the form of the dialectic, is the truest means for resolving conflict. It must be noted, however, that entering into the dialectic is not the same as finding the common ground between two conflicting points of view. The dialectic presumes that the sum of two individual parts is greater than the individual parts in themselves. In other words, the truth that is acquired when two conflicting points of view enter into the dialectic is more encompassing than

the individual truths embodied within the original points of view. Without using the dialectic as a means of bringing two conflicting points of view into a third and fuller reality, only limited, partial truths remain.

Hegel's idea of the dialectic is a necessary addition to Kant's concept of religion. Indeed, a combination of the two allows for a more dynamic grasp of other faith perspectives. An intellectual exploration of faith traditions will presumably lead only to a sterile and academic understanding of faith. However, a dialectical engagement between two individuals with different faith traditions will lead to a more profound awareness that fosters empathy, respect, and solidarity. Such conversations necessarily presume that individuals are able to enter freely into the ambiguities of life that are found in the rawest human experiences—to wrestle with questions surrounding the purpose of human existence. Religious-education teachers must understand that authentic discussion concerning religion and God is not simply an academic examination of the fundamentals of individual faith traditions; it is something more.

Ironically, even though faith is the means by which we express religion, localized faith language is maybe the greatest barrier to authentic dialogue concerning religion and God. Many individuals find it impossible to get beyond the specific, yet limited, language of a particular faith tradition. However, if true dialogue about religion and God is going to exist, we need to forfeit our most precious vocabulary, namely the means by which we express ourselves through scripture, rituals, and rites. It is no simple task to get beyond the inherent biases that are rooted in specific faith traditions. Indeed, it is when people find themselves threatened or feeling vulnerable that they are most likely to revert to the

comfortable language of their faith. If any authentic dialogue is going to occur between individuals, this limiting language must be closely watched.

Jürgen Habermas (1929– )

Habermas (2003) contributed to the conversation in important ways when he claimed that authentic dialogue could occur only once individuals have distanced themselves from the inherent biases associated with institutions and hierarchies. Following Habermas' approach, it is necessary to give students the freedom to speak about religion in ways that are not necessarily bound to their language of faith. For traditional Catholic schools, this is a frightening proposition. Catholic schools have customarily focused on transmitting to students a specifically Catholic worldview and vocabulary through which different, even competing, perspectives were to be understood. While this is important for faith development, it is most unhelpful when one individual speaks to another about the higher and more unifying experiences of religion. If students are not given the freedom to speak about religion and God in ways that transcend their faith traditions, they are forced to carry on a superficial and inauthentic dialogue. Students need to be free to wrestle with their image and experience of the transcendent in ways that are meaningful, even if their expressions may seem contrary to a specific set of a tradition's beliefs.

Once students have wrestled with and dialogued about their perspectives on religion and God, they will most certainly reach the conclusion that no vocabulary adequately or comprehensively expresses these realities. In fact, the depth and width of an individual's personal experiences and desires far transcend any human vocabulary. Once students have realized that their religious faith traditions are simply a means of

articulating a more transcendent reality, they become less focused on their particular faith as the pinnacle of religious expression. Faith is important and, in the context of this study, Catholic schools must recognize that ritual and tradition are a necessary means of relating to God. However, doctrine and tradition must never be made into idols themselves.

Human beings are inherently religious; we long to know the good, desire to live lives of meaning, and strive for a better future. Allowing students the opportunity to use school as a forum in which to dialogue about these higher truths means that we allow students to express their views about how religion and God are active in their lives. Catholic schools should not let faith-based language get in the way of a student's authentic experience of religion.

#### Paulo Freire (1921–1997)

The educational philosopher Paulo Freire (1970) contributes two pivotal insights on the ways that students can achieve authentic dialogue about religion. Building upon the premise that the ideal relationship between a teacher and a student has more to do with mutuality than hierarchy, Freire claims that teachers must be “partners of students in their relationships with them.” In the context of this relationship of mutuality, Freire argues that teachers need to be open to learning from their students. Freire asserts that this relationship will lead a teacher to construct a style of classroom instruction that is based on a problem-posing of ideas and situations. By taking an active, dialectical approach to the process of learning, teachers become the primary catalysts in a procedure of asking questions and creating dilemmas that leads to both teacher and student learning.

Freire's assertion that a teacher should be an active participant in a student's learning dramatically altered the dominant educational model of his day (1976). His

theory was a response to experiences of a dismal educational system that equated the process of *teaching* to that of *banking*, in which teachers simply deposit knowledge into the students as one would deposit money into a bank. Proponents of this method understand the teacher to be the sage who possesses all the knowledge and the students to be receptacles whose primary function is to passively receive and accumulate knowledge. While this form of instruction may be the most expedient means for teachers to instruct their students in practical matters, Freire maintained that this model does not allow for the solving of new problems. If all a teacher does is dispense knowledge, there is little room for questions and dialogue concerning the subject material. Therefore, students receive little return by way of “interest” on the deposits of knowledge that the teacher has made.

Freire claims that teachers need to approach education as active participants in the process of learning, recognizing that they too can gain new insights and information from the students. Teachers, he claims, must take a more interactive role in the way that students accumulate and process information. By allowing students the opportunity to engage the information that they have encountered in dialectical ways, Freire claims that greater insights, new ideas, and alternative truths will emerge.

Problem-posing is the primary method by which teachers can facilitate this relationship. Freire claims that one of the most crucial steps in teaching is for a teacher to take the dominant narrative or truth and create questions or intellectual conflicts about the topic. With regard to the previous philosophic foundations, it is the role of the teacher to create a dialectic by which students can come to more authentic understandings of the subject. By understanding the teaching role as primarily one of problem-posing, the

teacher ceases to deposit knowledge into empty receptacles and becomes the primary facilitator of student-initiated learning. This dialectical and dialogical nature of Freire's educational theory can easily serve as model upon which to create new modes of religious education in Catholic high schools.

To transpose Freire's philosophy to the specific task of teaching of religion in schools, teachers must adapt in two fundamental ways. In the traditional Roman Catholic religious education model, teaching *about* religion and God was typically approached from a hierarchical *banking* perspective. This way of educating students failed to allow an authentic exploration of individual experiences concerning their relationship with a transcendent reality. Beliefs and rituals have customarily been taught from a dominant perspective that presumes students have virtually nothing to add to a conversation concerning religious expression. Teachers were considered the experts and opinions and ideas proposed by students were given little credence. Freire would maintain that teachers should no longer see themselves as the primary and select depositors of this sacred religious knowledge and traditions. In a dialogue concerning the nature of religion and God, both the teacher and the student can learn from each other. Indeed, it is the role of teachers to facilitate authentic discussion surrounding the sacred and not consider themselves to be the primary possessors of an absolute truth.

The transformative power of the teacher as a collaborating individual in the process of learning may be the greatest contribution that Freire has made to the discussion concerning authentic religious dialogue. If teachers are able to ask relevant and problematic questions concerning the students' relationship to either God or religion, it will create a dialogue in which students begin to authentically articulate their

understandings concerning the transcendent. In Freire's model of education, teachers are only fulfilling their role as educators if they are creating situations where students can discuss, make assertions, revise, and change their understandings based on interactive dialogue and discussion. If students are not given the opportunity to grapple with their relationships to God as manifested through their religious expressions, a teacher of religion is failure. The most authentic understandings of the transcendent are those that arise from a great struggle and dialogue with both peers and the teacher.

### *Educational Responses*

Recent educational discourse has revealed a diversity of perspectives about the relationship that should exist between religion and education. The premise of this paper is that students need to speak about their experiences of religion and God in ways that allow for an exploration and exchange of personal opinions, beliefs, apprehensions, and perceptions in safe, authentic, and meaningful ways. It presupposes that students' expressions of their faith traditions can be different from, yet as valid as, other points of view that have different ends, insights, and aspirations. The question we must ask is how we can speak about religion and the diversity of faith perspectives in terms of equality without going so far as to identify all religions and religious expression as being the same.

### Public Responses

The Canadian system of education developed predominately along sectarian lines, insofar as Catholic students traditionally attended Catholic schools and Protestant students traditionally attended public schools.<sup>4</sup> Despite a generally accepted understanding that public schools were non-sectarian in nature, they remained largely

composed of Anglo-Saxon students well into the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> In the subsequent decades, the arrival of religious groups such as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs made it no longer possible to consider public schools as predominately Protestant or even Christian in character (Ghosh, 1995, p. 119). The entire spectrum of public education changed dramatically in the 1980s when immigration demographics saw a major increase in the non-Christian and nonreligious student enrolment in public schools all across Canada.<sup>6</sup>

As a response, public schools began to see “the spread of a humanistic philosophy rooted in science as a substitute for religion and the emergence of agnosticism and atheism as acceptable public stances ...” (Stamp, 1982, p. 223). To this end, the religious-education programs in public schools began to approach religious expression either from a point of view that equated religiosity with universal humanism or from a perspective that regarded religiosity as useful only for particular groups. Either way, the teaching of religion in public schools was often approached from a detached, analytical perspective.<sup>7</sup> As a result, students in public schools were not given the forum to explore each other’s religious traditions in ways that were non-judgemental, free from questions concerning their validity, and open to their lived reality.

In the late 1970s the Board of Education for the City of Toronto adopted a religious-education program in its public schools that allowed instructors to teach their students about a multitude of religious philosophies and traditions. Every morning, students were invited to reflect upon a reading that highlighted a salient aspect of a particular faith tradition. The readings ranged from those that spoke about a God to those that were rooted in the basics of human virtue and morality. The study suggested that students were willing to learn the various ways in which religious groups express

themselves. Likewise, it was claimed that the program was a means by which students and faculty could “cooperatively assemble, and sanction for school use, materials expressive of humankind’s most fundamental beliefs and values” (Weeren, 1986, p. 57).

While the program was a good way to start the dialogue, it did not go deeply enough into allowing for dialogue surrounding students’ personal understanding of God as learned in their faith traditions. It seems that what was lacking in the religious-education program was an opportunity for students to dialogue with each other in ways that gave them a meaningful insight into their peers’ experiences of religion. While reflection on the scriptures of other traditions may help to build the foundations of religious tolerance, such an activity lacks any real ‘faith sharing’ from which one individual can grow to fully and intimately understand the religious tradition of another.

Students who participated in this program passively received information concerning different religious traditions without receiving a context that linked this knowledge to the living experience of religion in their daily experiences. At the end of the day, the students—whether they were Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu—still lacked fundamental insights into how either they or others could understand God and their relationship to God in the world. Scriptures can only tell us so much about others, and it seems that dialogue on real religious experiences is much more profound and lasting. When we do not create a forum for religious dialogue, we do not allow our students any real opportunity to understand other perspectives.

### Religious Responses

Despite the public schools’ response that saw secularism and atheism as a legitimate and growing response to religiosity, John Coleman (1990) proposed that

Western culture is not as secular as it may first appear. He argues that the concept of secularism only “represents a minute and by no means growing fraction of modern populations in Europe and North America or the third world (circa 1%–3% of the total population), an isolated elite” (19). Even though the obvious trend in society is a move away from organized mainstream religious traditions, less than 3% of the population identifies itself as secular or without a religion.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, most students in our schools, both public and Catholic, despite the fact that they may not claim to belong to any particular religion, still consider themselves religious.

Coleman expands his study on religiosity and secularism to include an exploration of the relationship between secularism and religious practice. He clearly explains that a delicate affiliation must exist between a religious culture and the secular world. He claims that too great a tension between the religious institution and the secular world will result in the creation of an unhealthy conservatism. If there is too little tension between the religious institution and the secular world, individuals begin to question the relevance of religiosity in their lives. If the religious institution does not offer an alternative approach to life, then affiliating oneself with such an institution will seem meaningless. The relationship between the secular and the religious is a delicate balance that must be open enough for ideological flexibility yet narrow enough to offer an alternative to the mundane.

With regard to fostering dialogue between students, Coleman’s thesis is important, insofar as it affirms that religious-education programs must be flexible enough not to alienate themselves from the broad world with a claim that they hold the only means by which the transcendent can be encountered. Likewise, they must not be so

liberal that there is no difference between being a religious person and being a secular humanist. Religion must be understood as offering something more to life than what can be achieved by simply living with moral or ethical integrity. However, it must struggle to do this while still maintaining a relevancy and relationship to ordinary human experiences.

Coleman has laid an important foundation when he suggests that only a small percentage of the population considers itself secular or non-religious. Building upon Coleman's suggestion that religiosity is intrinsic to all human experience, Kevin Donlon (1991) suggests that any study on religious expression must wrestle with questions concerning how religion is to be defined. In his opinion, it is nearly impossible to fully understand the true meaning of religiosity when it is observed in an academic forum. He claims that the movement away from organized religious expression is a natural response of young people who have become critical and cynical of large institutional structures. However, despite the fact that they claim no affiliation with religious institutions on a communal level, they still typically consider themselves religious on an individual level.

Ironically, Donlon has suggested that while isolation from the community may appear, on the surface, to be a good thing for many youth, it ultimately leads to another form of repression. Indeed, "The individual person in splendid isolation, dependent on nobody, loyal to nothing, standing for herself or himself alone may appear to be a picture of freedom. It is not" (45). The isolation that youth feel when they separate themselves from the community in an attempt to seek out a path of individualism ultimately results in a lack of meaning and direction. They are caught between an institution that they reject out of a feeling of helplessness and a deep desire that compels them to seek something

that gives their life meaning. The youth have found that throwing away the social frameworks that have traditionally created religious communities ultimately leaves them with no sense of direction.

Religious-education programs in schools need to foster a discussion surrounding the disillusionment that students seem to have for established religious traditions. In recent years, many major Christian denominations have experienced a decline in youth attendance.<sup>9</sup> Today, perhaps, it is more necessary than ever that students have a forum where they can explore their concerns over belonging to such religious institutions, as well as a place to express their difficulties in separating themselves from religion altogether.<sup>10</sup> The youth are seeking what it means to be spiritual and how to foster community, yet they have no forum in which they can act upon their desires.

#### Catholic Responses

From a specifically Canadian perspective, the major shift in religious demographics during the 1980s saw an increase in both non-Catholic and non-Christian enrolment in Catholic schools across nearly every province in the country. As a response to these changes, many Catholic schools introduced values-education programs that were designed to be more inclusive and respectful to non-Catholic, non-Christian students.<sup>11</sup> These programs attempted to move away from the traditional discourse on Catholic teachings and rituals toward deeper and more inclusive reflections on morality and human virtue. Like the programs offered in public schools, these values programs sought to highlight the similarities that unite all individuals in a humanistic way instead of approaching moral development from one specific faith perspective. However, in the process of seeking greater inclusiveness between Catholics and the recent influx of non-

Catholic, non-Christian students, these schools may have thrown out the baby with the bath water. Instead of developing programs that allowed for mutual exploration of each other's experiences of religion and God, the values programs focused more on moral development.

Indeed, Catholic authors have wrestled with questions surrounding the relationship that should exist between dialogue on religious diversity and Church teachings. One side of the debate clearly recognizes that there are many perspectives on approaching the understanding of religion and God. However, they are often careful to stress that all debate in Catholic schools must exist within the established confines of the teachings of the *Catholic Church* as proclaimed by the *magisterium*. The other side of the debate suggests that Catholic doctrine can and should be questioned on the basis of both individual and community experience. Many of these individuals often find themselves at odds with the official teachings of the Catholic Church and its hierarchy. In supporting the supremacy of conscience, these advocates often assert that an individual has the right to determine an expression of religiosity that is different from what is found in official Church teaching. Depending on the administration and political climate, questions about the amount of freedom that students should have to form their own opinions on religious expression have sparked many fierce debates.

Walter Principe (1987) raised interesting questions concerning changes in Church teachings that were once considered untouchable. He clearly analyzes the ways in which dogmatic beliefs within *the Church* have often progressively developed despite the pronouncements that they were fundamental and unchangeable tenets of the Church. He specifically focuses on doctrines such as "salvation only within the Church" as well as

questions concerning the limitations of abortion as indicators of how the Church has changed with new understandings of revelation. The Church has moved forward so radically at times that some individuals say that it has changed beyond recognition.

Principe's article opens the door to questions surrounding what can and cannot be said about Church teaching in Catholic schools. He suggests that he has come to deeply recognize how "Vatican theology is generated and controlled by a network of like-minded, mainly Roman or agreeable European theologians, who often have little experience of the world or even of the secular intellectual communities in their own countries, and who are generally unwilling to challenge opinions received in curial circles" (73). Perhaps Principe would claim that anything is up for debate, insofar as it is based on the personal and authentic experience of God. Speaking from the historical perspective, Principe recognizes that there truly is nothing sacred about Church teaching, especially in light of continuing revelation.

Alternatively, James Heft (1989) has suggested that there are many ways to approach God, but he rejects the belief that open debate is necessarily helpful to the education of students in Catholic schools. He asserts, "Theological pluralism may be acceptable as long as it represents different ways of approaching and expressing appropriately the gospel message. It is unacceptable when it obscures, distorts, or dilutes the gospel message" (36). Indeed, there are clear limits to the amount of dissent that is appropriate within Catholic schools, and it is the job of the educator to maintain an appropriate balance between freedom to dialogue and respect for the official teachings of the church. Students cannot be given absolute freedom to question and comment on the

Church's teachings, especially when they are unaware of the specifics concerning the official perspective.

According to Heft, teachers are among the primary transmitters of the Catholic faith to their students and must take their positions responsibly. Educators must be willing to understand the official teachings of the Church and transmit them in a mature and reflective way. The Church entrusts the Catholic educator with the mission to pass on the Church's message of salvation in ways that give their students opportunities to appropriate the faith in meaningful ways. Therefore, it is the moral task of every educator to explain the importance of responsible dissent, but also to make clear that there are limitations. As Avery Dulles suggested when asked about whether students should be taught to think critically about Church teaching, "Surely they should, for without critical reflection there can be no assured conviction. But if criticism is not captious, it must itself be grounded in serious convictions, and therefore some kind of faith" (39).

The problem regarding how much questioning and debate about religious matters should be allowed in Catholic schools frequently presupposes that the majority of students in the school are Catholic. Changing demographics continue to show that there is an ever-increasing number of *non-Catholic* and *non-Christian* students in Catholic schools. This large influx has been a cause of concern for Catholic schools and school boards across Canada who continue to struggle with questions regarding how much of a relationship should exist between a diversity of religious perspectives and the need for a single and unified faith identity. James Mulligan (1999, p. 182) quotes an Ontario school chaplain as saying, "It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to maintain, let alone deepen, the Catholic character of the school with ... a large [32%] non-Catholic

population.” It is clear that the traditional model of what it means to be a Catholic school is changing along with the increase of students from different religious backgrounds. Lacking prior experience, educators, administrators, and stakeholders are trying to respond adequately to questions concerning the best ways to initiate non-Catholic, non-Christian students into both the academic and spiritual culture of the school.

A report put forth by the Ontario School Trustees Association (2000, p. 17) claims that the increase in non-Catholic, non-Christian students in Ontario’s Catholic schools could have a negative influence on the Catholic ethos of the school. Aside from having to contend with the more mundane concerns that affect the daily operation of Catholic schools, the Association stresses that “many are worried about the internal factors that could threaten our existence. ... Many wondered if the increasing number of non-Catholic students who are present in our schools would change the tone of the schools.” Without a doubt, the character of any school will change depending on the type and number of students admitted into the classrooms, but the inclusion of students from faith traditions outside Catholicism does not necessarily need to have negative consequences.

What schools must begin wrestling with is how non-Catholic and non-Christian students can be included in classroom activities, including the religious-education programs and faith formation, in a way that respects religious differences but still expects full and genuine participation. The question is not so much how to make non-Catholic, non-Christian students more like Catholic students as far as faith development is concerned. Rather, the question seems to be how religious-education programs and faith formation in Catholic schools can be modified so that students are able to obtain an

experience of God, opportunities to dialogue with others, and an ability to grow as religious persons regardless of whether they are Catholic. We can seek to project a sense of Catholic unity in our schools by excluding all non-Catholic students, but even this does not guarantee that the student population will be internally religious. Personal observation leads me to believe that what would be more helpful for Catholic schools is to ensure that the religious-education programs and faith formation are able to foster religious growth and a reflective maturity for faith development whether the student professes to be a Catholic, a Hindu, a Jew, or an adherent of any other religious tradition.

#### Jesuit Responses

The *Society of Jesus* administers high schools around the globe. Since the founding of the order and the opening of its first school in Messina, Sicily in 1548, *Jesuits* have endeavoured to bring education and religious development into a harmonious unity. There are some 1,600 Jesuit educational institutions around the world, with Canada being home to three high schools and the United States of America to 46. A considerable amount of dialogue has occurred since the early 1970s concerning the nature of what a Jesuit high school should look like. As to the characteristics found in any Jesuit high school, no document speaks more to the subject than “What Makes a Jesuit High School Jesuit?” (The Jesuit Conference, 2000).

The document, itself a collaborative work between Jesuit provinces in the United States, was based on work developed by Jesuit schools in the country as identified through the Jesuit Secondary Education Association, which is the primary membership organisation serving the Jesuit high schools in Puerto Rico, the United States, and Canada. It sought to identify the means by which Jesuit schools could more easily foster a

sense of unity in the practices that exist in all the high schools, regardless of location or student population. In its final form, the document focused on principles that North American Jesuits identified as integral and necessary aspects of the Jesuit high-school apostolate. The focus on the spiritual dimension of Jesuit education is of the utmost importance in understanding the relationship between religion and education, as it is meant to exist in Jesuit schools and could exist in other Catholic and non-Catholic schools.

Perhaps no statement is more important in giving voice to the Jesuit vision of education than the following: Jesuit schools must “conscientise their students on the value of interreligious collaboration and instill in them a basic understanding of and respect for the faith vision of the members of the diverse local religious communities, while deepening their own response to God” (Society of Jesus, 1995, p. 75). Ultimately, Jesuit schools must allow students to experience opportunities that both provide for dialogue with other faith traditions and stress the importance of responding to God in authentic and meaningful ways according to a student’s particular faith tradition. Building upon this foundational principle, which itself was adopted from General Council 32 of the Society of Jesus, the document makes three additional practical applications.

- Jesuit high schools should foster the development of students as adult members of their faith communities.
- School personnel should fulfil their responsibilities in ways that reflect agreement with the essential purposes of the institution and cooperation with their fellow workers.

- A Jesuit high-school community should reflect that ecumenical respect for all men and women of good will that was expressed by the Second Vatican Council.

In a very real way, Jesuit education must seek to make individuals both tolerant of diverse faith perspectives while insisting that all students become religious individuals according to their own traditions. Jesuit education, as embodied in the North American context, has deemed religiosity an important and necessary characteristic of what it means to be a Jesuit student. The work put forth by the Jesuit Secondary Educational Association in the United States brings a new dimension to the way in which dialogue about religion and God is carried out in Jesuit schools. It brings about an understanding of religious diversity that allows for diversity yet stresses individual faithfulness. Such a dialogue is important in reaching alternative means by which schools can foster authentic conversations and interactions between students of diverse faith traditions in multifaith environments.

The Winnipeg Free Press documented how a Jesuit high school in Canada has fostered an educational philosophy that seeks to build religious tolerance between diverse religious traditions (Longhurst, 2004). The article, “Muslim student proud of Catholic high school,” highlighted the ways in which the Jesuit school sought to deepen the faith journey of all students. According to the article, Mehdi Sesidgar, who emigrated from Iran with his parents in 1986, was initially hesitant to go to the school out of fears that the school would force him to accept Christianity and abandon his Islamic roots.

However, his experiences at the high school proved to be completely different. Sesidgar claims that the teachers always sought to address matters that were relevant to his religious perspectives, and that they always encouraged him to explore Islam more

deeply. The president of the school is quoted as saying, “Whatever their tradition is, we expect them to be a better Jew, Hindu, Christian or Muslim when they graduate.” The Jesuit ideal of fostering religious tolerance and diversity is evidently a major part of the school’s approach to faith formation. Presumably, all students—regardless of their faith—are challenged to become more deeply engaged in their own religious traditions, even though the school is Jesuit and Catholic in nature.

### *Current Discourse*

#### Catholic Education in the New Millennium

Gerald Grace (2002) outlined current trends, as he identified them, in Catholic education in the United Kingdom. Arguing against four common misconceptions about the nature of Catholic education, Grace asserts that Catholic education is generally accessible to all, open to diverse faith traditions, relevant, and an important mainstream social force. His study is “a limited attempt to counter some of these misconceptions, dated images, and secular marginalisations related to Catholic schooling...” (2002, p. xiii). Much of Grace’s work was committed to establishing the criteria by which one can evaluate what it means to be a Catholic school and how successful these schools are in fulfilling that mandate. The dialogue begun by Grace has inspired a vast number of similar works in the domain of Catholic education around the world.

A study by Stapleton et al. (2004) reviewed 13 Catholic schools in Manitoba using the criteria put forth by Grace. The study sought to “provide a greater understanding of the challenges facing Manitoba’s Catholic Schools and the responses of the schools to the identified challenges.” In particular, it undertook the task of identifying the specific problems associated with the operation of a Catholic school in the province.

Although the religious-education programs were examined as one of many areas, neither the religious-education program nor student religiosity was the primary focus.

The report identified a number of major challenges and the subsequent responses facing Catholic schools in Manitoba. The comprehensiveness of the report was generally well-received by the Catholic community, but certain omissions were noted (J. Cranston, director of Catholic education, personal communication, June 2004). To cite one example, the report lacked information on the challenges surrounding the diversity of faith traditions found in Manitoba's Catholic schools. Even though 80% of students in these schools are Catholic, one would presume that outreach to the 20% non-Catholic population would be listed as a contemporary challenge. However, none of the schools identified the presence of non-Catholics or even non-Christians as a challenge to their mission as a Catholic school. Although many schools spoke quite positively about the fact that their schools were "diverse" and "open to other faith traditions," no schools spoke about what they were doing specifically for these groups.

From the report, it would seem that religious diversity, especially concerning the dialogue that must exist between Catholics and non-Catholics, is of little concern for the schools' administrators. One could, perhaps, argue that non-Catholics receive so little attention as a distinct religious group simply because most of the non-Catholics are actually members of different Christian denominations. Therefore, those students still have a common historical bond and share many beliefs with the Catholic students. However, despite the religious homogeneity found in Manitoba, it is clear that in other parts of Canada Catholic schools have had to deal with a larger increase in both non-Catholic and non-Christian students.

Although the last Canadian census showed that more than seven out of every ten individuals still identified themselves as Roman Catholic or Protestant, the increase in non-Christian religions in Canada has grown substantially. The religious demographics in British Columbia, for example, continue to change rapidly:

There was substantial growth among Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs. The number of Muslims in British Columbia more than doubled to just over 56,200... The census also counted 85,500 Buddhists... 31,500 Hindus... and more than 135,300 Sikhs. (Statistics Canada, 2001)

The question that must be answered is how Catholic schools in Canada are going to respond specifically to this diversity in faith, especially in light of the increase of non-Christian students. Because of this major shift in faith traditions, Catholic schools need to begin the process of creating meaningful faith-based programs that foster dialogue about the nature of religion and God, leading to greater religious solidarity and tolerance between individuals of diverse faiths. No longer can Catholic schools presume that religious-education programs will be understood and appreciated by all their students if approached strictly from a Catholic perspective.

Catholic education that encompasses large non-Catholic student populations is not a new phenomenon in the global perspective. In fact, Catholic schools exist and continue to be opened in largely non-Catholic areas around the world. Without question, wherever the Catholic faith is to be found, Catholic schools exist—often with Catholic students being the minority. Catholic schools in countries that are predominately Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu have had to face the task of developing religious-education programs in their multifaith environments. They have had to establish standards by which they can allow

students to be educated in a Catholic environment while respecting the diversity of their non-Catholic, non-Christian students. It is presumed that these schools offer a unique perspective that can be shared with Catholic schools in Canada that have a diversity of faith perspectives. For many Canadian Catholic schools, it is time to begin exploring models of religious dialogue that exist in schools outside our Canadian context.

### Shared Christian Praxis

The educational theory of Thomas Groome (1999) builds upon the philosophical framework laid out earlier in this section. In providing a methodology for Catholic religious education, his work has been pivotal. Groome seeks to engage students in a dialogue specifically surrounding their faith, and suggests that students need to dialogue and discuss their relationships both to each other and to their God in ways that create, as he calls it, a “shared Christian praxis.”

Groome asserts that such dialogue needs to be personal, insofar as personal dialogue “invites people to both consciously and intentionally engage their dynamic structure of conation” and communal, as such dialogue makes for “honest sharing of one’s own story/vision and an empathetic listening to their word and expressions in true conversion” (Groome, 1991, p. 144). The process of interaction based on authentic dialogue and reflection permits students to come to a greater understanding of how religion and God are manifested in their lives. Groome defined this interaction and based his methodology on four steps of involvement: focusing, naming, making available the common Christian story, and integrating and responding.

In his discussion of dialogue, Groome says that when people come together to “discern and choose how to respond in faith, they are in dialogue with God as well as

with themselves and with one another; shared Christian praxis is a ‘prayerful’ process” (1991, p. 144). When persons gather to speak about their experiences of God in light of the tradition of the community, a dialogic is achieved. A dialogic is a means by which individuals can speak about and revise their understandings and interpretations of the transcendent acting in their lives. Without the opportunity to dialogue, individuals are unable to enter into the process of reflecting on their experiences within the context of the common, faith-based story. Therefore, no real personal or communal change is achieved without this necessary forum of expression. Groome asserts that shared praxis, or the process of dialogue in a communal setting, “asks trust of participants, that all are intent on seeking ‘their truth’ and that the Truth is seeking them” (1991, p. 145).

In its most fundamental form, the first step in Groome’s methodology for a shared Christian praxis involves focusing students on the topic at hand. In current educational terminology, it is the *activating strategy* that grabs the students’ attention and draws them into the process of learning. For example, a class discussion on medieval history may begin with the teacher entering the class dressed as a knight. Ideally, the focusing activity will engage the students as they begin to anticipate the themes that will be associated with the lesson. Students who are not immediately engaged in the topic at hand are most likely not going to enter into a classroom discussion. The process of focusing is a necessary means by which the praxis becomes meaningful for each student.

The second step in Groome’s method involves a personal reflection on one or more experiences that directly relate to the topic. For example, the subject of medieval history may elicit a number of different student responses according to individual experiences and understandings. Each individual approaches a topic from a diverse

perspective with different understandings based on prior experience and reasoning. For example, some students may know very little about the medieval era aside from their experiences with the Robin Hood and King Arthur fables. In contrast, other students may know a great deal about medieval history and culture. Groome asserts that individuals must be allowed to approach the conversation in a safe way that empowers them to express freely what they understand to be true about the specific topic. At this stage, there are no right or wrong answers and students are encouraged to listen to the various opinions of others on the same topic.

The third step of his methodology involves making available the common story, whether faith-based or not. It asks and answers questions on the topic from an authoritative perspective as understood by the larger community. Without allowing the community to speak as an authority, the results of individual dialogue are quickly lost since there is no established narrative to guide future insight. This step is crucial to the process insofar as the community, its vision, and its practice must carefully understood before individuals draw future conclusions.

As far as our example is concerned, the common story and vision might include a discussion on the importance of medieval military tactics or struggles associated with the feudal system. Whatever the topic, the common narrative of the larger community must be articulated as authentically as possible. In this stage of Groome's methodology, individuals must weigh their own perceptions against those of the established narrative, which may contradict their particular understandings. For example, a teacher may assert that life for a knight during the 1540s was very difficult both physically and emotionally.

This new information may contradict a preconceived idea that knightly life was idealistic and adventure-filled.

Finally, the process of integrating and responding, the last stages of Groome's methodology, allow students to appropriate new understandings in light of the articulations of others and in consideration of the communal history and vision. For example, a student who originally knew very little about medieval knights may now have a fresh interest in the subject because of a new perception that knights were individuals who lived with danger and intrigue. Whatever the case, students need the opportunity to appropriate the experiences of engaging the communal story and vision in light of their own previous understandings. This process of integration allows students to incorporate and use what they have learned for future interactions, which will lead—once again—to a continuing revision and transformation of personal attitudes and beliefs.

With respect to Catholic schools with diverse faith traditions, it would seem that Groome would allow for a shared communal story and vision that present the spiritual wisdom of all the traditions from which students can learn and grow. This must be contrasted with a program that simply makes available a shared history and vision that students simply need to learn without personal reflection. In other words, Muslim students in a Catholic school must be given the opportunity to explore a vision of the Catholic faith and draw upon truths that seem appropriate for their own lives. That said, Catholic students must also be free to hear the truths associated with the Muslim tradition and to incorporate those truths in their own lives as they see fit. Groome's methodology asserts that discourse should not be limited to one specific faith tradition if there is more than one tradition participating in the dialogue. The process of exploration of all faith

traditions within this context allows for the group's story and vision to be articulated in ways that transcend a single faith tradition.

In the process of critical and creative appropriation of the experiences, students should be encouraged to wrestle with beliefs they may hold that are in opposition to the collective vision. This freedom allows students to enter into the process of growing as spiritual individuals who are not bound to a single understanding of truth. While Groome's methodology has been used within Catholic schools as a means of deepening students' understanding of the Catholic tradition, his methodology can also be used in schools where a diversity of faith expressions exist. Theoretically, his approach should allow all students to delve deeper into the understanding of what it means to be religious, how religious expression continues to evolve, and how being faithful does not find its limitations within one singular faith tradition.

CHAPTER III  
METHODOLOGY  
Research Timeline

The research for this project was completed between November 2004 and March 2005. Four schools were observed and each observation period lasted from seven to twelve days with the observation period being determined primarily by the speed and ease with which data collection occurred. The research was directed toward an investigation of the extent to which the religious-education programs, faith formation, and spiritual ethos in the four Catholic schools cultivate dialogue about and foster experiences of religion and God in light of the diversity of faith traditions present in the student population.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Because religious-education programs and faith formation were the primary focus of this study, names and identities are not revealed in the presentation of the data. It was presumed that more authentic responses would be received if every effort was made to ensure that neither the school nor the participants were identifiable. Pseudonyms are used for all four schools, and geographical locations of the schools are not revealed, since this information could lead to identification. Although extreme care has been taken to ensure that all information is presented in a confidential manner, it is recognized that an informed reader with a personal association to one of the schools might still be able to determine a school's identity.

### Institutional Styles

In considering the research question, schools with varying ratios of Catholic to non-Catholic, non-Christian student populations were regarded as ideal locations for observation. Specifically, two types of educational institutions were identified as appropriate—schools where Catholic students formed the majority within a religiously diverse student population and schools where the student population was largely non-Catholic, and even non-Christian.

Having concluded five months of research, it is clear that an exploration of Catholic schools with large percentages of Catholic students was valuable insofar as these schools provided insight into the relevance of the religious-education programs and faith formation for the small percentage of non-Catholic, non-Christian students. In comparison, an exploration of Catholic schools with large percentages of non-Catholic, non-Christian students was valuable because of the ways that they have developed and implemented unique approaches to religious education and faith formation, intended to appeal to the large percentages of non-Catholic, non-Christian students.

The models of education in Catholic schools with large non-Catholic, non-Christian student populations are of particular interest insofar as these programs and strategies might be applicable to Catholic schools in Canada that currently have a predominantly Catholic student population but are in the process of experiencing major changes in religious demographics.

### Specific Selections

Although a diversity of educational approaches exists within Catholic education, this research concerned itself with Catholic schools run by the Society of Jesus.

Considerations for selecting only Jesuit schools rested on both the ease of access with which information from these schools could be obtained as well as a belief that a single type of school, with structural and procedural consistencies, would allow for a greater ability to highlight the fundamental differences that exist between each school's religious-education programs and faith formation.

After an exploration of different Jesuit schools around the world, one in Canada, one in the United States, and two in India were selected for this study.

St. Michael's High School, the school selected in Canada, was chosen because of its large Catholic student population and its location within a large Catholic community. Campion High School, the school selected in the United States of America, was chosen because of its large Catholic student population as well as its proximate relationship to a large multifaith, multicultural community. Loyola College and St. Isaac Jogues School, the two Jesuit schools in India, were chosen specifically because of their respective Hindu and Buddhist student population and Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim student population.

Given the cross-section of religious and cultural diversity present in the four schools, each school contributed a unique and valuable perspective.

#### Ethical Approval

After submitting a proposal that outlined the specific methodology of this study, the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba granted ethical approval on 25 November 2004 (see Appendix A).

## Research Tools

Three methodological tools were used for the data collection in this study. They included demographic and document inquiry, participant observation, and individual, semistructured interviews. These diverse methods of data collection allowed for the use of triangulation inasmuch as specific pieces of data were assessed in light of their relationship to other findings. Demographic and document inquiry was the only form of data collection that was standard in all four schools, and the two subsequent methods were used to greater or lesser degrees according to the structures found in the school, such as ease of access to participants, the general climate of the school, and the freedom with which data collection could occur.

### *Demographic and Document Inquiry*

Demographic and document inquiry was selected as a means of data collection because of the way that this method could give foundational information about the school. Information in the public domain, such as school mission statements, student and faculty statistics, publicity materials, and handbooks all speak to the Catholic and Jesuit ethos of a school. The specific focus that a particular school places on the religious-education programs was extracted through an inquiry into these demographics and documents. Likewise, it was expected that a comparison between schools with different demographics (see Appendix B), such as diversity of religious traditions, would lead to new insights concerning the successes and limitations of the religious-education programs and faith formation, insofar as they were able to foster dialogue and experiences of religion and God. The results of demographic and document inquiry are

incorporated into the final presentation of findings only as it is helpful in illustrating a point.

### *Participant Observation*

Participant observation is a form of qualitative inquiry that allows an observer to enter directly into a community or group under observation. There are a number of positive attributes connected with participant observation, including the researcher's ability to maintain a direct and sustained examination of everyday events within the community. Participant observation presumes that a researcher will seek to draw conclusions about the experience of a community in light of its professed ideologies and beliefs. In this way, participant observation relies on "participants' perspectives and cultural understandings of the phenomena under study to establish connections between espoused theory and reality..." (Tillman, 2002, p. 6). By exploring the religious-education programs and faith formation as a participant, an observer can determine to what extent the professed school philosophy and published documents concerning the religious-education programs and faith formation are being lived out.

Recent literature on participant observation (Patton, 1996) has identified a multitude of approaches concerning the possible relationship between participant and observer. In light of this literature, which identifies "full participant observation" as being at one end of a spectrum and "onlooker participant observation as an outsider" as being on the other, this study might be considered "partial" as the research was conducted simultaneously as both an insider and as an outsider. Although the research involved a participation in events such as communal prayer and retreats, at no time was the observation considered "full" participation. Even during such gatherings, data obtained

through participation was recorded from the perspective of an external observer. This balanced form of participant observation was a means by which the Catholic and Jesuit nature of the school could be objectively evaluated in light of the presence or absence of religious symbols, customs, and culture. Participant observation was invaluable as it allowed for the comparison of the intangible and qualitative ethos of one school with another.

Participant observation in this study also included informal discourse analysis, because of its ability to provide data through brief, yet meaningful, contacts with members of the school community. Informal discourse analysis was a way to collect data through ordinary conversations in either a group or individual setting. Because this form of discourse analysis had no formal structure, it allowed individuals to speak about the religious-education programs and faith formation in ways that were not bound to a specific set of criteria. Participants were given an overview of the study (see Appendix C) and were asked to complete a consent form (see Appendix D). Field notes were taken as the primary means of recording the data obtained from participant observation, and it was presumed that there was only a minimal risk of identification for individuals who took part in this method of data collection.

#### *Individual, Semistructured Interviews*

Individual, semistructured interviews permitted a greater degree of interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. In addition, this interview format allowed for greater flexibility for interviewees to expand on different subjects and recount different experiences relating to the study. Four interviews were carried out in every school, except St. Michael's High School where only three interviews were completed.

Teachers of religion, chaplains, and administrators were the primary participants for these interviews since it was presumed that they had the most experience with the religious-education programs and faith formation.

Although the interviews were semistructured, questions were based on a modified version of Groome's shared Christian praxis. Groome's methodology was used as the foundation upon which the questions were formulated and the conclusions drawn, because of its focus on creating a forum where authentic dialogue can occur—specifically, dialogue that takes into account both individual perspectives as well as the historical tradition and vision of an institution. Groome's methodology proved to be a beneficial tool in determining in what ways and to what extent the Catholic schools observed in this study were able to foster dialogue about religion and God within the school communities. The interview questions themselves acted only as a guide and not as a definitive means of obtaining data. It was not expected that every interview would touch upon every question, although it was presumed that every interview would touch upon the four general themes of Groome's shared Christian praxis (see Appendix E).

Since direct quotations from the individual, semistructured interviews were used to illustrate dominant themes, participants were required to complete consent forms. The participants were made aware that quotations from the individual, semistructured interviews would be used for illustrative purposes only, and every effort would be taken to ensure that neither their identity nor the identity of the school would be made known. Nevertheless, it was presumed that even if an individual from this study were identified, the risks to the individual would be minimal to nonexistent.

Participants were contacted in advance of my visit to the school by e-mail or telephone, with a follow-up contact when necessary. They were informed of the purpose and procedures (see Appendix F), e-mailed a copy of the consent form, and asked to complete the form as an indication of their willingness to participate (see Appendix G). Once the consent form was received, each individual was sent a list of interview topics and focus questions via e-mail or fax and an interview time was established.

In situations where a potential participant was identified only while the school was being observed, he or she was given an oral explanation of the study and was asked to read and sign a consent form at that time.

Interviews were done in person, each interview was recorded, and interview notes were made from the recording. Before synthesis of the data, interviewees who requested a copy of the interview notes were sent copies by secure e-mail in order that they could review what they had said.

#### Obtaining Permission in the Schools

Permission to do research in the schools was obtained from the chief administrator of each school, who has the authority to grant such permission to external researchers. They were informed of the specific nature of the study as well as the three methods of data collection that would be used (see Appendix H), and they were then asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix I). They were not informed of the names of participants in this study, but it was never presumed that the revelation of this information would cause any internal or external difficulties in relation to confidentiality or job security. Likewise, the chief administrator of the school was not informed of the number of interviews that took place, making it more difficult to determine individual

participants based on quotations or any other specific information revealed after the publishing of this document.

### *Data Analysis*

The data obtained from the demographic and document inquiry were classified by content categories. It was presumed that the literature from the schools would have thematic consistencies, insofar as each one would have printed material on its mission statement, religious-education programs, faith formation, and identity as a Jesuit school. The specific content categories were developed based on data from these documents, and this categorization led to greater clarity of both the similarities and the differences in the printed material.

Following the placement of printed material into content categories, similarities were sought between these data and the specific demographic character of the school. In particular, the religious and cultural identities of both the faculty and the student population were assessed, insofar as these demographics had a direct relationship to the professed identity of the school, as identified through the content analysis of the published documents.

The coding of data obtained from participant observation was initially based on a cross-section of thematic events. For example, an examination of general categories such as prayer, communal gatherings, retreat programs, and Catholic ethos led to a better articulation of how the religious-education programs and faith formation in each school is manifested in its daily operation. Once the data were coded into larger thematic categories, emergent subcategories were extracted as they become apparent through an evaluation of the data. It was shown that many of the larger thematic categories, such as

prayer, could be broken down into smaller subcategories such as individual prayer, classroom prayer, and alternative forms of prayer. By allowing specific themes to emerge in this manner, the similarities and differences between each school's religious-education programs and faith formation were more easily articulated.

The individual, semistructured interviews were initially interpreted based on categories adapted from Groome's methodology. The data were sorted into his four categories of *focusing the dialogue*, *naming*, *making available the common story and vision*, and finally, *interpreting and responding*. Once each interview had been investigated in light of these specific topics, a general thematic comparison between all the semistructured interviews led to the emergence of larger predominant thematic consistencies. For example, a similar approach to the religious-education programs was identified through a comparison of the theme of focusing the dialogue. A contrast between larger general themes, as extracted from the individual, semistructured interviews, allowed for a more clear identification of the relationships between each school.

Finally, the common themes, connections, and correlations, as identified in the participant observation and the individual, semistructured interviews, were interpreted against the findings extracted from the demographics and documents inquiry. It was expected that the religious demographics and professed religious identities of the school, as identified through the published documents, would directly influence the extent to which schools articulate an inclusive communal story and vision as well as how they afford time and space to integrate and respond to diverse religious perspectives.

## CHAPTER IV

## ST. MICHAEL'S HIGH SCHOOL

*Introduction*

A change in governmental policy was the catalyst leading to the establishment of St. Michael's High School. Following decades of government funding for faith-based schools, a referendum led to the closure of all faith-based schools within the province. The original St. Michael's High School, founded in the mid-19th century in a small, eastern Canadian city, was closed in the late 1990s after this shift in policy. The current school, which maintains its original name, was reopened under Jesuit leadership as a fully private school after a year of closure. St. Michael's is an initiative of the larger Catholic community and seeks to maintain the strong tradition of Catholic education that previously existed within it. The school is located near well-established Catholic neighbourhoods, near churches, convents, monasteries, and various Catholic outreach programs. There are currently three Jesuit and nine lay staff members in the Grade 8 to Grade 12 co-educational high school, which serves about 110 students.

The principal claims that, as the only Catholic high school in the city, St. Michael's appeals to parents for three reasons. The school's reputation of academic excellence, established over the course of 150 years, is a major contributing factor in parental decisions to send their children to the school. The traditional Catholic character of the school is also an important reason why many Catholic parents choose to send their children to St Michael's High School, though many non-Catholic parents point to the Christian, faith-based nature of the school as being equally important. Finally, nearly all

parents claim that the community atmosphere and the relatively small student population are significant factors that influenced their choice of schools.

From the perspective of the school administration, the ability to foster a Catholic culture within a strong academic context is perhaps the most important reason for its existence. Because of the recent history of the school, which involves a conflict between a lack of confidence in publicly funded, faith-based schools and a change in government policy, the traditional Catholic nature of the institution is explicitly emphasized. In fact, at times it seems as though the school has deliberately pitted itself against the secularism of the outside world by bringing out as many symbols as possible to identify it as Catholic. One teacher suggested that the continued existence of the school can be achieved only through the hard work and intense dedication of the Catholic community. Because of this perceived struggle, both the Catholic faith and the Jesuit tradition of educational excellence are of utmost importance in all aspects of the daily operation of the school.

### *Focusing the Dialogue*

#### Two Different Approaches

Unquestionably, two different approaches are taken to fostering an interest in the religious-education program at St. Michael's High School. For two of the three religion teachers, the religious-education program should seek to intellectually stimulate the students and help them come to grips with the complexities of faith and the mystery of God on a purely academic level. For the third religion teacher, the religious-education program should challenge the students personally, leave them with questions, and force them to evaluate how religion fits into their lives. In conversations with each of the three

religious-education teachers, there was evidence of a clear split in the understanding of what results should be obtained from the classroom instruction offered by members of the religious-education department.

One religion teacher wants the students to be able recall the important events in the history of the Church and identify major figures, while another argues that facts and dates are not as important as personal experiences of God. Although these questions do not seem to have been raised among the religious-education teachers themselves, two competing teaching styles plainly exist. Despite these differences, it is generally acknowledged by members of the department that a teacher who allows for personal reflection, discussion of important topics, and a personal integration of the subject matter is a more popular teacher with the students. The classes of the individual who does take this approach are typically described by students with positive adjectives, whereas the more academic religious-education program of the other two teachers have been described with—at best—an optimistic ambivalence.

“We have a religion teacher who thinks that dialogue should be worth 90% of the students’ marks. Since I’ve arrived, I’m in charge of revamping the program to make it more academic, so I’ve added tests, which the students had to adjust to. I’ve tried to give the students a more academic and intellectually challenging religion program” [Chaplain, religious-education teacher].

“I understand the philosophy of the school to be that God created all things and that all things can be holy. Therefore we shouldn’t dissuade the students from talking and really thinking about things that are important or of concern to them” [Religious-education teacher].

“I am having a guest speaker come to the class today to speak about sacraments. It may ignite a discussion that will throw the rest of my lesson plan out the window, but that’s an OK outcome if they are interested” [Religious-education teacher].

“I think religion class needs to set the students on fire. They need to be able to come to class and really engage the material—to make it a part of who they are” [School president].

### Classroom Content

There is a general recognition by both school staff and students that the religious-education programs at St. Michael’s need to be redeveloped. Many students, including those who would be identified as Catholic, are not as interested in the religious-education programs as they could be. Religion classes are a necessary part of the curriculum for all, but many students say the classes neither excite them nor hold their attention. Informal conversations reveal that many of the classes are too theoretically based and the material seems irrelevant. The predominant feeling is that the academic material presented does not touch the personal concerns and experiences of the students. However, there are instances when students do seem to make connections between the materials offered within the religious-education programs and their lives. According to all three of the religious-education teachers, these connections come most often when they allow for a debate on sensitive topics such as abortion, birth control, or homosexuality.

It seems that the teacher can make all the difference between a good class and a bad one. Regardless of the subject material, the teachers who allow for discussion and debate seem to have the best-appreciated religion classes. Students in classrooms with teachers who foster dialogue and reflection inevitably find the material interesting and

engaging. Teachers who conduct their classes as lectures are often perceived as teaching about material that is not relevant, regardless of the actual content. In the end, as one teacher observed, the issue is not *what* is taught, but *how* it is presented. Even the most applicable and appropriate material will be perceived as outdated and irrelevant if students are not given an opportunity to engage it on a personal level.

However, despite the necessity of allowing students to engage the matters that they consider important, students themselves recognize that their peers who continually interrupt the teacher with their own ideas, especially unsubstantiated ones, are a distraction. According to one teacher, students in his class are frustrated by a particularly vocal student who continually interrupts the lesson to offer personal ideas or refute what has been said. The students describe this individual as being outspoken and suggest that the individual really should listen to what the teacher is trying to say before speaking out. Despite the desire to engage actively the subject material in a debate format, the majority of students recognize that it is unhelpful to speak before they fully understand the perspective of the teacher.

“Students need to be given the basics first before they engage in dialogue, otherwise they’re speaking about something they don’t fully understand—and that’s not helpful at all” [School president].

“I don’t mind if students disagree with me about a Catholic teaching or something else in class, but I expect them to know what they are talking about and make informed comments” [Religious-education teacher].

### Cool to Be Catholic

One of the phrases repeated most often at St. Michael's is that it is "cool to be Catholic." The school has successfully developed a culture that accepts and fosters religious expression without making religiosity an oppressive or coercive force. Students recognize that it is important to be religious and that the religious ethos of the school is something to be embraced. While exploring this notion, it became clear that religious devotion within the Catholic tradition is something that the school administration hopes that students will appreciate and embrace, but it is never enforced. The school does not presume that every individual will be religious, and consequently, it does not look disapprovingly at those who do not practice their faith. However, students who choose to express their devotions in a public way are accepted and appreciated by both the faculty and their peers in ways clearly contrary to what they would experience from students their age outside the school.

"The Catholic ethos of the school is all-permeating, it's everywhere. But it becomes a part of who we are" [Religious-education teacher].

"The biggest form of spiritual development does not take place in the religion class or on retreat, but in the atmosphere of the school" [Chaplain, religious-education teacher].

"Social outreach is one of the ways that we can allow our non-Catholic students to become religious. By serving others, whether they are Catholic or not, they are serving God" [School president].

*Naming*

## A Limited Diversity

When asked about whether the school is able to embrace traditions of other religions as far as communal gatherings are concerned, nobody could recall an instance where religious traditions other than Catholicism figured prominently within the context of school prayer. Presumably, St. Michael's has too limited a religious diversity to cause organizers of the religious gatherings to consider them relevant. In the entire school, there are only seven non-Christian students. Of these students, two are Jewish, two Muslim, one is Hindu, and two are Buddhists. Despite the recognition that no school-facilitated religious event has ever expressly involved prayer from different traditions, two instances in which Judaism played a fundamental role in the nonreligious culture of the school were identified.

## Building Tolerance

During one of the school's drama productions, the Holocaust was the central theme. The school engaged in an exploration of Judaism prior to the debut of the play by inviting in Jewish guest speakers from the community. Likewise, the actors in the play were asked to wear the Star of David on their regular school uniform during the week before opening night. This activity clearly provided an opportunity to foster a sense of increased respect and tolerance for the Jewish people. Though the school does not boast a large Jewish population, it sought to support an honest and sincere exploration of Jewish history, culture, and life through this activity.

Another interesting incident occurred in a religion class when the teacher was speaking about the importance of tradition in Jewish culture as it was identified in the

stage musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Recognizing that this topic resonated positively with the students, a Jewish student was invited to stand up and speak about how tradition is an important part of the celebration of Passover. Despite the Catholic roots of the school, the teacher was clearly willing to take time out of his class to allow for an exploration of non-Catholic and non-Christian faith perspectives.

Having heard about the Jewish student's experience of celebrating Passover, the class was invited to discuss the ways in which they understood the importance of tradition within their own religious contexts. According to the teacher, some students spoke about opening Christmas presents early in the morning on Christmas day, others spoke about not eating meat on Good Friday, and yet others spoke about how their own church communities had a Passover meal in honour of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. The teacher seized this moment to explore another religious tradition by inviting students to read about Judaism more thoroughly in their textbooks as well as by inviting individuals from the local Jewish community to speak to the class.

#### Missed Opportunities

Despite having embraced at least two opportunities to explore other religious traditions, one missed opportunity was identified. The school's morning prayer is a time when prayers from different religious traditions could be used, but prayers from traditions outside Catholicism were seldom read over the intercommunication system. Likewise, the liturgical gatherings always seem to have a distinct Catholic feel to them, despite the recognition that the religious gatherings did not always involve the celebration of the Eucharist. These times could be useful opportunities for an exploration of different faith traditions, at least by incorporating prayers or rituals not specifically Catholic.

### Students Speaking to Each Other

One of the most interesting means through which students are able to dialogue with each other on the topic of religion is with “family groups.” The high school uses these groupings as a way of allowing students in an attached elementary school to have direct contact with students in higher grades. These groups meet every month, and they allow for a sharing of ideas and thoughts across grade levels. The mentoring from students in the senior grades allows for the transmission of faith through student initiated group prayer and dialogue about faith with the students in the lower grades. The ethos of the school, especially its Catholic nature, is quickly passed on to the younger grades through these family groups.

### *Making Available the Common Story and Vision*

#### A Clear Identification

The traditional Catholic identity of the school is abundantly represented within the school. As soon as individuals enter the school, statues, crosses, photographs of the Catholic hierarchy, and paintings of saints confront them. A quick exploration of the school reveals historic photographs of priests and bishops adorning the walls as well as statues of the Virgin Mary standing proudly in every classroom. There is a clear desire to foster a traditional Catholic identity within the school, which is—at least in part—a response to the removal of funding from faith-based schools and the subsequent closure of all Catholic schools within the province. In any case, both students and visitors alike immediately feel the strong outward Catholic tone upon entering the school.

The restoration of the school chapel is an ideal example of the care shown in fostering a traditional Catholic identity. Turned into classrooms toward the end of the

school's earlier existence, the Jesuits made the restoration of the chapel a major priority upon reopening. Over the course of two years, a group of 12 volunteers worked tirelessly to completely restore the chapel to its original grandeur. The stained-glass windows—the originals sold long ago—were replaced, the hardwood floor was refinished, and financial contributions from prominent members within the Catholic community have allowed for a number of additions. It is clear that both staff and parents consider the chapel to be a visible expression of the importance of the Catholic nature of the school. Even before much of the rest of the building has been repaired, the chapel has been completed and stands as a place of tranquillity and beauty.

### The Ring

An interesting exchange that typifies the deep Catholic ethos within the school occurred when a student entered the general office with a shiny new silver ring. One of the faculty members asked to see the ring, and upon examination, proclaimed that the image on the ring was that of Our Lady of Grace, a popular representation of the Virgin Mary. Upon examination of the ring by another staff member, the image was identified as Our Lady of Guadalupe, another popular representation of Mary. A dialogue ensued where both individuals explained why they thought their interpretation was correct. Ultimately, whichever the image was, the exchange showed how deeply entrenched Catholic culture is within the school. The school is so aligned with traditional Catholicism that two faculty members could freely dialogue and debate the nuances between diverse representations of the Blessed Virgin Mary in such casual ways.

### Grace Cannot Be Quantified

Aware that not every external Catholic symbol, statue, or photograph will resonate with everyone, the administration clearly recognizes that these objects are an intrinsic part of what makes the school special. But, how many students can make a direct connection between the sense of community that the school seeks to foster and its deeply Catholic identity is not as clear. Informal discussions with staff and parents suggest that although morning Mass or statues in the classrooms will not resonate with every student, they do resonate with at least a few, and are thus important. One teacher commented about how *grace* is not something that can or should be quantified in a school like St. Michael's. Though only 10 or 12 persons may attend morning Mass, the grace that they obtain will have an exponentially positive effect on others throughout the day. Therefore, mere statistics are not necessarily good evaluators of a school's religious success.

Likewise, the president of the school suggests that because the school takes so many different approaches insofar as Catholic piety is concerned, the multitude of small things quickly add up to one big thing. To remove the small things would be a disaster for the spiritual tone of the school as this larger dynamic rests upon that foundation. Though the statues, photographs, and paintings do not affect all individuals, different devotions resonate with different individuals; therefore, it is important to be aware of how the removal of even one external symbol may affect the larger community. The president claims that the more diverse types of Catholic symbolism that can be displayed within the school, and the more diverse the pious devotions fostered, the more ways people may be influenced by something that is especially important to them as individuals.

“The Catholic identity of the school is very important. Students enjoy saying the Rosary or having Benediction, and I think that it is something that other Jesuit schools should begin to adopt” [School president].

“When other Catholic schools in the city closed, we received all their statues and religious objects. For us, it is a good thing to have, since it reinforces the idea that this school is Catholic” [Chaplain, religious-education teacher].

### Striking the Right Balance

The wider Catholic community perceives that St. Michael’s has done an excellent job in the last five years of creating an atmosphere that is conducive to religious expression, regardless of a student’s individual faith. In terms of dialogue between students of diverse faith traditions within a public and organized forum, there are few supports in place. However, when an opportunity arises for one student to speak about his or her religious tradition in the context of a class, it is most probable that the teacher will allow for an explanation and exploration. Likewise, students feel free enough to question and raise objections concerning Catholic teachings, but both students and teachers recognize that such comments must be informed and that dialogue requires one individual must listen to the perspective of others.

A concern that could be raised about St. Michael’s is the overwhelming number of Catholic objects scattered throughout the school. As far as promoting a Catholic culture is concerned, there is never a moment when one is unaware that the school is Catholic. That said, these traditional representations of Catholic piety, do not seem to affect students’ abilities to remain open-minded about diverse forms of religious devotion, whether from a Catholic, non-Catholic, or non-Christian perspective. Most

students seemed to recognize that individuals approach God from their own perspectives, and that the school fosters a deep sense of compassion and tolerance among the few religious traditions that do exist within the school.

### *Integrating and Responding*

In response to a question concerning the appropriation of religious formation at St. Michael's, the chaplain was unable to identify adequately how the students were able to maintain contact with the school once they have graduated. He suggested that because the school is so new, there really is no structure in place to allow students to continue their spiritual journey. There are plans to establish an alumni office that will maintain contact with graduates, but this office would be completely distinct from the religious identity of the school and would be more associated to fundraising endeavours. There were no current plans, according to the chaplain, for the school to continue a program of spiritual formation once students had left Grade 12, despite his recognizing that it would be a good idea to do so.

However, another of the religion teachers quickly identified ways that the school is able to maintain contact with the alumni of the school. Along with invitations to the celebration of the Eucharist on special occasions, it was pointed out that many of the alumni are asked back to direct retreats and sing in the choir. Although the school has a relatively small alumni base, this teacher recognized that because the community in which the school is located is so tight-knit, individuals were always returning to the school for any number of reasons. These are opportunities to inform students of new events on the school calendar, especially those related to religious development, and a

hope was expressed that the religious formation that began at St. Michael's would continue through this contact.

“I really hope that students come back and get involved in the community here. I think it's important to continue the work we began even after they have graduated” [Religious-education teacher].

“There is a fraternity for graduates of the school, but it is not really something that the Jesuits run. It was begun before we took over the school, and its main purpose is more for maintaining contact for fundraising or other sorts of financial support” [Chaplain, religious-education teacher].

## CHAPTER V

## CAMPION HIGH SCHOOL

*Introduction*

Campion High School, a fully private boys' school, was founded in the late 1800s in a Midwestern city in the United States of America. Originally a combined high school and liberal-arts college, Campion moved to an independent location in the 1950s with an initial enrolment of just over 100 students. Over the last 50 years, the city has grown up around Campion, and urban sprawl has placed it at the centre of an aging, white-collar, middle-class neighbourhood.

The school is currently one of the largest private boys' schools in the district, and it has a reputation of being academically and socially elite. With over a thousand students, Campion is an athletic, academic, and social powerhouse. Students from all over the city seek to attend Campion, and though admission standards are high, the school does have a reputation for admitting students of all socioeconomic and faith backgrounds. About 74% of the students at the school are Catholic. Despite its excellent standing, Campion has avoided an elitist character that seeks to separate itself from the community due to positive public-relations efforts on behalf of the administration.

Entering the school is like entering a newly constructed office building. Everything gleams with fresh coats of white paint, the lighting is modern, and a receptionist sits at a desk flanked by a state-of-the-art computer and telephone system. Indeed, if one were not certain what sort of building it was, one could easily confuse it for something other than a school. Moving past the front desk and into the hallways does reveal a more academic atmosphere, but there is still a sense that one is moving about in a

very modern complex given the large windows, bright lighting, and carpeted floors. There is a sophisticated, yet unpretentious, feel to the school that immediately suggests that the school is well cared for both physically and financially.

### *Focusing the Dialogue*

#### The Foundational Document

Speaking with both teachers and administrators concerning the religious-education and faith-formation programs reveals the importance of a document entitled *The Five Characteristics of a Graduate at Graduation*. This document, which is overtly posted in many classrooms, outlines the criteria that Jesuit schools use to evaluate the spiritual, social, and academic growth of their students. Along with criteria that are listed under the headings of *loving*, *intellectually competent*, *open to growth*, and *committed to doing justice*, there are a number of points listed under the heading *religious*. Jesuit schools in the United States, Canada, and increasingly parts of Europe, are starting to use the *five characteristics* document as a focal point for standardizing their educational institutions. Any individual who seeks to understand how students are being educated and which outcomes the schools are actively seeking to achieve need only refer to this document.

The following excerpt, which is extracted from the section titled *religious*, focuses directly on the theme of academic and spiritual formation within the context of Jesuit academic institutions:

By graduation, the student will have a basic knowledge of the major doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church. The graduate will also have examined personal religious feelings and beliefs in order to choose a fundamental orientation toward

God and to establish a relationship with a religious tradition or community. The level of theological understanding of the graduate will be limited by the student's level of religious and human development.

This paragraph reveals that while each Jesuit school expects students to have a fundamental understanding of the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church, an exploration of their own religious feelings and beliefs should not be biased by Catholic tradition or theology. In other words, Jesuit schools expect their students to become more involved in their own faith traditions and develop a prayer life according to their own understanding of what it means to be in relationship with God.

Consequently, it is not expected that non-Catholic students in Jesuit schools will become Catholic—or even agree with the philosophical and theological foundations of Catholicism.

There is a great openness to fostering a diversity of religious traditions within Jesuit schools, and it is expected that students will explore their own traditions, grow in a deeper understanding of how God is active in their lives, and become individuals who are more religious. According to the document, by the time students have graduated, they should:

- Be developing an understanding and acceptance of the central role of God in human life.
- Have had opportunities for some personal experience of God, in private prayer, while on a retreat, in liturgical prayer or in some other experience.
- Be learning how to communicate with God in various methods of prayer.
- Have had some exposure to various world religious traditions.

- Be beginning to take more responsibility for exploring, developing and validating personal faith.
- Be beginning to form a Christian conscience for evaluating moral choices, and show the ability to reason through moral problems with increasing clarity.
- Be learning through one's own failures of the need for healing and reconciliation.

This document clearly outlines the importance that Jesuit schools place on the necessity for students to approach God in their own ways. Presumably Jesuit schools, especially ones guided by the principles of the five characteristics of a graduate at graduation, should both openly allow for dialogue between students of diverse religious perspectives as well as be accepting of students who may approach the transcendent from a perspective other than that of the Catholic tradition. At least at Campion, there is an expectation that students authentically wrestle with problems, and while it is expected that each student know fully what the Catholic Church teaches on questions concerning morality and ethics, students are not necessarily expected to hold the same views. There is a strong desire to have students reflect upon their own experiences, develop their own consciences, and fully incorporate the experience of God in their own lives.

#### The First Five Minutes

In speaking with teachers about how they seek to make religious-education classes more relevant and meaningful, most suggested that the first five minutes of class are key. Although it is not an official teaching policy or a part of any pedagogical

method, most teachers seemed to recognize that the first five minutes of class are an important time to engage the students personally through informal discussion relating to the subject, topics in the media, and their own lives. For many, this first five minutes is a springboard through which they launch into the official subject material after having captured the full attention of nearly all the students.

An observation of several religion classes highlighted the importance of the first five minutes of class. While each teacher approaches this time a little differently, nearly all teachers were able to engage the students on a personal and reflective level. Whether teachers asked students questions about their lives (their new job, the next basketball game), or referred to topics in the media (the morning's front-page headlines), each teacher was able to draw his or her class into a discussion concerning relevant events in both their lives and in their world. Watching some of the more experienced teachers, this was a clear opportunity to engage some deeper level thinking, to ask some questions that demanded sincere reflection, and to open the students' eyes to different ways of seeing the world. The first five minutes, while not a required part of any class, was an excellent way to immediately engage every student through personal reflection and dialogue.

“I think that students need to come to grips with God in their own lives. I can tell them what to think, but unless they see how it actually plays out, my lessons are lost” [Religious-education teacher].

“The best part of class is when students can take something we've learned and put it into the context of their own lives” [Religious-education teacher].

## *Naming*

### The Retreat Programs

According to a recent evaluation of the high school by a national accreditation board, the retreat programs at Champion serve as the most important programs for spiritual development, since they allow for foundational religious experiences for the students. Whereas the religious-education classes focus more on the academic component of religious expression with respect to social justice, Catholic dogma, Church history, and social teachings, the retreats are opportunities for students to engage in a personal experience of religious expression within the context of a supportive community of peers and under the direction of trained faculty members.

The school boasts two retreats that are often described by parents, faculty, and students as *life-changing*. The Freshman Retreat was developed as a means of allowing Grade 9 students an opportunity to interact with their peers on a more personal level, to develop friendships with students in higher grades, and to experience for the first time a deeply religious component of the school community. The Junior Encounter, is designed for students in Grade 11 and is an important opportunity to build upon the religious formation that has taken place over three years as a student in the school.

### The Freshman Retreat

The Freshman Retreat has been a Champion tradition for over 26 years and is woven into the very social fabric of the school. Walking around the school, retreat banners from past years reveal some of the many mottos that defined the retreat: *Standing Alone—Together*, *Growing as a Community*, and *Take a Chance and Find Yourself*. The

retreat has become a rite of passage for all students, and the energy and enthusiasm surrounding the retreat experience are contagious.

The Freshman Retreat involves many senior students. A rough count suggests that every year, more than 50 Grade 12 students, 30 Grade 11 students, and 40 Grade 10 students volunteer to help with the retreat. For many, involvement in the retreat may be nothing more than working behind the scenes to set up chairs, move tables, and clean floors; however, these students seem to oblige willingly. Teachers claim that there are such large numbers of senior student volunteers because they recognize how deeply the Freshman Retreat has affected them and they want to see the Grade 9 students influenced in similar ways.

At first glance, the retreat structure does not seem as if it would prove to be such a profound experience. However, the retreat culminates in two emotionally and spiritually charged events. Each small group consists of two Grade 12 students and approximately seven Grade 9 students. The first evening of the retreat involves an opening gathering and slide show where the students are treated to a photo and music presentation that documents their first few months at Campion. The first evening continues with guest speakers who talk about the themes of community, tradition, and the importance of friendship. The highlight of the first evening is a sing-along where the Grade 9 students, along with their Grade 12 leaders, spend about an hour singing traditional pop and folk songs in an almost electric atmosphere.

The second day is typically understood as the day that affects the students the most. Early in the morning on the second day, the Grade 9 students arrive at the school for a full day of activities. The first activity is a game, which has been called *the*

*discrimination game*. This game involves the completion of tasks by three teams while having to endure more or less discrimination depending on their team. For example, in an activity that involves pushing a ball down a hall way with their noses, one team is asked to push a basketball, another team is asked to push a softball, and a third team is asked to push a tiny steel marble. As students move from one event to another, one team begins to find their tasks increasingly and unjustly more difficult. Of course, the activity is meant to show how unfortunate it is when individuals are treated unfairly through discrimination.

To reinforce this theme, and to build a greater sense of community, an alumnus is invited back to the school to speak briefly on the theme of discrimination and to articulate some of his experiences in the school. This speech reinforces the negative side of high school life inasmuch as every school has the potential to foster discrimination and oppression between peer groups. The talk shows that actions and words do affect individuals, and it gives the Grade 9 students an opportunity to reflect upon their own potential to choose to include or exclude their peers. The talk on discrimination is followed by a movie that reinforces the whole theme of fitting in, being accepted, and treating others fairly and with respect. By the time that lunch comes on the second day of the retreat, the Grade 9 students have begun to identify the mantra of community, respect, and tolerance.

The afternoon of the Freshman Retreat is spent at social-service placements. Each group is assigned to work in a senior's centre, a homeless shelter, or some other social outreach institution. Following the service placements, each group spends about an hour of time together at a leisure activity such as miniature golfing, arcades, or at a swimming

pool. Aside from teaching the Grade 9 students about the importance of service, each group takes the time during the afternoon to bond as a group, to begin to speak about things that are important, and to open up some dialogue between students who would not normally communicate.

The second day reaches its first climax when each group returns to the house of their Grade 12 leader. Awaiting their arrival is a priest from the local Catholic community, a teacher and alumnus from the school, and the best friend of the Grade 12 leader. The entire group has dinner together, talks about the day, and relaxes. After dinner, the priest, teacher, and alumnus all give talks concerning their own faith journeys and how they have been affected by their experiences at Campion. After these talks, each Grade 9 student is asked to meet one-on-one with their Grade 12 leader in a room away from the main gathering. It is at this time that the Grade 12 leader speaks to the Grade 9 student about friendship, about experiences that they share in common, about prayer, and about anything else that may arise in the intimate conversation. For many of the Grade 9 students, this is the first opportunity to engage in dialogue with someone in a deeply personal and intimate way, and many Grade 9 students find it to be a profoundly moving activity.

The culminating activity of day and of the entire retreat happens when the students return to the school about 10:00 pm. Upon arrival, they return to their small groups and do an informal and subdued debriefing of the day. Students are then told that they are going to celebrate Mass with the local Jesuit community. It is also at this time that they are told that at one point in the celebration they will be given an opportunity to say a few words to the entire Grade 9 class, depending on whether or not they feel moved

to speak. As Mass begins, the spirit becomes more focused and serious, and the students begin to absorb the experiences of the retreat—the opening talks, the sing-a-long, the service placements, the leisure activities, the time at the house, and the intimate conversations with their Grade 12 leaders. Each of these experiences affect the Grade 9 students in a deep way, and the Mass is a time to reflect upon these moments.

As Mass nears its completion, a senior student stands up and goes to the microphone. He speaks about how God is active in each individual's life in different ways and how God calls us to share these moments with others. He speaks about how we are the face of God and each one of us is holy in our own way. Inviting students to come to the microphone, he says that the Witness Talks, as they are called at Campion, are a way to speak out about the love of God and one's own faith journey as it has come to be understood in the last 45 hours. Although it might be presumed that the invitation to speak would be intimidating for Grade 9 students, the Witness Talks inevitably continue for hours. Student after student comes to the microphone, many in tears, speaking about how often they have alienated others, how they have received a new experience of God's love for them, how much they really want to belong to a peer group, and how they have been transformed by the caring community at Campion. The retreat is an opportunity for an experience of God that is not limited to a specific faith tradition. Whether a student is Jewish, Baptist, or Catholic, the Freshman Retreat affects them all in powerful ways.

### The Junior Encounter

Two years after the Freshman Retreat is the Junior Encounter. This retreat is much smaller in scope, with only 20 students at a time participating. It is much more intense. Although there are a number of important activities that could be mentioned in

describing the retreat, the most important moment for engaging in a dialogue about one's particular faith experience comes on the last day of the retreat.

After an intense day of personal sharing by the group leaders, students are invited to reflect upon their own experiences of what it means to be loved and cared for by God and by others. As students arrive back to their rooms for a time of prayer and reflection, they find a large envelope filled with letters from friends and family. These letters have been written especially for the individuals on retreat and they contain messages of support, of spiritual guidance, and of personal affirmation. Undoubtedly, each student is deeply moved when he realizes what has been given to him, since the letters themselves are one of the most highly guarded secrets of the retreat. Once students have had time to reflect upon the ways that these letters have affected them, they are invited to respond—in writing—to the individuals who have written letters. Students are given paper and pens, and are told that they should write to others about how God has touched them on the retreat and how they are grateful for the expressions of kindness and love in the letters. Students who finish the Junior Encounter are often described by their parents and teachers as being completely different—more generous and compassionate, profoundly sincere, and more open to accepting the differences of others.

#### Fostering Diversity

While the administration of Campion recognizes that it is important to bring together students of diverse cultural backgrounds, religious diversity does not necessarily seem to be a major concern. For example, one administrator spoke about how about 28% of the students at Campion are minority, meaning from Latino, African American, and Asian backgrounds. Yet he was unable to give an adequate estimation of how many

students were from religious traditions outside Catholicism. A number of teachers spoke about how it is important to make sure all students feel included, yet this inclusion was based primarily on concerns that directly related to culture, race, and socioeconomic background. Apparently, religious identity was not a major factor in the school's considerations about how students can better be helped to grow. Yet, while the school does not seem to consider religious diversity an important matter, at least two of the programs at the school that foster cultural inclusion do have a clear religious component.

#### Campion Latino Club

Discreetly placed on one of the school's bulletin board are two posters inviting individuals to join the Latino Club at the school. The club's mandate, according to the poster, is "to spread diversity, celebrate who we are, and help people in need." They have adopted as a motto for their club an expression of the former Jesuit superior general Pedro Arrupe, SJ who spoke of the need for all individuals to live lives devoted to *Amar y Servir*: to love and to serve. The club "invites all individuals, from all nations, cultures, religions, and beliefs to come celebrate" the diversity of the Latino culture at the school. The photograph of club members shows that some of the members are not of Latino ancestry and, presumably, any individual who subscribes to the club's ideals of love and service is welcome to participate.

From a conversation with the staff moderator for the group, it is clear that Campion Latino Club was designed to foster a sense of pride for individuals of Latino descent. The school, which has about 25 Latino students in a population of one thousand, is trying to create opportunities for a personal exploration of Latino culture. According to the moderator, because Latino culture is so intrinsically linked to the Catholic faith, this

group is attractive to both students of Latin American ancestry, as well as students who are serious about the Church's social teaching, and individuals who want to find an accepting community. While the club does invite students of any religious faith, they do focus on Catholic traditions such as an annual celebration of the Day of the Dead—a strong Latin American custom that seeks to honour and remember deceased family members. Any student who joins the Latino Club is free to explore his own culture as well as the cultures and religious traditions of other individuals within the group.

#### Working on Real Diversity

One administrator at the school has developed a program that he calls *Working on Real Diversity*, or WORD as an acronym. When asked why he chose that acronym, he explained that each student is responsible for hearing the *word* of God and making it an active part of his life. The group's primary focus is to bring together individuals of different cultural and religious backgrounds in order to foster communication and tolerance through community service, religious celebrations, and cultural reflection. Although the primary focus of the group is to build bridges between the traditionally segregated communities within the city, fostering religious diversity is also approached as an important part of the WORD experience.

According to the administrator, the opening prayers for all WORD gatherings are expressly nondenominational and acceptable to every member of the group, regardless of their specific faith tradition. Likewise, when the group has a communal prayer service, it is of a type to be meaningful for all, regardless of a student's personal religious background. For example, WORD hosted a celebration on Martin Luther King Day for the entire school, and the guest speaker articulated how one individual effects change for

many through both action and prayer. The event had clear religious undertones, but it was not a Catholic celebration in any traditional sense. Prayers came from both Catholic and non-Catholic traditions, the inspirational readings were nondenominational, and the theme of the service was based on principles common to all traditions. An excerpt from the opening prayer from this specific celebration reads:

*I am a man. I am a woman. I am a son. I am a daughter.  
I am a teacher. I am a student. I am a mother. I am a father.  
I am a Jesuit. I am a layperson.*

*I am Catholic. I am Jewish. I am popular. I have been bullied.  
I will inherit a large house someday. I live in a small cramped apartment.  
I love to act in front of people. I like to pray by myself.  
I am a saint. I am a sinner.*

*We are all different. We have much to be thankful for.*

The prayer is a call to break down walls, to build bridges, and to help students recognize that no matter what divides them, they are all united by a common vision and the same supportive community. This prayer would have resonated with any student, regardless of religious affiliation.

The students involved in WORD also run a summer camp for children from local elementary schools, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The administrator facilitating the camp recognizes that students from these areas are probably not members of the Catholic tradition and WORD has responded accordingly. According to the administrator in charge of the group, there is a responsibility to ensure a fidelity to the Catholic roots of the school, but there is also a responsibility to engage the children

who come to camp on a spiritual level that is acceptable to their non-Catholic affiliation. As an example, the morning prayers were written by students themselves in order that both the tone and the content of the prayers might reflect the diversity of the group's different faith expressions. Likewise, the shirt that each student was given for being a participant at the camp had a logo that included an "M" for the Latin word *magis*, which speaks to the school's motto of always seeking the greater good. It also had a fishing net that describes the school's desire to be inclusive, to be fishers of men and women—regardless of faith, ethnic background, or social status. The camp is successful in fostering a sense of tolerance and diversity through physical activity, prayer, and social interaction for both students in the neighbourhood as well as for participants from Campion.

“There are student groups that focus on specific ethnic communities. I think that while this is good, programs that foster cultural diversity are very important” [Administrator].

“Sometimes as a school, we can be more concerned in cultural exploration than in religious exploration” [Chaplain].

“We've had interfaith prayer services, and I've found these helpful to create a sense of understanding. It's nice that the boys recognize that the celebration of Mass is not the only way that an individual can pray” [Chaplain].

“One of the characteristics that we seek to instil in our students is a sense of being religious. We expect students to be men of faith, whatever their faith is” [Religious-education teacher].

“We would never expect a boy to become Catholic or believe Catholic teaching if that was not his faith. We encourage an exploration of the Catholic perspective,

but we also recognize that if someone is forced to believe something, that negates the whole aspect of faith” [School president].

*Making Available the Common Story and Vision*

It is only upon closer observation of the physical structure of the building that an individual can really ascertain that Campion has a strong religious focus. While there are numerous objects that would distinguish the school as being Catholic, they are discreet and incorporated fully into the whole architectural feel of the school. Inside every classroom is a small crucifix—noticeable, but not overly oppressive. Likewise, there is an occasional painting of a religious theme, but these are so completely integrated into the school’s décor that they could be overlooked easily. The school has a clear religious tone, but it is not overt. The administration has striven to make the school feel like any other school while maintaining a strong sense of tradition for its academic, athletic, and spiritual past.

Freedom to Choose

Concerning the Catholic vision of the school, an interesting conversation with one of the Jesuits revealed a deeply philosophic approach to the way of addressing diversity within the religious-education and faith-formation programs. He claimed that the Society of Jesus has never demanded that students in Jesuit schools become Catholic. Quoting numerous sources, he claimed that the first Jesuit schools openly accepted non-Catholic students, because their academic approach was to make good citizens who would openly work to effect a positive change within the larger society. Consequently, students did not necessarily need to be Catholic. Therefore, if it was never the intent of the early Society of Jesus to run schools for the strict purpose of conversion, it would be contrary to the

spirit of Jesuit education today to consider religious conversion part of the Jesuit educational philosophy.

This is an interesting insight, since it does beg the question of how Jesuit schools can foster experiences of religion and God without necessarily seeming to evangelize from a strictly Catholic perspective. A delicate balance must exist in the classrooms, in school assemblies, and on the retreats insofar as the school needs to remain faithful to its Catholic roots without necessarily demanding the adherence of all students to specifically Catholic theological principles. Indeed, one of the most difficult matters to address is how much a Jesuit school can speak about Catholic tradition, mandate religious-education, and foster religious experiences and expression without crossing the threshold into the realm of proselytizing.

#### *Integrating and Responding*

While the structures of the retreat programs do allow opportunities for students to come together at later dates to reflect specifically upon their experiences, very few students respond to the invitation. For many students, an opportunity to discuss the retreat experiences is found within their respective Christian Life Community (CLC). CLC groups are small collectives of individuals who meet regularly to discuss life. For students in these groups, the retreat experience can be nurtured and fostered through sustained interaction with their peers.

As a whole, the administration of the school acknowledges that most students from Campion attend Jesuit universities across the United States after graduation. All of these colleges have chaplaincy programs that allow for continued religious formation. Therefore, although Campion does not specifically foster religious formation programs

for their alumni, these students still have structures in place at the university level that allow them to continue developing their faith lives at a Jesuit institution.

Campion clearly develops individuals who are compassionate, socially aware, and able to excel both academically and interpersonally. Although an exploration of religious differences between individuals is not a specific focus at the school, students who graduate from Campion recognize that tolerance and compassion must be guiding principles in dealing with others. Students seem to receive enough examples of diversity that when they encounter individuals of different religious traditions, they are presumably able to interact maturely and with an ability to dialogue in an accepting and tolerant way.

While the school has not shown a specific dedication to fostering dialogue between students of different religious traditions, in some ways the dialogue of compassion and tolerance exists in the many ways that the school seeks to bring students together. Experiences such as speaking personally about important matters in the classroom, having the opportunity to discuss life within the safe context of a retreat, or building a community spirit based on common social ideals, can affect the students in very positive ways. Individuals who graduate from Campion understand the Catholic tradition and the Jesuit ideals, but are expected to continue seeking God in their own ways and according to their own experiences. Consequently, they enter the world with the tools needed to dialogue and explore other religious perspectives in whatever context they might find themselves after graduation.

## CHAPTER VI

## LOYOLA COLLEGE

*Introduction*

Belgian Jesuits founded Loyola College in the late 1800s at the request of British upper class living in India. Though the Jesuits were the administrators and teachers at Loyola, the majority of the student population was of British descent and was closely affiliated with the Church of England. The school itself is located in a city with a population of approximately 114,000 in northeast India. The predominant languages spoken in the geographic area surrounding Loyola are Nepali and Hindi, with English being the language spoken at most of the area's boarding schools.

Loyola can only be described as a traditional British-style boarding school that stands proudly on a large piece of land on the outskirts of town. Built of stone, it is a large three stories tall institution with a quadrangle in the centre. Architecturally imposing, it recalls the grandeur of British life under Victoria, empress of India, at the end of the 1800s. Although the school was originally opened for the sons of the British elite, the school currently has approximately a thousand students—none who are British—from grades 1 to 12 with 340 fulltime borders. While Anglicanism was once the predominant religion of the boarders, the current student population is predominantly Hindu, with just 4% of the student population being Catholic, less than 1% of the student population being nondenominational Christian, and only very few Sikhs, Buddhists and Muslims.

The school has had to adapt to changing social, cultural, and religious demographics over the last hundred years. Although the school still has the reputation of

being mainly for the rich, increasing numbers of poorer students have attended the school through a bursary program.

### *Focusing the Dialogue*

#### Intrinsically Religious

Students at Loyola do not necessarily need the same level of animation that students in North America need concerning religious-education and faith-formation programs. For the majority of the student population, outward religious expression and a belief in God are integral parts of their lives, both personally and culturally. There is a social expectation that every individual will have some religious foundation, and when the school encourages students to embrace their religious roots, they quickly and happily oblige. There is a sense that every student should be able to pray, have a relationship with the Divine, and be able to articulate why being religious is important. From personal experience with individuals in and around the school, this has proven to be true. Every morning, boarding students arise and pray either communally or individually, even when it is not required by the daily schedule. At the end of the day, all students participate in a group prayer before retiring to their dorms.

#### Values Education

All students at Loyola are required to take a values-education program from Grade 9 until graduation at the end of Grade 12. The headmaster of the school, a Jesuit priest, teaches this program to each of the senior grade levels. Although there is an official textbook, mandated by the state in which the school is located, the headmaster suggested that his classes are entirely student-driven. Students are given an opportunity at the beginning of the year to submit a list of topics that they would like to explore. These

topics can include anything from political responsibility and the value of sporting activities to sexual ethics and drug use. The teacher has suggested that the values-education class, which meets two times every week, is the favourite of the students because of its relevance to contemporary culture. By basing his material on students' personal experiences, he feels that they more easily identify and learn the subject matter. The headmaster has stated that it does not matter what he teaches, as long as the students can connect with the material and incorporate it personally. By allowing them to suggest the topics and to wrestle with the outcomes in class, the headmaster has created a program that is meaningful to all students.

Ironically, though the values-education program does allow for debate and discussion, students are less apt to discuss topics such as abortion or homosexuality than their counterparts in North American schools. Part of this ambivalence comes from the close relationship that the teachings of the Catholic Church have with the predominant social narrative in Indian culture. Topics such as abortion, gay marriage, euthanasia, and political responsibility generally elicit similar reactions among students regardless of whether they are adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity. Debate concerning morality and ethics is minimal, and such topics are typically not widely discussed among students, inside or outside of the classroom.

This lack of discussion about controversial topics comes from a cultural approach that suggests certain ethical topics have a clear right and wrong perspective. For example, a section from the textbook concerning homosexuality states that homosexuality was once considered to have resulted from hereditary influences, but the current perspective is that homosexuality is caused by family and extra-familial influences. Consequently, an

indulgent mother or a weak father can contribute to the development of these negative tendencies. The final section in this chapter discusses how individuals can overcome homosexuality with the help of a capable counsellor. With such certitude expressed in a government-prescribed textbook, students are not apt to disagree in a public forum.

Similarly, a section on religious expression suggests that while the number of atheists and agnostics in the world is not negligible, these individuals do not believe in the existence of God because of ignorance. The chapter asserts that human beings are, by their very nature, God-oriented, and that man is not only a rational, social, and economic animal, but also a religious one. To deny one's religious longing is to deny one's final destiny. An enlightened individual will recognize that God exists and will seek to understand how to encounter God in the best way possible. As with the topic of homosexuality, there is very little room here for debate. Consequently, students are not typically bold enough to state their doubts and struggles concerning religious expression within the context of the class.

“The students here are not as individualistic as they are in the West. They don't feel the need to criticize everything that they either don't understand or may disagree with” [Headmaster].

“Religion isn't something that is talked about. People generally don't get engaged about such topics. Politics is what really gets people—but religion isn't talked about” [Religious-education teacher].

“The boys don't talk about issues such as homosexuality, abortion, or what have you. In fact, you'd embarrass them by asking. They're more united culturally by very similar ideals” [Religious-education teacher].

“Students are very respectful of the teachers. When a teacher says something, they’re not apt to disagree” [Rector].

### *Naming*

Religious differences are not spoken about in public forums at Loyola. The classroom is not acceptable as a place where one student can engage another student about what it means to be a member of a particular religious group. In fact, there is a sense at Loyola that every religion is simply a different manifestation of the same reality and therefore it is best not to speak about the differences. This viewpoint is expressly stated in the values-education textbook in the chapter on religious diversity. It says that each religion “has its own values and is good and capable of leading people to a God-experience. An understanding of this will lead to religious tolerance and fraternal relationship among various religious groups.” Being a religious individual, whether one is Catholic or Hindu, is such a part of what it means to be a human individual that students and staff members just expect one another to be religious. Therefore, questions about ‘why’ one is religious or ‘how’ one is religious usually go unasked in classroom discussions.

### Religious Celebrations

The rector of the College, a Jesuit who grew up in Canada but has lived in India for most of his life, suggested that Loyola truly is a model of religious tolerance for the rest of the world. He explained that the school celebrates Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, but it also celebrates all the holidays that are important to the student population in the school. The feast of Diwali, also known as the festival of light, is the Hindu New Year. For the staff and students at Loyola, this is an important time of

celebration, and such celebration is not reserved just for the Hindu students. Indeed, the school decorates its long corridors and quadrangle with lights and ribbons in anticipation of this day of celebration. Although Loyola is a Catholic institution, it recognizes the importance of the religious traditions of its student population by celebrating the religious traditions of its Sikh, Buddhist, and Muslim students as well.

Likewise, students move between religious traditions very fluidly at Loyola. During the Christmas season, Hindu students are invited to Christian households to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. At Buddhist feasts, many non-Buddhist students celebrate with Buddhist families. Finally, because Hinduism is the predominant religion of the students at Loyola, Hindu feasts are a time when the entire student population celebrates together. The religious boundaries existing in North America are practically nonexistent at Loyola, and questions about how students relate to each other with respect to religious differences seem out of place. Each student understands his own particular religious tradition, but not in the same finite ways as found in the West. Rather, to be a Catholic means that one begins with Catholicism and continues to pray and celebrate along with students who may be Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, or Muslim.

#### Being a Hindu-Catholic

Interestingly, many of the Hindu students at Loyola consider themselves both Hindu and Catholic. Although they were raised Hindu, they have adopted the Virgin Mary as someone to be revered or worshipped. Likewise, the person of Jesus Christ is considered as one of the many incarnations of the God Vishnu and is subsequently spoken about with reverence and care. One teacher, who identifies himself as a Hindu-Catholic, spoke about Jesus as an important individual whose message is greatly needed

given the world's present strife. The Jesuit administration of the school fully endorses this spiritual adoption of Jesus and Mary by the Hindu students as a logical and appropriate union of two religious traditions.

Alternatively, many Catholic students have begun to adopt distinctive forms of Hindu prayer and reflection within their own lives. Centring prayer is the most common form of prayer used by the students, including the Catholics, and it is strongly rooted in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. In fact, many of the classes begin with a Hindu form of centring prayer where students close their eyes, focus on their breathing, and recite a single phrase repeatedly until they have calmed themselves down and achieved a sense of peacefulness. This movement between one religious tradition and another is an accepted practice, not only at Loyola, but also in the wider area. Catholic boys regularly attend Hindu religious services, and non-Catholic boys will attend Catholic services.

“We are a model for the world. Students don't worry about religion, and they're not so focused on intellectual understandings. They're faithful, they pray, they believe in God, and that unites them” [Headmaster].

“Many Catholic schools in India will have ceremonies for students on special non-Christian days. For example, on Guru Nanak's birthday, many schools will have a celebration” [Headmaster].

“Our boys don't worry about being one religion or other. They're all as Catholic as they are Hindu. One religion or the other, it's all the same” [Religious-education teacher].

“I think that the boys don't care about Catholic, or Hindu, or Muslim. Prayer is prayer and religion is religion. One or the other doesn't matter to them” [Religious-education teacher].

*Making Available the Common Story and Vision*

Loyola does not seek to educate non-Catholic students about the fundamental doctrines and teachings of the Catholic Church. Students at Loyola who are from non-Catholic, non-Christian religious backgrounds know very little about what it means to be Catholic. The Jesuits of the school have maintained that those students who are not Catholic should be given the freedom to attend Mass and other Catholic celebrations if they wish, but in no way should attendance ever be made compulsory. At a social gathering, I mentioned that many Catholic schools in North America insist that non-Catholic, non-Christian students attend Catholic celebrations such as the Mass—at hearing this, outrage was expressed. Nuns, priests, and Catholic laypersons condemned the obligation for non-Catholic students to attend Catholic ceremonies as being religiously oppressive. At Loyola, the administration of the school does not consider it the job of the school to catechize non-Catholic students, and the description of such blatant evangelization was quickly dismissed.

“The majority of the non-Catholic boys don’t know so much what type of school this is. Most don’t know the difference between a Protestant or a Catholic school” [Headmaster].

“Non-Catholic students should never be forced to attend Catholic celebrations. That does not make them better people. It just makes them resent the Jesuits and the Catholic community” [Religious-education teacher].

## Prayer on the Campus

During the time when Catholic students are expected to attend weekly celebrations of the Mass, non-Catholic students are expected to be in the study hall reviewing their homework or in a private and quiet area of the school doing their own

prayer offerings. Although there is no official policy that all students pray together at the same time, it is expected that each student will be faithful to his specific religious tradition at appropriate times according to his own conscience. For example, Muslim students have permission to get up in the evening, after the official call has been made to be in the dorm rooms, in order to do their evening prayers. Hindu students, likewise, are expected to say their prayers and are given appropriate space. Even though Catholic students are the only individuals required by the school to attend religious celebrations, there is strong pressure from the school administration that all students pray in a formal manner.

“All the Catholic boys have to go to Mass every day, and I am thinking about instituting communal prayer for the Hindu boys every morning in the New Year”  
[Headmaster].

#### Catholic Education for Catholic Students

Along with the values-education program, Catholic students are expected to attend a weekly class on Catholic education. This class, which is only for Catholic boarding students, seeks to teach the fundamentals of Catholic belief. Many of the boys see this extra class as tedious and—though they understand that it must be taken—they attend only grudgingly. Many of these religious-education classes are devoted to a study of the type of catechism that one could have found in North American Catholic schools during the 1960s. This traditional catechism allows the Catholic boarding students to receive as strong a religious education as their day-school companions would normally receive in the local parishes.

In addition to classes such as the catechism and scripture study, another program specifically limited to Catholic students is the annual three-day retreat. While non-Catholic students have requested permission to attend these retreats, the school administration has not yet allowed non-Catholic participation. The reasons that they give is that these retreats are specifically Catholic in nature. They are designed along the same lines as retreats that were given by Catholic missionaries decades ago insofar as they are in silence, students are given material to pray with, and there are opportunities for group reflection. Many teachers suggest that these are very ineffective retreats for the students but are at a loss as to what other options may be available for spiritual formation.

“The Catholics go on a three day preached retreat and are given points for meditation, but the Hindu students are just expected to pray in their dorms or something like that” [Religious-education teacher].

“Some Buddhist schools run by the monks expect the students to study Buddhism and learn the religion, and many students become monks. They also charge little tuition so many poor students can go to the school, but they must follow the monks’ schedule. At our school, religion is more personal, and we don’t insist that students follow the Jesuit schedule” [Religious-education teacher].

### What Makes a Catholic School?

One of the biggest unanswered questions was why the Jesuits would continue to run a school for Hindu students when evangelization was not the primary focus and students often graduated knowing very little about the teachings of the Catholic Church. One of the common responses from both teachers and administrators is that Loyola exists in order to educate and effect social change. The school has a proud reputation of having educated kings and princes of Nepal and Bhutan, as well as many prominent political

leaders in India. Because of its mission to educate for social change, the question of religious affiliation plays very little role in the social mandate of the school. In fact, the school is so successful with many non-Catholic individuals precisely because of its liberal attitude toward religious expression. It was suggested by the headmaster that if the Jesuits were more conservative, they would not attract the same types of families that they are currently able to attract.

While affecting social change is a legitimate reason to operate the school, the question concerning what made it a *Catholic* school was pressing. For many the school was Catholic inasmuch as the Jesuits operated it, while for others it was a Catholic school because of the few statues that were placed around the quadrangle. However, nobody was able to explain fully what made the school Catholic in light of the expressed practice not to evangelize to non-Christian students.

However, the answer as to what was Catholic about Loyola came over an informal cup of tea with a nun who is closely affiliated with a number of the Catholic schools in the region. She claimed that what makes Loyola a Catholic school is the way that it witnesses to gospel values of love, compassion, and tolerance. She explained that in the area, these attributes readily identify the Catholic schools as being different from other educational institutions in the area. Although Loyola does not insist that the non-Catholic students take religious-education classes, they are given the fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church through the ways in which each teacher cares for them as individuals, loves them unconditionally, and acts in a Christ-like manner in both his or her professional and personal lives. The teachings of the Catholic Church, she claims, are not found in the catechism, the Mass, or in rituals—the teaching of the Catholic Church is

found in the way that every individual seeks to bring Christ to the world. That is what makes Loyola a Catholic school.

“Loyola was once a school for the Christian children of the British who were living in India, and it had a religious focus. Now it’s filled with neighbourhood kids who are not Christian. It is a social outreach from the Jesuits” [Rector].

“The Jesuits came in to educate the sons of the British because they knew they could change social structures. It’s never been the goal of Jesuit education in India to make Catholics” [Headmaster].

“Evangelization in the East is considered formation toward tolerance. Whether you’re Buddhist or Hindu or Catholic, spiritual formation means building tolerance” [Headmaster].

“Authentic gospel values are what makes Loyola College a Catholic school. Being ‘Christ-like’ to others is more powerful than anything we could instil in our students concerning Catholic doctrine” [Religious-education teacher].

“If we teach them well but are not Christian models, then we have failed. They must learn from not only what we say, but also what we do” [Religious-education teacher].

### *Integrating and Responding*

There is very little follow-up for students after the course of their four senior years. There is not the continued formation after graduation that one might expect or desire. That said, many of the students who leave Loyola go away to the United States or Europe for university, but then return after their studies to live near the school. As a result, many of the students and families maintain close contact with the teachers and

priests at Loyola. This relationship of fraternal affection is best described as building up a Christian community. Individuals in the city know who is an alumnus of Loyola, and there is a subculture of friendship and mutual support among all graduates.

Although it was never the goal of Loyola to catechize its students and gain converts to Catholicism, many of the students clearly live lives in accordance with Christian ideals. The school song speaks of “always lending a hand to a faltering brother,” and many of the graduates consider this an important life-lesson. The teachings of Loyola, while not expressly Catholic in nature, are derived from the gospel of Jesus and lived out by the teachers and administrators at the school. If there is such a thing as a good Catholic-Hindu, then Loyola has formed them as well as any school could. Building up the kingdom of God based on Christian ideals is one of the great successes of the school.

“When non-Catholic students go on to university, they don’t get taught about Catholicism. But they don’t get that here either. That’s not the job of our school” [Headmaster].

“Many boys I meet in America or Canada have become Catholic, but here in India there is strong family pressure not to convert, so most don’t” [Rector].

“The school once taught scripture and other Christian religious education when the students needed it to qualify for European-based standardized exams. However, we discontinued those programs in the late 1960s. It was not useful to have a predominately Hindu student population studying the Bible” [Rector].

## CHAPTER VII

## ST. ISAAC JOGUES SCHOOL

*Introduction*

Founded 30 years ago in a major Indian city with a population of nearly 14 million, St. Isaac Jogues School is a well-established co-educational institution. The central buildings of the school are within the confines of a previously abandoned, five-star European hotel complex built in 1910 as a resort for British visitors to India. The school itself—constructed with plaster and iron complete with Roman arches, high ceilings, balconies, and cloister walks—has a distinctly Italian feel. The school is a Grade 1–12 institution of approximately 3,000 students and serves a student population from a variety of socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. There are 110 staff members working at the school, but only two are members of the Society of Jesus.

Both the exterior and the interior of the school are comparatively plain, though St. Isaac Jogues School has a more noticeably Catholic identity than many other Jesuit institutions in the region. As one enters the campus, one's eye naturally moves to a large statue of St. Isaac Jogues placed atop one of the larger buildings near the street. On the interior of the main administration building, photos of the local bishop and the pope are hung in prominent positions on the wall. The school has a very Western feel, and the students dress predominantly in European and American fashions. Although other elite Indian schools have been influenced by the British educational system, the recent establishment of St. Isaac Jogues makes it feel comparable to any major American school—with its modern computer laboratory, LCD projectors, televisions, and other teaching aids that are not necessarily used in even the most prestigious Indian schools.

*Focusing the Dialogue*

## Technology in the Classroom

St. Isaac Jogues has developed a technology plan that uses media in the classroom to make the subjects more relevant to the students. The director of the religious-education program suggested that it is the responsibility of the department to ensure that technology is used in a variety of ways in order to bring the message to the students more quickly and with increased meaning. Therefore, the department has made it a priority to use current movies, books, and news events to bring the subject material to life for students in its program. In fact, the director of the religious-education program, one of the two Jesuits on the faculty, is a member of an international organisation of Jesuits devoted to the use of media in conjunction with spiritual development.

As an example of how media are used in the classroom at St. Isaac Jogues, consider an incident in which students were discussing the topic of oppression and liberation. Instead of exploring the story of the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, which was the textbook material to be explored on the theme, the concept of the Exodus was articulated using the movie *Life is Beautiful*, in which an Italian man finds God in the midst of his imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp. The religious-education department is slowly developing an entire curriculum that incorporates media and technology in the classroom to foster dialogue and growth about morality and ethics between students of all faiths. There is a sense that the foundational religious experiences of all students, regardless of religion, is rooted in the human experience of what it means to be an ethical individual. Therefore, instead of speaking directly about religious experiences, especially experiences rooted in the doctrines of particular faith traditions,

students are encouraged to speak about their experiences of being human. The technology in the classroom is used to facilitate this dialogue.

“When I show the students movies, we can talk and we can explore what we feel and think about it. By doing this we all become better people, and religion is not the focus” [Values-education teacher].

“I make movies with students in my class. It’s an opportunity for them to express things very deeply. They can take the subject of religious expression and make it more personal, more dynamic. It’s like life” [Values-education teacher].

“Media is the way to do moral education. You need to reach the students with the same elements that they are using. You need to take what they find normal and make it holy. Then they become holy” [Values-education teacher].

“The boys and girls are not in churches, they’re in the bars. Therefore, the priest needs to be willing to go to the bar” [Chaplain].

### Asking Questions without Giving Answers

The pedagogy adopted by teachers within St. Isaac Jogues’ religious-education department asserts that teachers should seek to ask questions of the students in order that they may seek to find the answers for themselves. Basing their pedagogic approach on the Indian notion of a guru, the school has determined that it is the responsibility of a teacher of spiritual development to bring students to a point at which they will desire to seek answers to life’s most profound spiritual questions. Consequently, teachers consider themselves only facilitators of the students’ personal spiritual journeys. One of the religion teachers suggested that both Buddhist and Hindu traditions heavily influence St.

Isaac Jogues, inasmuch as every spiritual journey must be facilitated by trained spiritual leaders.

“Values education demands that when a student comes to me for an answer, I don’t give them an answer. Rather, I help them to seek the answers within themselves” [Values-education director].

### Training the Teachers

Because of the strong emphasis on teachers’ ability to guide students along the path of spiritual and moral development, teacher formation is very important at St. Isaac Jogues. Teachers are given opportunities to reflect upon their own moral approaches and are expected to foster a prayer life of their own. Likewise, teachers within the religious-education department are expected to maintain contact with a spiritual teacher from a religious tradition such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Catholicism. Though most of the teachers at the school are Hindu, there is a sense that the spiritual quest is not limited to a single tradition and that each individual is ultimately seeking the same answers. Therefore, religious formation for the teachers, as far as personal devotion is concerned, is not as important as a general moral and ethical formation. Teachers are expected to grow in virtue and moral goodness more than in devotion to any specific religious practice.

“Anyone can teach religion, because it’s theoretical. Only someone who has embarked upon the journey themselves can teach values education” [Values-education director].

“Teachers shouldn’t presume to know more about being spiritual than the students. Nobody has all the answers to life’s difficult questions, and we need to work together to find our way as a whole” [Chaplain].

### *Naming*

The religious-education program at St. Isaac Jogues maintains that students should be given the opportunity to express themselves openly and honestly. Consequently, the school seeks to foster dialogue within each of the religious-education classes so students are comfortable to speak about the subjects that they feel are the most important. It seems that the approach they have adopted, similar to the approaches of other schools in large Indian urban centres, is one where the classes are based on dialogue between the teacher and the students. It is expected that the teacher will bring topics of relevance to the class and that students will engage these subjects. However, one of the most important recognitions at St. Isaac Jogues is that there are no simple answers to complex problems, and students should never be given the impression that theology and the experience of being human is a black-and-white matter. The struggle for the teaching staff is to show that while there are different responses to the same question, these various responses are ultimately seeking to articulate the same reality.

### Secularisation and Moral Development

The constitution refers to India as a secular nation, and the Jesuit institutions seem to follow that philosophy very closely. Instead of seeking to have the various religious groups struggle to understand one other, many Jesuit schools avoid speaking about religion altogether. At St. Isaac Jogues, it is held that religion is not something to be discussed within the classroom setting, and students are best left to practice their own religious traditions within the context of their own lives. Indeed, the school's assistant director asserts that the school is not the place for students to speak about religion with others. While students are free to spend their leisure time in prayer or other religious

rituals on the school campus, conversations between students about religion are limited. Instead of speaking about religion, they are encouraged to speak about their moral foundations, which are presumed to be common to all religions.

The quest to be a better person is universal, and it is not limited to a single religious tradition. The students at St. Isaac Jogues are taught that whether an individual is Catholic, Muslim, or Hindu, his or her final goal is the same. An individual's highest potential is to be morally virtuous and upright—consequently students are encouraged to wrestle with what it means to be a human being. As far as dialogue is concerned, theirs is a unique approach, since without feeling threatened by the diversity of religious traditions, it allows for a starting point for students to speak to each other on even terms.

At St. Isaac Jogues School, moral education is viewed as the foundation of religious expression. The philosophy of the religious-education department suggests that values education leads to religious expression, but religious education does not necessarily lead to individuals with strong principles. Therefore, the department finds it necessary to focus on values education instead of religious formation. The director of the religious-education program has claimed that in the West, Catholic schools have the process of student formation wrong. Students are not made into better individuals and tolerance is not built by teaching about religion, especially if that means teaching Catholicism to non-Catholic students. Instead, tolerance is increased and religious expression is deepened when students recognize that they all start from a common point that is holy and move forward toward a similar goal.

“Why talk about religion? All that does is cause tension and fighting. We must dialogue about what makes us human—and then we will find the Divine”  
[Values-education director].

“Ghandi dreamed of a secular India, and that’s what we strive for—a school where no single religion or caste or people define the others” [Values-education teacher].

“Values education needs to allow for curved lines and shades of grey. Not all life’s answers are found in the catechism” [Chaplain].

Holidays and Religious Diversity

<b>2004 Holidays—St. Isaac Jogues School</b>			
<b>January 1</b>	New Year’s Day	<b>August 15</b>	Independence Day
<b>January 26</b>	Republic Day	<b>September 7</b>	Janmashtami
<b>February 2</b>	Id-UI-Zuha	<b>October 2</b>	Gandhi’s Birthday
<b>February 18</b>	Maha Shivratri	<b>October 22</b>	Dussehra
<b>March 2</b>	Muharram	<b>October 28</b>	Valmiki’s Birthday
<b>March 3</b>	Ram Navami	<b>November 12</b>	Diwali
<b>April 3</b>	Mahavir Jayanti	<b>November 15</b>	Idu’l Fitr
<b>April 9</b>	Good Friday	<b>November 26</b>	Guru Nanak’s Birthday
<b>May 2</b>	Milad-Un-Nabi	<b>December 25</b>	Christmas Day
<b>May 4</b>	Buddha Purnima		

One of the most striking differences between schools in the West and St. Isaac Jogues is the diversity of religious and secular holidays that are dispersed throughout the academic year. Unlike schools in North America, which follow a yearly schedule based predominately on Christian holidays, St. Isaac Jogues has an abundance of Christian, Catholic, non-Christian, and secular holidays that define the rhythm of the school year. Over the course of an academic year, there are only two Christian holidays out of a total of 19 holidays. According to the school’s principal, it is felt that, since the majority of

students in the school are not Christian, it would be unethical to create a school calendar that included only, or even largely, Christian holidays. He suggested that any school that accepts students of different religious traditions has an obligation to provide them with days off to celebrate their central religious feasts.

The above list incorporates Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Sikh holidays as well as secular holidays. All students at St. Isaac Jogues are given the entire day off to celebrate these festivals, regardless of their particular faith tradition. Though it is not mandated by the school, most students celebrate all the holidays with friends and family from the respective religious communities. Students learn about differences in religious expression through personal experience because of an increased social freedom to move among religious traditions without seeming to betray one's own spiritual roots.

### *Making Available the Common Story and Vision*

#### Adapting Catholic Teaching

St. Isaac Jogues asserts that non-Catholic students should not be asked to take part in a specifically Catholic education. There is a general sense that non-Catholic students should not be obliged to study the Bible or the catechism of the Catholic Church. Therefore, the religious-education department has developed a curriculum that encompasses Catholic teachings without specifically addressing Catholic doctrine. The school holds that gospel values must be the primary focus in the values-education classes. The Catholic perspective can be taught in ways that are dynamic and relevant to students of all faith traditions. Instead of teaching biblical stories such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, the school focuses on the importance of care for friends, compassion toward the poor, and social justice. Likewise, the catechism teachings are approached from a

strictly non-Catholic perspective, inasmuch as words directly relating to the Catholic Church will never be heard within the religious-education classes.

“We need to teach Christ. Christ was an experience, not a religion” [Values-education director].

“What is the use of teaching Catholicism? Students don’t seek religion, they seek to be human. We need to teach students that” [Values-education teacher].

“Do you get anything out of religion? If not, why expect your students to sit through a long, irrelevant religious service” [Values-education teacher].

“Good theology means that the Bible will be interpreted and nuanced. You can teach scripture without opening the book. You need to make it alive for the students” [Chaplain].

#### Values Education Leading to Religious Expression

Regardless of faith tradition, most students claim that they become more religious individuals because of the moral-education program at St. Isaac Jogues. Ironically, a school that avoids speaking and teaching specifically about religious tradition and sectarian faith seems to be very successful in leading people toward a greater devotion in their religious lives. Whether a student is a Hindu, Muslim, or Christian the process of teaching morality leads to a deeper understanding of the student’s need to express himself religiously. The school seeks to impart to students the notion that God is a singular reality sought by all religions, and that the path to finding God comes first from moral righteousness and only then from religious expression. By founding the students’ religious expression on a solid moral base, students become more tolerant when they

adopt religious practices and devotions, because they understand that each individual is seeking fundamentally the same thing in a different way.

“A Hindu boy cannot speak to a Catholic about doctrine. That is not dialogue. Dialogue begins with human experience, one experience talking to another” [Values-education director].

“What does it mean to teach them to be better Hindus? Teach them to be better human beings and that will follow” [Values-education director].

### Hindu Philosophy in Catholic Teaching

The religious-education department often quotes the Hindu principle of “*Ekam sad vipra bahuda vadanti,*” which means, “Truth is one but the learned express it in a variety of ways.” The teaching faculty intimately understand that there is nothing wrong with expressing the same thing in different ways, especially if those alternative means of expression are more relevant to the wider student population. The director of the religious-education program suggested that in North American schools there is a perception that unless an idea can be found in the official catechism, it cannot be taught in a Catholic school. To the Indian mind, this is not the proper way to teach students about God. Educators must recognize that what it means to be Catholic can be expressed in a number of ways, many of which bear no resemblance to the ways that Catholicism has traditionally been taught in Catholic schools.

Because of Hindu philosophy, Hindu students at Catholic schools in India are typically very tolerant of Catholic teaching and able to embrace it because of their own belief that a singular truth can manifest itself in many ways. Jesuit educators at St. Isaac Jogues have taken advantage of this philosophic approach in their own pedagogical

methods. They claim that unless they can show different ways of articulating the same reality, they are not reaching all their students—especially since the students come from a diversity of faith perspectives.

### Small Human Communities

In many Jesuit schools in North America, students are invited to participate in Christian Life Communities (CLC). However, at St. Isaac Jogues, students are involved in *Small Human Communities* (SHC). These groups have the same fundamental structure as CLC groups, but they are more open to discussing the diversity of human experiences from different perspectives, since they are not as rooted in the Judeo-Christian milieu. Instead, in light of the moral foundation that the school seeks to impart, these groups promote a sharing of individual experiences from a diversity of perspectives. Although a SHC is normally composed of 10 to 12 students from a wide variety of faith traditions, students very rarely have conflict in their discussions.

### *Integrating and Responding*

Students from St. Isaac Jogues graduate with a strong sense of moral responsibility. The school has developed an alumni association with three primary goals: raising funds for charitable organisations, building a community of support for graduates, and volunteering with local charities.

The mandate of the alumni organisation has been to work with students who are disadvantaged, and the organisation has a special concern for students with handicaps. Most recently, the alumni organisation hosted a play called *Agar Magar*, which was about a crocodile that rules the jungle and decides that he wants to evict the other animals. The theme of the play was about tolerance of individuals who are different, and it was

presented by children from ASTHA, the Alternative Strategies for the Handicapped Association. The proceeds from the play went to aid 45 students from low-income families who needed special help in schools designed to accommodate their disabilities.

What is most interesting about the alumni organisation is that, while the chair of the committee is a Jesuit, there are Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Catholics on the board. They share a sense that the mandate of the organisation is more unifying than any single religion. One member of the alumni committee suggested that volunteerism is not limited to a particular religious denomination, and individuals who commit time to the committee and the organisation understand the importance of giving to others. Through the activities of the alumni organisation, the school has provided a major opportunity for graduates to continue to develop the moral foundation that the school sought to impart.

## CHAPTER VIII

## DISCUSSION

*Foreword*

The purpose of this thesis was to explore and articulate how, and to what extent, the religious-education programs, faith formation, and spiritual ethos in Catholic schools cultivate dialogue about and foster experiences of religion and God in light of the diversity of faith traditions present in their student populations.

To differing degrees, three methodological tools were used for the data collection in this study. They included demographic and document inquiry, participant observation, and individual, semistructured interviews. The use of three diverse methods of data collection allowed for the use of triangulation inasmuch as specific pieces of data were assessed in light of their relationship to other findings.

Like the framework used for the presentation of data obtained from each of the four schools, the following section is also organized into Groome's categories concerning a shared Christian praxis: *focusing the dialogue*, *naming*, *making available the common story and vision*, and *integrating and responding*. The use of this framework is beneficial because it allows for an easier synthesis of how, and to what degree, each of the four Catholic schools were able to cultivate dialogue about and foster experiences of religion and God.

*Focusing the Dialogue*

## Inspiring the Students

One of the most difficult challenges facing religious-education programs in all four schools is the most appropriate ways to grab the attention of the students. In both

schools in North America, students generally view programs that have religious undertones with suspicion. The recent cases of priestly abuse within the Catholic Church in North America seem to have eroded the credibility of the Church. Jesuits at both Campion High School and at St. Michael's High School expressed a dissatisfaction with student presumptions that religious expression is both unenlightened and out-of-touch with their daily experiences. Specifically at Campion, the president of the school spoke about his concerns with student perceptions that religious expression has nothing to offer and that the religious-education classes and faith-formation programs will always be a waste of time.

In contrast, students in India seem to recognize innately that religious expression is a necessary part of being human, and they are generally open and appreciative of the values-education programs offered. However, in terms of classes specifically devoted to the study of Catholicism, which are mandatory for the Catholic students at Loyola College, there seems to be about as little interest in the subject matter as is found among their Western counterparts. While the teacher of the values-education classes at Loyola describes his students as 'enthusiastic,' he articulates a different perspective concerning the classes specifically devoted to a study of Catholicism. It seems the students have a general sense that Catholic dogma has nothing to offer to them. Consequentially, the school continues to struggle to make the classes on Catholicism relevant and meaningful for their Catholic students.

### Catholic Symbolism

All four schools sought to highlight their Catholic identities by embellishing their schools with art objects specific to the Catholic tradition in at least some way. However,

the degrees to which each school highlighted this aspect of its school culture differed greatly. Whereas St. Michael's clearly sought to display as many types of Catholic symbols and memorabilia as possible, the other three schools did not follow such an approach. For example, the director of the religious-education programs at St. Isaac Jogues School suggested that there was no general sense that students in their school appreciated or even understood the importance of displaying traditionally Catholic iconography. Seeking to be sensitive to the diversity of religious traditions in their urban school, they were the most discreet in their use of visual representations. Indeed, classrooms generally have little more than a small crucifix and occasionally a painting.

The usual comment concerning the usefulness of Catholic iconography to foster an interest in the school is probably best summarized by a teacher at Champion who suggested, "Something new on the walls will hold the boys' attention for approximately three minutes before they no longer notice it." While this is obviously hyperbole, it does summarize what was observed and heard. From my own experience as a teacher in a Catholic school, I recognize that students quickly cease to notice the familiar within a school after a very short period. Although a statue may be in a prominent place, it often goes unnoticed.

An excellent example of the integration of Catholic iconography in a school takes place at Loyola College in India. Although there is not an abundance of statues or religious photographs around the school, there is a single, and prominently placed, statue of the Virgin Mary in the school chapel. According to the headmaster, students go into the chapel and leave flowers as a religious offering before major tests. Consequently, from what was observed, this statue receives more attention and respect than the

combined statues that adorn the classrooms of St. Michael's. In fostering a reverence for the holy, a single statue—when given exceptional significance—can be more important and more greatly appreciated than a hundred ignored statues.

#### Student Class Input

At all four schools, the teachers of the religious-education classes recognized—to greater or lesser degrees—that the most important way to attract the attention of students is to foster a style of classroom instruction initiated by the students. The religious-education classes presented as lectures were the least appreciated and, of the four schools observed, only St. Michael's continues to teach in this style—though in a limited manner. Nearly every interviewee articulated a recognition that the religious-education classes need to be directly relevant to the students' daily lives and that a teacher needs to rely on the interest of the students to determine the course outline. Therefore, data obtained from these teachers and administrators suggest that it is helpful to solicit the opinions of the students at the beginning of the school year so that class content may address topics the students consider important.

To give a specific example, a teacher of religion at Campion explained that after 11 September 2001, when two hijacked planes hit and destroyed the World Trade Centre in New York, students wanted to explore their emotional responses as well as the social and ethical implications surrounding this act of terrorism. Although the religious-education department had already established their course outlines at the beginning of the year, it was decided that the curriculum should be quickly revamped to allow time for students to discuss the events of that day. If the experience of teachers in these four schools holds true, classes of religious education, especially those that have a strong

focus on morality and ethics, need to be structured in ways that allow students to influence the classes in relevant directions—regardless of the established course outline.

### Intellectually Stimulating

A theme that emerged from both individual interviews and informal conversations suggests that the religious-education programs need to remain both relevant to the experiences of the students and, at the same time, be intellectually stimulating. Specifically at Campion, informal conversations with teachers revealed a concern that while their classes may be interesting to the students, they might not be intellectually challenging enough. Indeed, this was echoed by teachers in the three other schools who—to various degrees—suggested that sometimes there can be too much of a focus on abstract ideas such as *goodness* or *grace* without placing them into a relevant context. Ideally, it seems that teachers must learn to balance the affective and the practical, insofar as ideals need to be defined within a practical context. Presumably, the most relevant and intellectually stimulating teachers are those who can take an abstract concept and show how it directly affects students.

An example of this combination of abstract concepts with concrete examples occurred at St. Isaac Jogues School when the notion of *responsibility* was highlighted through the use of a newspaper article in which a high-school student was arrested after he was caught stealing a major piece of electronics from a local store. Although the teacher could have spoken abstractly about the topic, suggested that theft is wrong, and quoted the catechism, he raised a relevant topic that immediately interested the students. By allowing them to grapple with a situation that was more than just hypothetical, students were able to put an abstract notion into a real context.

### Teaching Styles

An informal conversation with the director of the religious-education programs at St. Isaac Jogues School suggests that religious-education and faith-formation programs must practically engage the students. According to his description, the teaching staff within his school increasingly avoids speaking about God and religion in traditional ways and are seeking to explore such notions through the experiences of the students. Certain documents such as the Bible and the Catholic catechism, which served as foundational resources in religious-education classes in many Indian schools for decades, are being relied upon less. Replacing the traditional parables found in the scriptures are experiences drawn from the collective wisdom of the group.

This movement away from traditional teaching methods toward more contemporary illustrations seem to hold true at all four schools. For example, students in Loyola are not just learning about the crucifixion of Jesus as a historical event, they are learning about the meaning of suffering and redemption through the newspapers, class discussions, and personal interactions within their own impoverished neighbourhood. At Campion, students are learning the Ten Commandments by writing their own personal commandments—specific rules of life that are related directly to their own personal experiences and situations.

Each of the four schools has begun to develop—if only in a limited manner—a media component to use in conjunction with their religious-education and faith-formation programs. Individuals within the Campus Ministry Departments at both Campion and St. Isaac Jogues articulated the importance that music and video have in their classrooms and in their religious celebrations. For example, Campion uses songs from contemporary

bands during the celebration of the Mass and St. Isaac Jogues shows movie clips at their all-school gatherings. Both music and video can reinforce a moral or religious topic in contemporary ways. Articulated in similar ways, individuals at both institutions suggested that their respective schools have sought to increase the use of media in religious-education and faith-formation programs since students no longer appreciate the traditional chalkboard and transparency overheads as the primary means of transmitting information.

### Reliance on Textbooks

Teachers in all four schools expressed a disappointment with the textbooks selected for their religious-education programs. At the two schools in India, textbooks are used as secondary resources, but go largely unused because of a perceived lack of relevance. The two schools in North America continue to use textbooks in the classrooms, but the level of use varies greatly depending on the particular teacher. Nearly all teachers at Campion spoke positively about the textbooks, but also recognized that they are quickly outdated and can often contain examples that are irrelevant to the student population. At St. Michael's High School, there are stacks of recently purchased—but now unused—textbooks in the school's basement. After one year of use, the chaplain of the school decided that they were no longer relevant or useful in daily classroom instruction.

From the observations at all four schools, it appears that textbooks for the religious-education classes should be selected with recognition that, while the foundational material within the textbook may not change, the approaches taken to convey it and the relevance of examples quickly do. Teachers should be asked to adapt

their teaching styles appropriately. For example, a class on the history of Christianity at Campion uses a textbook, since it contains the correct names, dates, and general information. However, the homework assignments listed in the back of each chapter of the textbook are considered as overly pious and no longer appropriate for the general student population. One question on discipleship, for example, asks how students could continue to follow Jesus in addition to the fulfilment of their religious duties, such as attendance at Church, daily prayer, and commitment to reading the scriptures. While this may have been appropriate for an all-Christian classroom at one time, it is clearly not relevant to a group of students from a mixed-religious background.

### *Naming*

#### The Admissions Process

The admissions criteria of each of the four schools openly allow the acceptance of non-Catholic and even non-Christian students. Although each school clearly articulates its preference for Catholic students, the acceptance of non-Catholic, non-Christian students is readily permitted. The major criteria that define whether a non-Catholic student will be admitted into St. Michael's and Campion typically rest upon the openness of the applicant to learn about the Catholic Church as well as an openness to embrace spiritual development. The major criteria that define whether a non-Catholic student will be admitted into St. Isaac Jogues and Loyola typically rest upon whether the applicant is willing to be educated in the Catholic milieu as well as whether there is a willingness to work toward becoming a more spiritually grounded individual.

Explicitly asked in the application process for both North American schools is the religious affiliation of the candidates, as well as their history of formal, institutionalized

religious practice. In contrast, neither of the schools in India requires students to belong to any formal religious institution, though St. Isaac Jogues does expect the Catholic students to receive all the necessary sacraments as they progress from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Ironically, St. Michael's High School, which is the school that seems the most interested in the religious affiliation of the candidates, does not differentiate the instruction between Catholic and non-Catholic students. The three other schools, which focus less on the traditions of the candidates during the application process, have differentiated instruction and programming. This is demonstrated in the way that Catholic students in Loyola have an extra class devoted specifically to Catholic religious instruction and non-Catholic students in all three schools are never obliged to participate in Catholic liturgical celebrations.

#### Religious Education versus Faith Formation

Each school draws a distinction between its religious-education classes and the faith-formation programs. The religious-education classes are designed to increase a student's understanding of Catholic teaching and doctrine while the faith-formation programs are designed to facilitate spiritual growth, regardless of the student's religious affiliation. Despite these distinctions, only Champion and Loyola have both religious-education classes and faith-formation programs. Alternatively, St. Michael's predominately focuses on religious education, while St. Isaac Jogues focuses predominantly on faith formation.

At both St. Michael's and Champion, all students are expected to participate in the religious-education programs, regardless of religious affiliation. These schools have developed programs that encompass Christian scripture and Catholic theology for all

students in the senior grades, and they also offer students the choice of a course in world religions. At Loyola, the religious-education classes are specifically designed for just the Catholic students, while the faith-formation classes, based on a government prescribed values-education program, are obligatory for both Catholic and non-Catholic students. At St. Isaac Jogues, all students participate in the classes devoted to faith formation.

At Loyola in India, as well as St. Michael's and Campion in North America, the religious-education classes are often unsuccessful in capturing the interest of the students. The schools in North America mandate that all students, including non-Catholic students, attend the religious-education classes, and so it is not surprising, perhaps, that many students are less than enthusiastic about them. Through a number of conversations at both schools in India, I concluded that this clear lack of interest is part of the reason why there is a general agreement that the religious-education programs—especially ones that focus specifically on Catholic themes—should never be mandatory for non-Catholic students. A recurring theme, emerging from conversations with both Jesuits and lay teachers in India, is that because the religious-education classes are difficult enough for Catholic students to understand and appreciate, it would be a shame to insist that non-Catholic students attend them too. Consequently, St. Isaac Jogues has dropped the religious-education classes at its school, even for the Catholic students.

#### School Facilitated Prayer

Each of the four schools used school-facilitated prayer as a way to build community and understanding between students of different religious traditions. However, only St. Isaac Jogues makes a consistent effort to have regular religious gatherings that specifically encompass a variety of religious traditions. For example, the

principal suggested that at each of the all-school gatherings, which occur every two weeks, readings from the Bible, the Qur'an, the Vedas, and Sri Guru Granth Sahib—respectively the Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Sikh holy scriptures—are all used.

Because of their efforts, the students at St. Isaac Jogues seem to be more appreciative than students in any other school of the school-facilitated prayer. Though not explicitly a goal of the gatherings, the use of different religious traditions clearly demonstrates how universal values such as tolerance, respect, friendship, and integrity are all present—in at least some form—in every tradition. The principal asserted that not only is regular prayer important for the school community, but it is equally important that such prayers include all traditions.

In contrast, St. Michael's, and to a lesser extent Campion, typically develops communal prayer services that are distinctly Catholic. Despite attempts to make these communal faith gatherings relevant to the student population, it seems that they provide only minimal spiritual sustenance for the students. Although most students accept that the schools are attempting to make the liturgical gatherings more up-to-date by using modern music, informal conversations with teachers revealed that the students typically find communal prayer that is specifically Catholic in its focus overly ritualized and uninspiring.

### Finding the Right Place

According to teachers in all four schools, students are generally interested in learning about the religious traditions of their peers. India, however, is officially a secular nation and discussion about religious affiliation is generally kept out of the public sphere. As a result, school students are not encouraged to speak about what it means to be

religious within the context of their daily lives. This cultural taboo leads to a general lack of discussion about religion and God in the classrooms and a general hesitancy to explore another's religious tradition through informal conversation. However, despite this tentativeness, there is a great deal of flexibility for alternative methods of religious discovery. Unlike North America, which has more defined religious boundaries, students in India are not afraid to attend religious services or celebrate holidays that lie outside their specific faith traditions. In this way, religious exploration is much more dynamic since it is more experiential.

In contrast, there is a great openness and desire among students at both St. Michael's and Campion to dialogue about alternative religious traditions. The Christian students at these two schools were described as being curious about non-Christian religions. Similarly, teachers identified students of Hindu, Islamic, and Sikh descent as often very willing to talk about their own traditions in public forums. Specifically, a member of the Campus Ministry department at Campion identified Christian Life Communities as one of the primary locations where students spoke openly and authentically about religious differences. The chaplain at St. Michael's asserted that a religion class on world religions was the ideal place for students to explore other religious traditions.

Interestingly, even though schools in India and North America approached religious exploration from different perspectives, each school was able to find ways in which students could encounter different forms of religious expression.

### Religious Expression

Although no single institution has school-facilitated prayer that regularly highlights the diversity of faith traditions present in the school—except St. Isaac Jogues, administrators at both Indian schools stressed how important it is for students to have time and space to practice their own religious devotions personally and on a regular basis. Therefore, both schools allow specific time during the day for the students to pray according to their own religious traditions. Although the schools never mandate how prayer should occur, both schools are adamant that students should take the time for prayer.

In contrast, neither school in North America allows time within the busy daily schedule for personal reflection. Despite documents from both schools that stress the importance of a regular prayer life, neither St. Michael's nor Campion gave adequate time for such personal development within the school day.

While the students at both schools in India are very comfortable praying according to their own traditions, students in North America clearly do not understand prayer as something that can be a regular part of their lives. However, if schools are going to insist that prayer is an important part of what it means to be a human being, then they must allow time for its development.

### School Calendar

To some degree, at least, a school demonstrates what it considers important by what it declares to be worthy of a holiday. At both schools in India, as well as at most other private Christian schools in the country, students are given a holiday for all major Christian and non-Christian feasts. Unlike their counterparts in North America, both

Loyola and St. Isaac Jogues provide opportunities for students of the Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions to be with their families on important holidays. While obviously not their intention, schools in North America—which have growing non-Christian student populations—give unarticulated messages to the student body that Christian holidays are more important than non-Christian holidays.

With respect to fostering dialogue and tolerance among students, allowing students to celebrate the holidays of diverse religious traditions is very important. When the school recognizes the importance of all religious holidays, the students begin to consider other traditions as being significant. For example, students at Loyola help decorate the school not only for Christmas, but also for holidays within the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Muslim traditions. By showing an acceptance of all religious traditions, the school not only affirms the specific religious tradition of every student, but it also unifies the entire student population in a common goal and purpose.

#### Retreat Experiences

One of the major differences that North American schools have from their Indian counterparts is the creative process that is put into the development of retreat programs. Campion has the most developed retreat programs, and both teachers and students speak highly of their importance as a tool for faith formation and spiritual development. The retreat programs at Campion offer students of all religious traditions the opportunity to dialogue with other students in intimate and open ways. Further, they provide a forum in which non-sectarian religious expression is fostered and appreciated.

Many Jesuit schools in North America are developing similar retreat programs, and while a school like St. Michael's has not yet fully developed such a program, the

Campion style of faith formation is gaining influence in Catholic and Jesuit schools across the continent. Without doubt, these programs serve as a fundamental way for schools to encourage religious expression outside the context of the regular academic programs. They provide opportunities for students to encounter what it means to be religious in ways that are not necessarily bound to the Catholic traditions associated with the religious gatherings that traditionally occur at the school. The retreats, by their very nature, are more flexible in their design and visibly allow for greater creativity in faith formation.

*Making Available the Common Story and Vision*

Authentic Christian Witness

Each of the four Jesuit institutions clearly demonstrated that the Catholic identity of a school must be highlighted through actions and not simply words. The president of St. Michael's High School believes that all students, even non-Catholic students, must be familiar with common Catholic prayers, be knowledgeable about significant Catholic personalities and events, and understand the fundamentals of Catholic teaching. There is an expectation that these matters become familiar by the time a student graduates.

In contrast, Campion tends to avoid such traditional forms of evangelization. Teachers are expected to allow for diversity in opinions within the classroom, and students are encouraged to explore Catholicism, but always within the context of their own religious experience. There is a general sense that students need to understand and be familiar with Catholicism, but that they do not need to agree with it. A conversation with a Jesuit priest, who is a long-time staff member at the school, revealed a

disappointment with his perception that many non-Catholic students graduate with no deeper an awareness of Catholic traditions and teaching than they had when they arrived.

The two schools in India demonstrate an approach toward Catholic evangelization that is quite different from what is found at both North American Schools. Although both Loyola and St. Isaac Jogues are Catholic institutions, there is a clear sense from the school administration that the transmission of the Catholic faith to all students, especially the non-Catholic students, is of minimal importance. Consequently, with such large non-Christian student populations, both schools avoid using too many external expressions of Catholic piety and symbolism.

Informal conversations with Jesuits at both Loyola and St. Isaac Jogues suggest that the Catholic ethos of the school is best observed by the ways in which gospel values are lived on the campus. Both schools articulated that the best way for the faculty to transmit the meaning of Catholicism to the students is through living lives of love, compassion, tolerance, and respect. There is a focus on authentic Christian witness in both Indian schools, and individuals whose lives demonstrate this witness are held up as examples. Indeed, though an individual such as Mahatma Gandhi was not a Catholic, or even a Christian, he is held up as an ideal example of Christian Witness.

#### Teacher Formation

Such a major focus on authentic Christian witness necessarily demands that a school place a great deal of energy on teacher formation. As a result of a major focus on authentic Christian witness, both St. Isaac Jogues and Campion recognize that teachers who form students into moral and religious individuals need to practice what they are preaching. Though many teachers are not Catholic themselves, they are expected to

model good moral behaviour consistent with Catholic teaching insofar as they have firm reputations and are respected by the students as ethical and moral persons. Both schools assert that any person can teach about religion, but only someone who has embarked upon the spiritual journey can facilitate faith formation. The goal of teacher formation is to develop educators into moral persons who will seek to find how God is active in their own lives and lead students on the same quest.

#### Catholic Ritual

Aside from St. Michael's High School, only Catholic students in the schools are obliged to participate in the explicitly Catholic rituals. Whether it is the weekly recitation of the rosary at Loyola or the celebration of Mass at Campion, these activities are optional for non-Catholic students. Interviews at all three schools revealed a perception that such rituals are so specifically Catholic in their nature that they are not useful for fostering spiritual development in non-Catholic students. Although the schools feel that it is not profitable for non-Catholic students to attend Catholic rituals, none of the three schools foster similar religious gatherings specifically for the non-Catholic students. Therefore, while Catholics are celebrating such rituals, the non-Catholics are expected to be in study hall or in unfacilitated prayer elsewhere in the school. It was suggested by a teacher at Campion that it would be good practice to have a general prayer service for those students who do not attend the celebrations of the Mass. This would allow the whole school to pray at the same time, though in ways appropriate to each religious tradition.

After a number of discussions with teachers and administrators, it seems as though optional attendance for non-Catholic students seems appropriate. Indeed, one

teacher at Loyola pointed out that students in many convent schools in India are expected to attend Catholic services regardless of religious affiliation, but that this creates animosity toward both the sisters who run the school and the Catholic Church itself. According to this teacher, and articulated by others in informal conversations, there is less tension between the academic institution and the students when non-Catholic students are *invited* to participate in Catholic celebrations, but are never required to participate. If the goal of Catholic institutions is to build tolerance and foster religious growth, students should learn how to pray according to their own traditions.

### *Integrating and Responding*

#### Religious Integration

Classroom observation at all four schools revealed a dedication toward student integration of the classroom material. Whether it was Campion—which allowed a general discussion in the first five minutes of class, or Loyola—which allowed students to discuss topics of personal importance, each school provided a forum where students could reflect upon previous experience. According to the Jesuit teachers in all four schools, the hallmark of Jesuit education rests upon reflection and action. Students need to be given an opportunity to integrate and synthesize their experiences within the context of a supportive and nurturing community.

#### Follow-Up Programs

Rooted in the belief that reflection is an integral part of an educational experience, the Jesuit Secondary Educational Association (JSEA) in the United States has asserted that the religious-education and faith-formation programs at Jesuit schools should allow for opportunities to incorporate and integrate the students' major religious experiences,

both while they are students and also after graduation. Therefore, Campion—which is affiliated with the JSEA—spends a great deal of effort trying to develop and foster forums that allow for such discussion and appropriation through religiously themed reunions and retreats for alumni. However, it must be noted that none of the other three schools offers such programs—either prior to or after a student’s graduation.

For whatever reasons, there are no school-organized reunions for students to build upon the in-school faith-formation experiences. Perhaps a part of the reason for this lack of a follow-up is that, aside from Campion, the other three schools do not have intense, sustained faith-formation and retreat programs.

#### Post-Graduation Relationship

Though all schools articulate the importance of following up with students in their religious development once they have left the school, none of the schools has developed a specific program. Some of the schools cited a lack of interest or too distant a relationship between students and the chaplaincy department for such programs to work. All four schools spoke about creating regular forums for gathering alumni, such as Christian Life Communities or Small Human Communities, where individuals can return, make connections, dialogue about the spiritual life, and continue to grow religiously. However, in none of the schools were such programs even in the long-term planning stages.

#### Alumni Organisations

Each of the schools has developed an alumni organisation. Campion has retreat programs for alumni, but St. Isaac Jogues is the only institution with an alumni organization that has a spiritual component. Indeed, St. Isaac Jogues has a desire to foster the strong service component associated with the alumni organisation and root it in the

school's spiritual tradition. Whereas the other three schools use the alumni organisation as primarily a fundraising unit, the central focus of the St. Isaac Jogues alumni organization is community service with a strong focus on using its resources to help disadvantaged children.

#### University and College

Only students from Campion have an adequate means to continue with religious and spiritual development once they have graduated. This is primarily because of the relationship that Campion has with other Jesuit universities and colleges in the United States. According to the alumni office, most students attend Jesuit universities and colleges after graduation from Campion. Accordingly, the chaplaincy of each of these institutions is informed of the arrival of students who have been educated at Campion. Therefore, even though students have left high school, they are still encouraged to participate in the religious-formation programs offered by a Jesuit institution at the university level. Many students from Campion become actively involved in the campus ministry departments on the post-secondary campuses.

Regarding the other three schools, relationships between the secondary institution and local colleges and universities do not exist. Therefore, when students leave the school for post-secondary education, they no longer receive a daily, sustained religious formation. Despite this lack of continued contact, both schools in India have begun to include a strong spiritual component in their alumni mailings. Likewise, St. Michael's tries to remain in contact with students through the Internet and e-mail, especially for the continuation of spiritual formation.

*Conclusion*

While this thesis does highlight a diversity of approaches that can be used in fostering dialogue, what was demonstrated most clearly through the analysis of the data is that specific dialogue about religion and God is not a primary focus in any of the schools. In fact, surprisingly, individuals at both schools in India considered interpersonal dialogue about religious affiliation to be socially unacceptable. Instead, the approach developed at these schools and, to varying degrees, the two schools in North America, is to foster character development and religious tolerance based on the trusted principles of moral and values education that is rooted in the direct unmediated experiences of the students.

To differing degrees, each school has tried to implement programs that allow for an exploration of religious diversity that find their meaning in the similarities—not the differences—that exist between students. Rather than trying to identify and highlight what makes each religious tradition unique, the schools seek to form individuals who are religiously progressive, spiritually grounded, and rooted in a strong sense of ethical individuality—regardless of their specific faith traditions.

Accordingly, the starting point for dialogue concerning religion and God is not a student's specific religious affiliation. Rather, dialogue about diversity seems to emerge naturally from an understanding of another's most basic human experiences. By moving away from a focus on religious differences, and toward a reflection on common experiences, a greater sense of acceptance and tolerance is more easily achieved.

*Recommendations for Further Research*

This study has revealed a number of areas where further research concerning how and to what extent the religious-education programs, faith formation, and spiritual ethos in Catholic schools can cultivate dialogue about and foster experiences of religion and God in light of the diversity of faith traditions present in the student population.

From the data obtained in this study, it appears that Catholic schools with large non-Catholic, non-Christian student populations are beginning to think creatively about their religious-education and faith-formation programs. While the Catholic roots of the school cannot be ignored, it seems that administrators and teachers in Catholic schools want the programming and general culture of the school to engage both the Catholic and non-Catholic students. How Catholic schools can best be faithful to presenting their unique tradition while creatively presenting institutional material, such as the Bible or the catechism, in relevant and contemporary ways to all students continues to be of significance.

Closely related to this issue is the perceived lack of interest surrounding the specifically Catholic focused religious-education programs, as observed in this research. The data collected for this thesis suggest that at least some classroom content needs to be derived from the personal experiences of the students, but whether this is the best or only approach remains unclear. What is known is that if students are not interested in the religious-education and faith-formation programs, the energy of the teaching staff is misspent.

Another possibility for further research is based on what Indian schools offer to North American schools, by way of example, concerning the willingness of students to

engage in personal prayer throughout the day. Presumably, if religious expression is an important part of what makes a Catholic school so special, then schools in North America could afford more time for personal prayer within the daily schedule. However, data obtained from interviews in this study suggest that there is a general belief among North American teachers that, unless students are officially mandated to pray through either school-facilitated-prayer or school liturgies, they will not do so—however, this is an unsubstantiated claim. A study on what the implementation of personal prayer time in Catholic schools in North America would look like and how the students would respond to such a program could be very interesting.

The diversity of approaches that Catholic schools take in order to foster a specifically Catholic identity in their respective schools was a dominant theme raised in this study. Clearly, every school has its own understanding about the importance that religious art has in fostering such a Catholic identity. An issue related to imagery would be to what extent pious devotions such as a communal recitation of the rosary or Eucharistic adoration affect the students. Unanswered questions remain about the extent to which students and school culture are impacted by such outward expressions of piety.

Finally, a methodological study on the continuing faith lives of graduates from Catholic schools would be very timely. Great efforts are put into the formation of individuals who are rooted in the Catholic faith, but to what extent these students continue to express themselves religiously after graduation is not known. A survey of graduates, both Catholic and non-Catholic, who attended Catholic schools would articulate more clearly to what level Catholic schools that claim to transmit the fundamentals of the Catholic faith are actually successful in their mission.

*Epilogue*

This thesis provided an opportunity for me to explore the varied means by which Catholic schools in the Jesuit tradition are able to foster dialogue and build tolerance between students of different religious traditions.

It has allowed me to gain new perspectives on the ways in which students can and should be formed religiously within Jesuit schools. By developing and implementing new programs that allow students to dialogue about religion and God in ways that are not bound to traditional models, chaplains, teachers, and administrators are able to foster pedagogical techniques that permit a greater acceptance of all religious perspectives.

The paths by which individuals approach God are diverse, and the religious-education and faith-formation programs must be just as dynamic. If encouraged to develop themselves as moral and ethical individuals who are open to alternative forms of expression in all spheres of life, students in Jesuit schools will naturally gain an increased sense of tolerance for religious diversity.

From this, I drew the conclusion that Catholic schools can no longer approach their religious-education and faith-formation programs from a perspective that is limited to a single faith-based language. Instead, spiritual formation must focus on developing individuals who are grounded in a sense of their own moral and ethical integrity. In doing this, education becomes a process in which authentic and tolerant religious expression is fostered within the larger community.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Jumoad (Asianews.it, 2004) of Isabela de Basilan suggests that the local school in his town is one of the most important institutions, because it allows for an opportunity to foster inter-religious dialogue that may ultimately bring about peace.

<sup>2</sup> See Fernando (2001) on the need for educational structures that form individuals who are able to listen to their own consciences and determine moral outcomes for themselves.

<sup>3</sup> This is similar to Rudolph Otto (1936), who understood the “numen” as the penultimate reality that transcends all faith traditions. Like Kant’s notion of “religion,” the “numen” is the unifying factor between all faith traditions.

<sup>4</sup> For a general overview concerning the development of the public and private school systems in Canada, see Ghosh (1995, pp. 112-136).

<sup>5</sup> The Canadian government’s 1962 changes to the Immigration Act specifically stated that “any suitably qualified person from any part of the world could be considered for immigration to Canada, without regard to his race, colour, national origin, or the country from which he comes” (Canadian Heritage, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Between 1981 and 1991, the census in Canada reported a 144% increase in the category “other non-Christian religions” (Donlon, 1991, pp. 45-47).

<sup>7</sup> Astley (1994, p. 14) makes a subtle distinction between the process of teaching religion and teaching about religion.

<sup>8</sup> The Canadian Census (2001) states that 16.2% of the Canadian population identifies itself as having no religion. However, it could be argued that individuals in that category are not necessarily atheist, since there was no category for those who identify themselves as agnostic or spiritual but not affiliated with a mainstream religious tradition.

<sup>9</sup> [Religioustolerance.org](http://Religioustolerance.org) (1991) took a survey that suggested that only 38 percent of Canadians attend church regularly.

<sup>10</sup> Astley (1994) claims that education is primarily a practical activity that should bring about an outward change in an individual. Education that does not bring about transformation in the learner's attitudes or behaviour has not fulfilled its mandate.

<sup>11</sup> For more information, see Creamer (1982), who undertook a thorough examination of a values program in a Jesuit, Catholic high school in the early 1980s.

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APPENDICIES

*Appendix A – Ethics Board Approval Certificate*



UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA

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**APPROVAL CERTIFICATE**

25 November 2004

**TO:** Jeffrey Burwell (Advisor D. Creamer)  
Principal Investigator

**FROM:** Stan Straw, Chair  
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

**Re:** Protocol #E2004:097  
**“Another Experience of the Holy: Fostering Dialogue about Religion  
and God in Catholic Schools with Multi-Faith Student Populations”**

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement. This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

**Please note that, if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.**

*Appendix B – Demographic Enquiry*

- Number of Catholic students currently in the school
- Number of non-Catholic students currently in the school
  - Breakdown concerning specific numbers of non-Catholic religious affiliations of students in school
- Number of Catholic teachers currently in the school
- Number of non-Catholic teachers currently in the school
- Breakdown concerning specific numbers of non-Catholic religious affiliations of teachers in school

*Appendix C – Letter of Contact for Participant*

November 2004

Dear

I am writing to request your participation in a Master of Education research project carried out by me in conjunction with the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The thesis will seek to understand the varied means by which Catholic schools around the world with diverse multifaith student populations foster authentic dialogue about the nature of God and religious experiences and expression in light of the diversity of faith traditions as identified in the student population.

Research Project Title: **Another Experience of the Holy:**  
Fostering Dialogue about Religion and God in  
Catholic Schools with Multifaith Student  
Populations

Researcher: Jeffrey S. Burwell

The procedures proposed in this study include both the observation of the religious education classes and/or faith formation programs as well as informal, unrecorded discourse directly relating the aforementioned programs. It is not anticipated that there will be any risk to you or your school for participating in this study.

Both you and the school will be given pseudonyms. Aside from my academic advisor, Dr. David Creamer, I will be the only individual who will have access to the observation notes. These notes will be destroyed one year after the completion of the thesis, which is expected to be 1 July 2005. The final report may general themes that emerge from your religious education and/or faith formation program, but confidentiality for both you and your school will be strictly maintained.

It is intended that the results will be published and made available to both the University of Manitoba as well as Catholic schools around the world. If you wish to receive a copy of the final thesis, please indicate in the space below.

*Letter of Initial Contact Continued...*

Your signature on the form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and wish to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release me, the researcher, from my legal and professional responsibility. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If at any time before the completion of this study you wish to withdraw, please contact Jeffrey Burwell either by email, phone, or general post and all interview material and/or data obtained from the time of your initial consent will be immediately destroyed.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat of the University of Manitoba. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Jeffrey Burwell  
St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba

*Appendix D – Participant Consent Form*

After having read the letter outlining this study, I agree to allow **Jeffrey Burwell** to observe my religious education classes and/or faith formation programs as well as to extract any themes obtained from either these classes and/or programs as well as from informal, unrecorded discourse directly relating to the aforementioned programs for the study titled:

**Another Experience of the Holy:** Fostering Dialogue about Religion and God in Catholic Schools with Multifaith Student Populations

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Would you please confirm these details.

Name:

Phone number (Residence):

Phone Number (Work):

Address:

At the conclusion of the project, I wish to receive a final copy of the thesis:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

*Appendix E – Interview Protocol***Area 1:** *Focusing the Dialogue*

- How does your school motivate students to embrace the study and practice of religion?
- How is religion and the act of being religious understood and accepted in your school?

**Area 2:** *Naming*

- What does your school do for non-Catholic, non-Christian students to allow them to practice and learn about their own faith traditions?
- What sort of dialogue do you foster between Catholic or non-Catholic, non-Christian students about interpersonal faith expression?
- Do you allow forums in which students can speak about their experiences of the transcendent or God in ways that may be contrary to Catholic teaching?
- Do you have religious services that encompass non-Catholic traditions?

**Area 3:** *Making available the common story and vision*

- What specific, in-class religious-education programs are offered to the students?
- Could you describe some of the major themes and outcomes associated with your religious-education program?
- What extra-curricular programs do your students have the opportunity to participate in that are religious- or faith-based?
- How would you describe the religious-education program of your school as regards faith development for Catholic students?
- How would you describe the religious-education program of your school as regards faith development for non-Catholic, non-Christian students?
- How does your school articulate the differences in religious practices in the student body while maintaining the importance of the Jesuit and Catholic identity of the school?

**Area 4:** *Integrating and Responding*

- What processes do you have in place that would allow students to articulate or reflect upon new understandings gained through the religious-education programs at the school?
- What religious follow-up does your school have for students who have graduated?

*Appendix F – Letter of Contact for Interviewee*

November 2004

Dear

I am writing to request your participation in a Master of Education research project carried out by me in conjunction with the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The thesis will seek to understand the varied means by which Catholic schools around the world with diverse multifaith student populations foster authentic dialogue about the nature of God and religious experiences and expression in light of the diversity of faith traditions as identified in the student population.

Research Project Title: **Another Experience of the Holy:**  
Fostering Dialogue about Religion and God in  
Catholic Schools with Multifaith Student  
Populations

Researcher: Jeffrey S. Burwell

The procedures proposed in this study include a one-hour interview with you on topics surrounding the religious education program and Catholic nature of your school in light of the multifaith student population. The interview itself will focus on issues relevant to the religious education programs and faith formation in your school. A more detailed list of the questions will be sent to you before we schedule an interview time.

It is not anticipated that there will be any risk to you or your school for participating in this study. Although the interview will be audio taped and notes will be prepared, confidentiality will be maintained. You will have a chance to expand upon or nuance any of the notes taken from the recording if you so choose before the publication of the findings.

Both you and the school will be given pseudonyms. Aside from my academic advisor, Dr. David Creamer, I will be the only individual who will have access

*Letter of Initial Contact Continued...*

to the interview notes and recordings. These notes and recordings will be destroyed one year after the completion of the thesis, which is expected to be 1 July 2005. The final report may contain quotations from the interview notes in order to illustrate points, but confidentiality for both you and your school will be strictly maintained.

It is intended that the results will be published and made available to both the University of Manitoba as well as Catholic schools around the world. If you wish to receive a copy of the final thesis, please indicate in the space below.

Your signature on the form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and wish to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release me, the researcher, from my legal and professional responsibility. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If at any time before the completion of this study you wish to withdraw, please contact Jeffrey Burwell either by email, phone, or general post and all interview material and/or data obtained from the time of your initial consent will be immediately destroyed.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat of the University of Manitoba. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Jeffrey Burwell  
St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba

*Appendix G – Interviewee Consent Form*

After having read the letter outlining this study, I agree to be interviewed by **Jeffrey Burwell** for the study titled:

**Another Experience of the Holy:** Fostering Dialogue about Religion and God in Catholic Schools with Multifaith Student Populations

Participant's Signature:

Date:

If you agree to be interviewed, I will contact you upon return of this letter to arrange an interview at a place and time convenient to you. I will also send you a copy of the proposed interview questions at that time.

Would you please confirm these details.

Name:

Phone number (Residence):

Phone Number (Work):

Address:

At the conclusion of the project, I wish to receive a final copy of the thesis:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

*Appendix H – Letter of Contact for Chief Administrator*

November 2004

Dear

I am writing to request your participation in a Master of Education research project carried out by me in conjunction with the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. The thesis will seek to understand the varied means by which Catholic schools around the world with diverse multifaith student populations foster authentic dialogue about the nature of God and religious experiences and expression in light of the diversity of faith traditions as identified in the student population.

Research Project Title: **Another Experience of the Holy:**  
Fostering Dialogue about Religion and God in  
Catholic Schools with Multifaith Student  
Populations

Researcher: Jeffrey S. Burwell

The procedures proposed in this study include a one-hour interview with you or faculty at your school on topics surrounding the religious education program and Catholic nature of your school in light of the multifaith student population. The interview itself will focus on issues relevant to the religious education programs and faith formation in your school. Likewise, observation of religious education and/or faith formation programs at the school as facilitated by staff members will occur. Finally, informal conversations may occur with staff members, administrators, and parents concerning these programs in order to extract themes directly related to the religious education and faith formation programs.

It is not anticipated that there will be any risk to you or your school for participating in this study. Although the interviews will be audio taped and notes will be prepared, confidentiality will be maintained.

*Letter of Initial Contact Continued...*

Both you and the school will be given pseudonyms. Aside from my academic advisor, Dr. David Creamer, I will be the only individual who will have access to the notes and recordings. These notes and recordings will be destroyed one year after the completion of the thesis, which is expected to be 1 July 2005. The final report may contain quotations from the interview notes and general themes from the observation of the religious education and faith formation programs in order to illustrate points, but confidentiality for both you and your school will be strictly maintained.

It is intended that the results will be published and made available to both the University of Manitoba as well as Catholic schools around the world. If you wish to receive a copy of the final thesis, please indicate in the space below.

Your signature on the form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and wish to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release me, the researcher, from my legal and professional responsibility. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

If at any time before the completion of the study you wish to withdraw your school, please contact Jeffrey Burwell either by email, phone, or general post and all interview material and/or data obtained from the time of your initial consent will be immediately destroyed.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact the Human Ethics Secretariat of the University of Manitoba. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Jeffrey Burwell  
St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba

*Appendix I – Chief Administrator Consent Form*

After having read the letter outlining this study, I agree to allow **Jeffrey Burwell** to carry out the following study within my school and I affirm that I have the authority to give this permission for the study titled:

**Another Experience of the Holy: Fostering Dialogue about Religion and God in Catholic Schools with Multifaith Student Populations**

Participant's Signature:

Date:

School's Name:

If you agree to allow this study to take place within your school, I will contact you upon return of this letter to arrange mutually convenient dates for my visit to your school.

Would you please confirm these details.

Name:

Phone number (Residence):

Phone Number (Work):

Address:

At the conclusion of the project, I wish to receive a final copy of the thesis:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No