

A Catholic Approach to Visual Theology

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## **Abstract:**

This thesis explores the role that beauty (aesthetics) plays in increasing the spiritual capital of pupils within Catholic educational settings.

Inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar's project of returning beauty to the 'main artery' of Christian thought, this thesis provides a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art as a means of enriching knowledge, understanding, and transmitting the faith within a Catholic educational context, and possibly elsewhere. Inevitably a framework for the interpretation of Christian art draws upon Art history for its context, namely visual rhetoric, the cultural historical method of 'seeing things their way' and its counterpart in Art history the 'period eye.' Yet it cannot be restricted to its methods and content because of the consistency in which it fails to notice the theological significance of images. Therefore, a framework for the interpretation of Christian art necessarily includes a *theological aesthetic thread*.

The uniqueness of the framework for interpreting Christian works of art that this thesis presents, consist of a trifold criterion: *the site of its beholding*; the moment when the viewer encounters an image in light of faith; *the site of the image*, and the *theological aesthetic thread*; with its hierarchical project of 'ways of seeing,' namely *blepó*, *theóreó*, and *horaó*, which ensures an overarching continuity and connectivity throughout the above-mentioned sites. This thesis argues that it is this which enables and reveals a deeper and more profound appreciation of what Christian images express and mean for the beholder today. This is approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective, which draws upon and incorporates Scripture, the teachings of the Catholic Church, the lived experiences of the saints in light, and the practices of the faithful. In doing so, this thesis will contribute to the newly emergent sub-field of visual theology. To demonstrate the effectiveness of the theological aesthetic framework it is applied to a case study on a series of depictions of the Annunciation emanating from the Early Italian Renaissance period.

In order to analyse, explore, and evaluate the efficacy of utilising the visual arts as 'theological and spiritual aesthetic resources,' there is a need to include a practitioner's research element within the thesis. Fieldwork research is a key component in this study as without it there is a danger that the literature search could lack relevance. Therefore, a fieldwork research project consisting of in-depth semi-structured interviews, and an online survey is conducted for the purpose of ascertaining how, and to what extent the visual arts are used as theological aesthetic resources for increasing spiritual capital in students within a Catholic educational setting.

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**List of Abbreviations:**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| BOS     | <i>Bristol Online Survey</i>  |
| CCC     | <i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>   |
| CES     | <i>Catholic Education Service for England and Wales</i>                               |
| CPD     | <i>Continuing Professional Development Courses</i>                                    |
| DLQQ    | <i>A Dialogue between the Literature Review and Qualitative/Quantitative Research</i> |
| FIG     | <i>Figure</i>   |
| GCSE    | <i>General Certificate of Secondary Education</i>                                     |
| GDPR    | <i>General Data Protection Regulation</i>   |
| GL1     | <i>The Glory of the Lord: Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 1</i>                          |
| Jisc    | <i>Joint Information Systems Committee</i>  |
| NRSV-CE | <i>New Revised Standard Bible – Catholic Edition</i>                                  |
| PCC     | <i>Pontifical Council for Culture</i>   |
| RA      | <i>Religious of the Assumption</i>  |
| TD's    | <i>In Service Training Days (INSET days)</i>  |



## Chapter 1 A Catholic Approach to Visual Theology

### 1. Rationale

Whilst studying for my MA dissertation in Pastoral Theology,<sup>1</sup> a gap in research was identified in relation to the decline in religious literacy (as it currently stands), and role that the visual arts play in increasing the spiritual capital<sup>2</sup> of pupils within Catholic educational settings. Taking that into consideration, alongside the declarations and the recommendations found in a number of key Catholic Church documents<sup>3</sup> to find new ways of transmitting the faith to the faithful, it is clear that there is both a call and a need to provide a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art. As this connection is rarely made within the academic world, a study which explores the role that beauty (aesthetics) plays in increasing the spiritual capital of pupils within Catholic educational settings will par consequence contribute specifically to the newly emergent subfield of visual theology.

### The Focus of Study

Inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar's project of returning beauty to the 'main artery'<sup>4</sup> of Christian theological thought, the focus of this thesis is to explore, add depth to and develop a Catholic approach to the newly emergent concept of visual theology for the purpose of enriching knowledge, understanding, and communicating the faith within a Catholic educational context, and possibly elsewhere. This will be achieved, in part, by developing a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art. In order to do that, this thesis investigates the role that beauty (aesthetics) plays in increasing the spiritual capital of pupils within a Catholic educational setting.

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<sup>1</sup> Morrison, C., RA. (2012) *The Personal and the Profound: Meeting the Saviour via the Visual Arts*.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Grace in *Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets and Morality* (2002) defined the concept of 'spiritual capital' as 'resources of faith and values derived from commitment to a religious tradition.' Grace. (2002) p.236. The concept of 'spiritual capital' was later developed by Grace in (2010) *Mission Integrity: Contemporary challenges for Catholic school leaders* 'as - 1] a source of vocational empowerment because it provides a transcendent awareness that can guide judgement and action in the mundane world, so that those whose own formation has involved the acquisition of spiritual capital do not act in education simply as professionals, but as professionals and witnesses. 2] a form of spirituality in which the whole of human life is viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ and the saints, through the indwelling of the Spirit. 3] a form of spirituality which has been the animating, inspirational and dynamic spirit which has empowered the mission of Catholic education internationally largely (although not exclusively) through the work of religious congregations with missions in education.' Grace. (2010) p.125.

<sup>3</sup> The Pontifical Council for Culture's concluding document *The Via Pulchritudinis (The Way of Beauty): Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*. (2006), and *Instrumentum Laboris: The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelisation*. (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Balthasar's usage of the term 'main artery' is unusual in the sense that an artery suggests heart and not mind of Christian thought. However, it brings home the point of highlighting the importance of reinstating Christian theological thought back into the spiritual heart of theology. See Balthasar (1982) *GL*. p.9.

Whilst this thesis is inspired by von Balthasar's theological aesthetical project, his methodology has not been applied directly to the research itself, rather, it draws upon and develops von Balthasar's theme of restoring aesthetics to its rightful place alongside that of goodness and truth. Notwithstanding that, it does not attempt to undertake a substantive or groundbreaking theological treatment of his theological aesthetics. Rather, in exploring Balthasar's works it will assist the reader to understand the genealogy and of theological aesthetics in the twentieth century in relation to returning beauty to Christian theological thought, in particular Catholic theology, and how that correlates to contemporary interpretations of the Christian experience. Moreover, part I of the *Literature Review* takes an historicist than theological approach to Balthasar's work. Nevertheless, inevitably there will be a certain amount of overlap between the two different approaches. In part 2 of the *Literature Review* the thesis seeks to integrate both an historicist and a theological approach to the field of visual theology. This is achieved through the lens of a Catholic sacramental perspective.

Growing in spiritual capital, to be evangelised, and to evangelise others is the mission of all the faithful. That is, Christians are called to grow in the likeness of God's own image by modeling themselves and their practices both spiritual and professional on that of Christ. As the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) in his book *The Glory of The Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume I: Seeing the Form* (1982) argued,

*As a totality of spirit and body, man must make himself into God's mirror and seek to attain to that transcendence and radiance that must be found in the world's substance if it is indeed God's image and likeness – his word and gesture, action and drama.*<sup>5</sup>

However, according to a number of recent scholarly articles, Gallup reports, and books the teachings of the Catholic faith are not as well known, understood, loved and practiced as they were in previous decades.<sup>6</sup> The XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in *Instrumentum Laboris* (2015) *The Pastoral*

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<sup>5</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *The Glory of The Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume I: Seeing the Form*. p.22.

<sup>6</sup> Lydia Saad in a Gallup report published in 2018 stated that, 'From 2014 to 2017, an average of 39% of Catholics reported attending church in the past seven days. This is down from an average of 45% from 2005 to 2008 and represents a steep decline from 75% in 1955.' Available at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/232226/church-attendance-among-catholics-resumes-downward-slide.aspx>. (Accessed: 22 October 2018). For an in-depth analysis of the decline in Mass attendance see Brown, C. G. (2001) *The Death of Christian Britain*. Oxon: Routledge, and Bullivant, Steven (2019) *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II*.

*Challenges of The Family in The Context of Evangelisation*, echoed these findings when they stated that, there is in fact ‘a decline in sacramental and Christian practice among the faithful to the point that some members can even be called “non-believers”’.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this phenomenon is becoming increasingly common place in the Western world and is a cause for real concern in areas which were once considered strongholds of the Christian faith, namely Catholic places of education.

Whilst there are invariably many complex factors which have contributed to the decline in sacramental and Christian practice amongst the faithful, Balthasar argued that since the Enlightenment the role of beauty in Christian theology has been abandoned by both theologians and philosophers alike. That is, for far too long theological inquiry has pursued the transcendentals of truth and goodness and has left beauty behind. Von Balthasar’s argument is that as a result of the abandonment of beauty, theological discourse has become dry, dull and all too uninteresting.<sup>8</sup> As Aidan Nichols OP states in *A Key to Balthasar* (2011),

*Beauty’s separation from the other transcendentals, and the consequent rise of what Balthasar terms the ‘aestheticisation’ of the beautiful, is at least partly responsible, he thinks, for the inability of people to pray and contemplate.*<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the impact of ‘the aestheticisation of the beauty’<sup>10</sup> on religion and the arts has had profound and far-reaching effects. Therefore, the primary goal of von Balthasar’s epic trilogy on the transcendentals was to restore theology to its former glory. He stated that,

*It is not therefore, our intent to yield to some whim and force theology into a little travelled side road, but rather to restore theology to a main artery which it has abandoned.*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*. (2015) *The Pastoral Challenges of The Family in The Context of Evangelisation*. Vatican City. Preface. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20150623\\_instrumentum-xiv-assembly\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20150623_instrumentum-xiv-assembly_en.html). (Accessed: 22 October 2018).

<sup>8</sup> C.f. Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. Foreword.

<sup>9</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (2011) *A Key to Balthasar*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. p.12.

<sup>10</sup> For Balthasar, the term ‘aestheticisation of the beautiful’ is the concept of beauty seen from a this-worldly aesthetics, perspective of appearances, which is viewed as devoid of any transcendental qualities (namely, judgements of taste) as opposed to a property of divine Being. Balthasar’s claim that beauty cannot be separated from its divine characteristics has since been affirmed by the Catholic Church in the Pontifical Council for Culture’s concluding document *The Via Pulchritudinis (The Way of Beauty): Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue* (2006) ‘Beauty itself cannot be reduced to simple pleasure of the senses: this would be to deprive it of its universality, its supreme value, which is transcendent.’ Para.11.1. Available at:

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/cultr/documents/rc\\_pc\\_cultr\\_doc\\_20060327\\_pleary-assembly\\_final-document\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_doc_20060327_pleary-assembly_final-document_en.html). (Accessed: 23 October 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.9.

Von Balthasar argued that his project ‘to restore theology to a main artery which it has abandoned,’<sup>12</sup> would counterbalance the impoverishment of the aestheticisation of beauty within theology. In short, for von Balthasar, aesthetics (beauty) play a vital role in our understanding of theology.<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, concerned with the decline in sacramental and Christian practice amongst the faithful, the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in *Instrumentum Laboris* (2015) called for theologians, educationalists, art historians and artists to find new ways of transmitting the Catholic faith via the way of beauty.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, the focus of this study is to develop a theological aesthetic framework, which is inspired by von Balthasar’s concept of beauty as the narrative driver for the theological interpretation of Christian art.<sup>15</sup> To achieve that this thesis investigates the role that beauty (aesthetics) plays in increasing the spiritual capital of pupils within a Catholic educational setting. One of the benefits of increasing the spiritual capital in pupils through aesthetics is that it is strongly linked to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization’s call to [re]evangelise culture and society via the way of beauty.<sup>16</sup>

To demonstrate effectiveness of the theological aesthetic framework it is will be applied to a case study on the Annunciation. Alongside this the thesis explores how and to what extent the visual arts function as a theological aesthetic resource for increasing the spiritual capital of students, the formation, and the evangelisation of the Catholic faith in a contemporary Catholic educational setting. This thesis argues that this research, approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective, will contribute specifically to the newly emergent sub-field of visual theology.

Therefore, there are three main interlocking components to this thesis. Firstly, an overview of the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar is presented. The focus with regard to the works of von Balthasar is his contribution to the field of

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<sup>12</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.9.

<sup>13</sup> *C.f. Balthasar*. (1982) *GLI*. pp.1-3.

<sup>14</sup> The way of beauty will be discussed in greater detail through the course of this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> Whilst this thesis has been inspired by the works of von Balthasar it does not attempt to undertake a substantive or groundbreaking theological treatment of his theological aesthetics. Rather it will assist the reader to understand the genealogy and of theological aesthetics in the twentieth century in relation to returning beauty to Christian theological thought, in particular Catholic theology, and how that correlates to contemporary interpretations of Christian experience.

<sup>16</sup> See the concluding document of the Pontifical Council for Culture (2006) *The Via Pulchritudinis (The Way of Beauty): Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*.

theological aesthetics in *GLI*. The attention of the thesis then turns to the concept of visual theology. As visual theology is, relatively speaking, new to the field of theological aesthetics a cogent account of what visual theology is and how it is understood in contemporary theological discourse is given. From the outcomes of the investigation into von Balthasar's theo-aesthetics, and the newly emerging field of visual theology the thesis argues that methodologies for the theological interpretation of works of Christian art are just emergent, and consequently somewhat underdeveloped from a Catholic standpoint. This thesis fills the lacuna by offering a new theological framework for theologically interpreting Christian art,<sup>17</sup> by drawing upon and developing von Balthasar's theme of restoring aesthetics to the 'main artery' of theological inquiry. This is set within the context of visual theology viewed from a Catholic sacramental perspective. Secondly, to demonstrate the effectiveness of my theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art it is applied to a series of paintings from the Early Renaissance period, which is based upon the theme of Mary as a model of faith as revealed in the Annunciation. Thirdly, in conjunction with this, the thesis conducts an empirical research project comprising of semi-structured interviews and an online survey, which explores how the visual arts function as theological aesthetic resources for the increasing spiritual capital, formation and the evangelisation of the Catholic faith in contemporary Catholic education. The salient issues arising from the literature review and the outcomes of the fieldwork research afford a degree of triangulation, which in turn allows a reappraisal of the literature search.

## **1.2. Background of Researcher**

I am a member of a religious order called the *Religious of the Assumption* (RA), whose charism is based upon the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity. The mission of the congregation is to extend the kingdom of Christ here on earth through education. As mentioned elsewhere, the inspiration behind this thesis' study came from the research that I conducted for my MA dissertation in Pastoral Theology (2012)<sup>18</sup> entitled, *The Personal and the Profound: Meeting the Saviour via The Visual Arts*, which was gained at Heythrop College, London University. The question that I posited in the dissertation was, 'What is the significance of the

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<sup>17</sup> In particular the visual arts, frescoes, paintings, and sculptures.

<sup>18</sup> I started my studies in Theology in 2003 at Heythrop College, London University and completed them in 2006. I then entered the Religious Sisters of the Assumption. In 2010 I continued my studies at Heythrop College reading for a MA in Pastoral Theology.

*phenomenon of art exhibitions for our faith today?*’ The phenomenon that is being referred to is that in an age where church attendance has fallen dramatically, arts exhibitions at National Gallery, namely, *Seeing Salvation* (2000), *The Sacred Made Real* (2009), and *Treasures of Heaven: Saints and Relics and Devotions* (2011) have flourished. All of these exhibitions were clearly advertised as religious in nature and were sold-out successes. More recently, Dr. Gabriel Finaldi, Director of the National Gallery, recently stated that,

*Seeing Salvation (2000) turned out to be the most visited exhibition that the National Gallery has ever held. This clearly demonstrated that there was a huge interest in Christian art and the theological elements that underpinned them.*<sup>19</sup>

My MA dissertational research highlighted a lacuna within the academic world vis-à-vis the role that the visual arts play in Catholic education in bringing about an increase in spiritual capital in pupils. Since then, my interest of study has developed into inquiries concerning the understanding of the interdisciplinary relationship between the fields of theology, the visual arts, and education and with particular interest in the nascent concept of ‘visual theology’ viewed from a Catholic perspective.

Furthermore, I have been particularly struck and inspired von Balthasar<sup>20</sup> project of returning beauty to the mainstream of Christian theological thought, and by the letters, meetings and messages addressed to artists by several Popes of the Catholic Church.<sup>21</sup> The Pontifical letters and documents not only call for artists, but also philosophers, theologians and educationalists ‘to travel the way of beauty’ and to re-engage with the Church through their paintings, sculptures and writings for increasing the spiritual capital of the faithful, which in turn leads to the evangelisation of culture.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Finaldi, G. (2019) *On Art and Faith* a talk given at the Jesuit Church, Farm Street, London.

<sup>20</sup> As mentioned elsewhere, the purpose of this thesis is not to undertake a substantive theological treatment of Balthasar’s works, rather Balthasar is referred to throughout the thesis to assist in establishing key moments in theological aesthetics in the twentieth century.

<sup>21</sup> Pope Paul VI. (8th December:1965) *Message to Artists*, Pope John Paul II. (4th April:1999) *Letter to Artists*, Pope Benedict XVI. (21 November: 2009) *Meeting with Artists*, and Pope Francis (2015) *La mia idea di Arte* written by the Pope with Tiziana Lupi and published jointly by Mondadori and Vatican Museums Publishing House.

<sup>22</sup> Since beginning this study, a new *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) has been issued. Under the section on *Sources of Catechesis* a new source has been added, namely, Beauty which I have found particularly encouraging.

Pope John Paul II in his *Letter to Artists* (1999) gives an account of the relationship between religion and the Arts throughout the centuries. He makes the link between divine beauty, love, and service. He asks artists, in particular, to use their talents by once more putting them at the service of the Church and the faithful. Moreover, he stresses that it is not only artists but also theologians, philosophers, art historians and educationalists who ought to join the throng and put their combined talents at the service of the Church for the formation, evangelisation, and transformation of our society.

It is in light of that, this thesis develops a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art, which this thesis calls, *the site of its beholding: a Catholic approach to visual theology*. The purpose of this theological aesthetic framework is to enable the viewer/holder to see the beauty of the form anew, and thereby open up a dialogue between the viewer and the triune God through the medium of the visual arts. This in turn leads to an encounter with the divine, which ultimately transforms, and thus increases the spiritual capital <sup>23</sup> of the beholder. Increasing in spiritual capital aids the task of every Christian, namely, to proclaim the Word of God, and in so doing, evangelise the sphere in which they live. This thesis argues that the framework provided assists the return of ‘beauty’ to the mainstream of theological thinking in a Catholic educational setting and has the potentiality to be of significance in other interconnected fields such as Art History.

### **1.3. The Aestheticisation of the Beautiful**

In order to situate this investigation a brief overview of how von Balthasar understood the role of beauty in theological terms is now presented in short. This will be developed further in the next chapter.

For Balthasar, the most monumental change of fortune in the history of aesthetics occurred during the Enlightenment.<sup>24</sup> He argued that, during that time both

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<sup>23</sup> The relationship between spiritual capital the New Evangelisation’s trifold mission, namely the beauty of creation, the beauty of the arts, and the beauty of Christ, prototype of all Holiness is intrinsically linked. This will be explored and developed in chapter 2 and 3 of this thesis.

<sup>24</sup> According to Stephanie Ross, Steven M. Cahn and Sandra L. Shapshay in *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* (second ed. 2020) ‘The study of aesthetics concerns the arts broadly conceived, as well as the nature of aesthetic experience, which includes our responses to beauty, sublimity, ugliness, and other such qualities found in works of art, nature, the built environment, and the course of everyday life. Although the term ‘aesthetics’ to

theological and philosophical inquiry into the nature of beauty shifted in perception. For von Balthasar, an ‘aestheticisation’<sup>25</sup> of the beautiful took place, and as such the significance of beauty<sup>26</sup> as a transcendental<sup>27</sup> attribute of God was abandoned from theological and philosophical enquiry. As Balthasar states,

*There may well have been an historical Kairos [ . . . ] when human art and Christian revelation met in an encounter which saw the creation of icons, basilicas, and Romanesque cathedrals, sculptures and paintings. But since then too many misunderstandings and too many terrible things have occurred for us still to be in a position to insist more on the similarity of the two spheres than on their dissimilarity. Man’s habit of calling beautiful only what strikes him as such appears insurmountable, at least on earth. And therefore, at least practically speaking, it seems both advisable and necessary to steer clear of the theological application of aesthetic concepts. A theology that makes use of such concepts will sooner or later cease to be a ‘theological aesthetics’—that is, the attempt to do aesthetics at the level and with the methods of theology—and deteriorate into an ‘aesthetic theology’ by betraying and selling out theological substance to the current viewpoints of an inner-worldly theory of beauty.*<sup>28</sup>

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denote this area of study goes back only to the 18th century with the work of Alexander Baumgarten...Paul Oskar Kristeller’s ‘The Modern System of the Arts’ which, until recently, had been taken to be definitive proof that the concept of fine arts (the ‘system’ comprised of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry) originated with Beateaux in the 18th century’. Kristeller’s account has since been challenged by James O. Young’s paper (2015) which argues that fine arts really coincide with Plato and Aristotle’s notion of the imitative arts, and thus is not a truly modern system at all. *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* (second ed. 2020) P.1. Nevertheless, for Balthasar it was the aestheticisation of the beautiful, which occurred with the popularisation of the concept of aesthetics in the 18th century that was of concern. That is, a concept of beauty which is devoid of any ontological connotations.

<sup>25</sup> Balthasar’s concept of the ‘aestheticisation’ of beauty will be explore in greater detail in the following chapter.

<sup>26</sup> Beauty in antiquity was considered to be a one of the transcendental properties of being alongside that of goodness and truth. While the transcendentals are invariably interconnected and inseparable, the focus of the thesis is primarily concerned with the Beauty rather than that of the Good and the True.

<sup>27</sup> The word transcendental is derived from the Latin ‘*transcendens*’ (i.e., that what surpasses something), pl. ‘*transcendentia*,’ which means ‘to exceed’ and refer to properties of being, commonly known today as the one, the good, the true and the beautiful. The four words all signify the same as being, and yet they are not synonymous with each other rather they all add a certain concept to being, but not to the absolute nature of being. They are called transcendentals because they transcend/exceed any particular categories of being. That is, they are universal forms inasmuch as they are found in everything and in every category of being.

Cf. Stern, Robert. (2019) *Transcendental Arguments*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendental-arguments/>. (Accessed: 2 January 2021).

Although the first known use of the word transcendental was only introduced in 1624 by J. Scharf the concept of the transcendentals can be traced back to Parmenides (515 BC) who enquired into the co-extensive properties of being. See Scharf, J. (published in 1624) *Theoria transcendentalis Primae, Philosophiae, quam vacant Metaphysicam*. Cited in Honnefelder, L. (2003). *Metaphysics as a Discipline: From the “Transcendental Philosophy of the Ancients” to Kant’s Notion of Transcendental Philosophy*. In: Friedman, R.L., Nielsen, L.O. (eds) *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory 1400–1700*. The New Syntheses Historical Library. Vol. 53. Dordrecht: Springer.

Plato then developed the theory of the ‘Forms of the Good’ from which ideas such as beauty, justice, truth and equality are all derived. The development of the transcendentals continued with Aristotle. It was then developed further by the early Church Fathers, most notably by St Augustine of Hippo. Medieval theories of transcendentals fell into three major models which were developed in turn by St Thomas Aquinas, secondly, Henry of Ghent and Eckhart, and thirdly John Duns Scotus. The complex development of the transcendentals has a long history, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a detailed account of the development of medieval transcendentalism see <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentals-medieval/>.

<sup>28</sup> Balthasar. (1982) pp. 37–38.



Consequently, for Balthasar, an impoverishment of Christian theological thinking took place.

Balthasar's theological aesthetics has two dimensions to it.<sup>29</sup> In the first instance he was indebted to Kant's notion of beauty as the disinterested one. According to Dr. J. Phillips in *Having-To-Be-Thus: On Bonhoeffer's Reading of Goethe's Iphigenia in Tauris* (2018),

*Kant outlines his understanding of three 'faculties' in the first introduction to the third Critique, and it is there that he remarks on a certain interrelation of the second (practical) 'faculty of desire' with the third (aesthetic) 'faculty of feeling of pleasure and displeasure (or taste)' ...As regards to aesthetics however, objects are different, being beheld passively (not performed), and judged to be either pleasing or displeasing ...A crucial consequence of this object-differentiation, is that Kant considers a judgement of taste or an aesthetic judgement, to be 'without any interest'.<sup>30</sup>*

Does this mean that when we make a judgement of taste we do not desire it? Are we totally disinterested? Phillips clarifies this by pointing to a footnote in Kant's *Critique of the Power Judgement* (1790).

*However, there is a passing remark in a footnote to this discussion which serves to bind together practical ends with aesthetic objects more closely than we might expect. There, Kant states that one can make a practical judgement which 'can be entirely disinterested yet still very interesting.' This particular phrase means that there are circumstances in which a particular desired end is deeply compelling (is very interesting), but yet does not satisfy any personal inclinations (is 'entirely disinterested').<sup>31</sup>*

That is, a judgement of taste is not dependent on our interest, but it can produce interest. As Kant clearly states, 'it relies on no interest, but it produces one' (Kant: 1790, footnote 7). Quite simply, the first aspect of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics is to do with the senses.<sup>32</sup>

However, Aidan Nichols OP in *A Key to Balthasar* (2011) states that Balthasar's approach can be contrasted with that of Kant's subject-orientated

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<sup>29</sup> Balthasar. (1982) p.18.

<sup>30</sup> Phillips, J. (2018) *Having-To-Be-Thus: On Bonhoeffer's Reading of Goethe's Iphigenia in Tauris*. p.363.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, J. (2018) p.363.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Nichols, A.OP. (2011) p.14-15.

humanistic approach, and the Catholic Transcendental Thomism approach. As Nichols writes,

*These have it in common that they begin their epistemological reflections by examining human subjectivity from within - on the basis of what has been called the 'I' - 'I' relationship. Balthasar, however, puts the human subject - and that by virtue of its created nature - in immediate relation with the truth that lies outside of the self. The self-conscious subject exists, knowing that he or she exists as just such a unique subject, yes, but this is always in relation to the other manifestations of being.<sup>33</sup>*

That is, von Balthasar is referring to the 'I' - 'Thou' relationship inasmuch as we know that we exist invariably in relation to the other. Von Balthasar explained this by stating that, firstly, we know that we are loved by our parents, and ultimately we know that we are loved by God. As von Balthasar in *A Résumé of My Thought*, (Winter:1988) wrote,

*[M]an exists only in dialogue with his neighbour. The infant is brought to consciousness of himself only by love, by the smile of his mother. In that encounter the horizon of all unlimited being opens itself for him, revealing four things to him: (1) that his is one in love with the mother, even in being other than his mother, therefore all being is one; (2) that love is good, therefore all being is good; (3) that love is true, therefore all being is true; (4) that love evokes joy, therefore all being is beautiful.<sup>34</sup>*

Balthasar states plainly that beauty can only be understood in terms of love. As Phillips states,

*To discern beauty... one only needs to be capable of love, and this is something which, for von Balthasar, is located at the very heart of what it is to be human. Beauty does not rely on any precondition except love, and love is a universal and fundamental feature of human life, so this means that disclosing God in the beautiful can disclose God more fully and effectively – at least in our contemporary situation - than with truth and goodness. In this way, the beautiful can disclose that which is genuinely exterior to humanity, because it is not delimited by human presuppositions. By disclosing the exterior, beauty discloses the genuinely objective.<sup>35</sup>*

As such, 'the beautiful is the meeting-place of finite form with infinite light.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (2011) p.2.

<sup>34</sup> Balthasar. (Winter: 1988) *A Résumé of My Thought*. Communio, (15) p.471.

<sup>35</sup> Phillips, J. (2018) *Mary, Star of Evangelisation: Tiling the Soil and Sowing the Seed*. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press. p.86.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Nichols, A. OP. (2011) p.18.

According Nichols, the second aspect of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics is concerned with beauty as a transcendental property of being.<sup>37</sup> Von Balthasar's understanding of the transcendentals are perceived as,

*The One, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, these are what we call the transcendental attributes of Being, because they surpass all the limits of essences and are coextensive with Being...As transcendentals run through all Being, they must be interior to each other: that which is truly true is also truly good and beautiful and one.*<sup>38</sup>

Von Balthasar argued that the transcendentals vary in character to the extent that,

*A being appears, it has an epiphany: in that it is beautiful and makes us marvel. In appearing it gives itself; it delivers itself to us: it is good. And in giving itself up, it speaks itself, it unveils itself: it is true (in itself, but in the other to which it reveals itself).*<sup>39</sup>

From this von Balthasar claimed that 'one can construct above all a theological aesthetic (Gloria): God appears,<sup>40</sup> in the form of Jesus, the incarnate God. That is, theological aesthetics is concerned with the centrality of Christ, rather than solely an analogue between God and the world. The incarnate Christ is beauty personified, an objective reality revealing the glory of God for the salvation of humanity. For Balthasar, revelation and creation cannot be separated.

From a Catholic perspective, humanity has a desire for the perfect transcendental experience, namely God. It is this which differentiates humankind from all other creatures. As Dr S. R. Hemler in *The Reality of God* (2015) states,

*What we seek is something transcendental, something beyond our world and beyond our earthly experience. What we seek is God, who is Perfect Knowledge/Truth, Perfect Love, Perfect Justice/Goodness, Perfect Beauty, and Perfect Home/Being.*<sup>41</sup>

However, with particular reference to beauty Balthasar stated that,

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Nichols, A. OP. (2011) p.15.

<sup>38</sup> Balthasar. (Winter:1988) p. 471.

<sup>39</sup> Balthasar. (Winter:1988) p. 471.

<sup>40</sup> Balthasar. (Winter:1988) p. 472.

<sup>41</sup> Hemler, Steven R. (2015) *The Reality of God*. Charlotte, North Carolina: St Benedict Press. p. 3.

*An apparent enthusiasm for the beautiful is mere idle talk when divorced from the sense of a divine summons to change one's life.*<sup>42</sup>

The concluding document of the Pontifical Council for Culture (PCC) Plenary Assembly (2006), *The via Pulchritudinis, (The Way of Beauty): Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*, affirmed Balthasar's claim and asks,

*If cultural milieu strongly conditions the artist, then, echoing the appeal of von Balthasar, we must raise the questions: How can we be guardians of beauty in today's contemporary artistic culture where erotic seduction stems the instincts, pollutes the imagination, and inhibits the spiritual faculties? Is not the task of saving beauty that of saving man? Is this not the role of the Church, "expert in humanity" and guardian of the faith?*<sup>43</sup>

A more in-depth investigation into the life and works of von Balthasar is presented in chapter two of this thesis.

#### **1.4. Visual Theology**

In contemporary discourse the exchange of views between theology and aesthetics is increasingly being defined and understood in terms of the concept 'visual theology.'<sup>44</sup> However, relatively little theological investigation has been conducted with regard to articulating how the newly emergent concept of visual theology is to be understood beyond stating that it is an aspect of theology that affects the way we talk about, look at and understand God. This includes 'ways of expressing religious faith in art to illustration of the content of the Bible or even demonology.'<sup>45</sup> Even less research has been conducted with regard to developing a Catholic theological aesthetic framework for the theological interpretation of historical and contemporary Christian images. Especially with regard to the express purpose of bringing about a greater understanding of theological insight of what it means for

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<sup>42</sup> Balthasar. (1989) *Revelation and the Beautiful in Explorations in Theology, Vol. 1: The Word Made Flesh*. pp 95-126. Cited in Nichols. (2011) p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> PCC. (2006) para. III.2.

<sup>44</sup> Jensen, Robin M. & Vrudny, Kimberly J. (eds.) (2009) *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts*. Collegeville mi: Liturgical Press; Fujimura, M. (10th April: 2012) *Visual Theology*; Reddaway, C. (2013) *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces*; Challies, Tim. & Byes, Josh. (2016) *Visual Theology: Seeing and Understanding the Truth about God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan; Reynoso, Rondall. (2018) *Expanding Theology: An Argument for Visual Theology*., and Avanesov S. S. (2019) *On Visual Theology*. Journal of Visual Theology 1. pp. 13–43.

<sup>45</sup> Avanesov S. S. (2019) *On Visual Theology*. Journal of Visual Theology 1. pp. 13–43. p.40.

the contemporary viewer/beholder. Hence, contemporary theologians and artists who have attempted to conceptualise a methodology for theological interpretation of historical Christian images are few in number. This thesis fills this lacuna by developing a theological aesthetic framework for interpretation of Christian images as a means for transmitting the faith to those open to a Catholic ethos.

The originality of this thesis' theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art, is that it while inevitably the interpretation of Christian art draws upon Art history for its context,<sup>46</sup> it cannot be restricted to its methods and its content because of the consistency in which it overlooks the theological significance of images. Therefore, a framework for interpreting the theological aesthetic meaning of Christian art necessarily includes a theological aesthetic thread. The uniqueness of the framework which this thesis presents is that it is approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective, and consists of a trifold criteria, namely,

1. The theological aesthetic thread, which presupposes a perspective of the Christian faith with its project of explicitly seeking the beauty of the Incarnate God in all things, as the starting point of all theological aesthetic interpretation of Christian art. This is approached with an exegetical hierarchical project of 'ways of seeing,' namely *blepó* (to see something *physically* - *literally* with spiritual results of perception); *theóreó* (to look at, gaze to contemplate, experience *intellectually*), and *horaó* (to perceive metaphorically though the mind's eye, so as to *spiritually transcend*). That is, the optical language that connects being and cognition through vision. This is based upon Scripture, the teachings of the Catholic Church, the lived experiences of the saints in light, and the practices of the faithful.

2. The site of the image: visual content analysis. Theologically interpreting the theological capital found within the image, namely Scriptural, doctrinal, and devotional aspects (taking into account the practices of the faithful).

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<sup>46</sup> For example, visual rhetoric, the cultural historical method of 'seeing things their way,' and its counterpart in Art history the 'period eye.'

3. The site of *its beholding*: *the moment when the viewer aesthetically encounters the image in the light of faith*. The act of beholding the beauty of the form perceived through the graced eyes of faith, which leads to a ‘rapture’ which transports the beholder beyond themselves to an ‘Eros-love’ of God.<sup>47</sup>

The concept of visual theology viewed from a Catholic sacramental perspective is explored in greater depth in chapter three, while the theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art is further developed in chapter four of this thesis.

### **1.5. Fieldwork Research**

The motivation behind the study is to develop a theological aesthetic framework for interpretation of Christian images from a Catholic sacramental perspective as a means of enriching knowledge and transmitting the faith in a Catholic educational context, and elsewhere. In order to situate the theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art it is necessary to conduct practice-based empirical research with practitioners in Catholic Education to ascertain, analyse and evaluate how and to what extent the visual arts are used as a means of increasing spiritual capital in pupils in a Catholic educational setting. The fieldwork research takes the form of an online survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews with the purpose of evaluating the use of the visual arts in contemporary Catholic Education.

The fieldwork research presented in this thesis investigates a number of points as follows:

- Identify current practices of utilising the visual arts as ‘theological aesthetic resources,’ as a means for increasing spiritual capital in Catholic education.
- Investigate the extent of interdisciplinary collaboration between different departments taking place in Catholic education (schools), i.e., Theology (RE), English, Social Studies, Digital Learning, the arts, and

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. pp.121-125.

Culture which utilise the arts as a pedagogical tool for increasing spiritual capital in students and staff.

- Examine current leadership strategies which utilise the visual arts to determine how these styles and values have driven current practices in collaboration with staff and pupils in Catholic education for increasing spiritual capital.
- Investigate and evaluate guidelines that assist teachers to develop their confidence and skills in using the visual arts as theological aesthetic resources for evangelising and increasing faith and values in students.
- The sacramental perspective: investigate the extent to which modelling the teachings of Christ and the Church impacts, enhances and increases the spiritual capital of students.
- Draw conclusions from the outcomes and make some recommendations from the analysis with the view of developing further strategies to widen and enhance opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement of the visual arts within the school timetable to create a broad and balanced curriculum.

These points are explored and analysed in greater detail in chapter six of this thesis.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

To reiterate, there are three main interlocking components to this thesis. Firstly, in response to the need and the call from the Catholic Church to find new ways of transmitting the faith to the faithful,<sup>48</sup> this thesis argues that the newly emergent field of visual theology approached via a Catholic sacramental perspective, is an apt vehicle by which these concerns may be addressed anew. It was established that increasing spiritual capital in pupils and staff is strongly linked to the Pontifical

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<sup>48</sup> John, Paul, II. (4 April:1999) *Letter of his Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*; Pontifical Council for Culture's Concluding Document *the Via Pulchritudinis (The Way of Beauty): Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*. (2006), and *Instrumentum Laboris: The Pastoral Challenges of The Family in The Context of Evangelisation*. (2015).

Council of New Evangelisation's call to [re]evangelise culture and society via the way of beauty.

Therefore, inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar's project of returning beauty to the center of Christian thought, this thesis contributes new knowledge to the nascent field of visual theology by developing a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art specially from a Catholic sacramental perspective. Furthermore, the thesis argues that a theological aesthetic framework seen through the lens of the *theological aesthetic thread; with its hierarchical ways of seeing, the site of the image, and the site of its beholding*, enables and reveals a deeper and more profound appreciation of what Christian images express and mean for the faithful (and possibly others) today. The uniqueness of the framework that this thesis presents is that it consists of a trifold criteria, and is approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective, which is based upon Scripture, the teachings of the Catholic Church, the lived experiences of the saints in light, and the practices of the faithful.

Secondly, in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the theological aesthetic framework, it is applied to a series of historical Christian works of art emanating from the Early Italian Renaissance period. Ultimately, this functions as a didactic tool to enable the beholder to encounter the divine reality of the incarnate Christ through the beauty of the arts.

Finally, the thesis implements a practice-based research project to assess to what extent the use of the visual arts contributes to the increase of spiritual capital in pupils in contemporary Catholic educational settings. The outcomes of the fieldwork research and the salient issues arising from the literature review provide a degree of triangulation, so that a reappraisal of the literature takes place from which recommendations are posited.



## Chapter 2 Literature Review: Part 1

### 2.1. Hans Urs von Balthasar 1905 – 1988

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) was a Catholic priest, a university chaplain, and an eminent, if somewhat controversial, Catholic theologian. He was born into an upper middle-class family in Lucerne, Switzerland on the 12th of August 1905.<sup>49</sup>

For the first part of his life Balthasar was educated at the Benedictine Gymnasium in Engelberg, Switzerland. It is here that he developed a profound interest in classical music and German literature. Later, he transferred to the Jesuit Gymnasium Stella Matutina, in Feldkirch, Austria. In 1924 at the University of Zurich he began his doctoral studies on German literature and idealism entitled *History of the Eschatological Problem in German Literature*. Whilst in the process of finishing his doctorate he made a retreat at a Jesuit Centre in the Black Forest. It was here that he first heard the call to become a priest. He describes his calling as ‘coming like a bolt out of the blue.’<sup>50</sup> After completing his doctorate, he entered the Society of Jesus in Berlin (1929).

After joining the Jesuits in 1929 he returned to his studies, this time studying Philosophy in Munich under the guidance of Erich Przywara SJ. It was Przywara who introduced him to the concept of the *analogia entis* (the analogy of Being), which was to have a profound influence on his thinking. Balthasar was then sent by the Jesuits to Lyon in France to do four more years of theological studies. It was here in the Jesuit college of Fourvière that he first encountered Henri de Lubac SJ.

In 1936 he was ordained as a Catholic priest in the St. Michaelskirche in Munich, which on the whole is considered to be a relatively brief period of formation for a Jesuit. His formation was largely expedited due to his educational qualifications. However, von Balthasar later stated that he did not enjoy his studies at all while he was in formation with the Jesuits. He writes,

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Oakes, Edward T. SJ., and Moss, David. (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*. Preface.

<sup>50</sup> Oakes, Edward T. SJ., and Moss, David. (2004) p.3.

*My entire period of study in the Society of Jesus was a grim struggle with the dreariness of theology, with what men had made out of the glory of revelation. I could not endure this presentation of the Word of God. I could have lashed out with the fury of Samson. I felt like tearing down, with Samson's own strength, the whole temple and burying myself beneath the rubble. But it was like this because, despite my sense of vocation, I wanted to carry out my own plans, and was living in a state of unbounded indignation. I told almost no one about this. Przywara understood everything; I did not have to say anything. Otherwise there was no one who could have understood me.<sup>51</sup>*

Von Balthasar's remarkably honest and passionate testimony of his experience of studying theology whilst under the Jesuits went on to have a profound influence on his theological thinking. We will explore in greater depth how his experiences are a key factor in his theology of aesthetics in the next section.

After his ordination in 1936 his superior gave him a choice of apostolic missions. He was to choose between becoming a professor of theology at the prestigious Pontifical Jesuit University in Rome, the Gregorian University, or take the position of Chaplain to the University of Basle in Switzerland. He chose the latter. While in Basle he met the Protestant physician and greatly renowned mystic, Adrienne von Speyr. Von Balthasar was instrumental in bringing Speyr into the Catholic Church.

In 1945 von Balthasar and Speyr founded a new religious lay institute for men and women called The Community of St John (*Johannesgemeinschaft*). A great apostolic achievement of this lay institute was establishing its own publishing company, namely *Johannes Verlag* (St John's Press). Von Balthasar's superiors thought that his life as a Jesuit and that of running a lay secular institution as a founding member were not compatible and he was asked to choose between them. He chose the latter and as a result he left the Jesuits in 1950.

Some years later, in 1956, he became a secular priest in the Diocese of Chur in Switzerland. In later life he became a prolific writer and an eminent

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<sup>51</sup> Balthasar. (1975) *Erde und Himmel: Ein Tagebuch. Part II: Die Zeit der grossen Dikate*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag. Quotation cited in Oakes, Edward T. SJ., and Moss, David. (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*. p.4.

theologian. His greatest work is considered to be the Trilogy on the Transcendentals published from 1961-1985. In 1972 von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac SJ and Joseph Ratzinger founded the 'conservative' theological journal *Communio*. This was in direct response to the more liberal journal *Concilium*, which had been founded by Karl Rahner SJ a few years before in 1965. However, on the whole, it must be said that von Balthasar's theological thought is so diverse that it is almost impossible to categorise him. So much so that the editors of *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* stress that,

*...This volume makes no attempt to resolve these paradoxes or to force this elusive and subtle theologian into some preconceived category of either right or left, traditional or progressive, Platonist or Aristotelian, patristic or modern. Balthasar has treated almost every single theme that comes under the purview of systematic theology and St. Paul's manifesto, 'I capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ' (Corinthians 10:5) could well serve as Balthasar's motto too.<sup>52</sup>*

Von Balthasar never held an official post as a theologian. Perhaps for this reason, alongside his association with the mystic von Speyr and his somewhat controversial writings on Holy Saturday is why he often found himself isolated from other theologians and the Catholic Church (for example: he was not invited to participate as a *peritus* at Vatican II Council).

However, he later found favour with Pope John Paul II and was chosen to be a cardinal in recognition for his work for the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, he died on the 26th of June 1988 in Basel, Switzerland just two days before the ceremony was due to take place. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI gave the eulogy at his funeral as sign that the Catholic Church now approved of him.

In March 2018 the Roman Catholic Diocese of Chur, Switzerland opened the cause towards sainthood for the Cardinal-elect Hans Urs von Balthasar together with the mystic Adrienne von Speyr on the grounds of heroic virtue.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Oakes, Edward T. SJ., and Moss, David. (2004) p.6.

<sup>53</sup> Hagiography Circle, *New Saints*. Available at: <http://newsaints.faithweb.com/year/1988.htm#Urs> .(Accessed:11 June 2020).

## 2.2. An Overview of Hans Urs von Balthasar Theological Aesthetics

It is fair to say that the reception of the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar, in particular, *The Glory of Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Seeing the Form Vol. I (Herrlichkeit)* (1982) has received a considerable number of critical analyses from distinguished critics in the field of theology. Aidan Nichols OP writes that von Balthasar is seemingly unable to stop himself from ‘running after hares,’<sup>54</sup> while Oliver Davies says that ‘English readers may feel as if they are entering into a strange land,’<sup>55</sup> and Karen Kilby joins the throng by stating that, Balthasar’s theology forces the reader to make an ‘all-or-nothing response’<sup>56</sup> to his project. These are just a few of the censorious reviews that Balthasar has received with regard to his work on *Theo-Aesthetics*. They state this, in part, because of the Germanic style<sup>57</sup> in which it is written, and because of the sheer volume of pages which go into making up this particular series. For example, von Balthasar’s *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (1982-1991), series consist in a total of seven very substantial tomes, which is then followed by further fourteen volumes. This includes *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (1988-1988), and *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory* (2000-2005), which go on to complete von Balthasar’s great trilogy on the transcendentals.<sup>58</sup> Davies claims that to get to grips with von Balthasar’s train of thought, these volumes are not to be read in the typical way by scrutinising each and every concept, but rather, he instructs the reader to focus on key ideas.<sup>59</sup>

However, this may seem a little disconcerting at times as often his key ideas are hidden amongst vast pages of historical theoretical text. This is what Nichols was referring to when he stated that Balthasar is ‘running after hares.’

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<sup>54</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (1999) *Von Balthasar’s Aims in His Theological Aesthetics*. Heythrop Journal XL. p. 411.

<sup>55</sup> Davies, O. (2004) *The Theological Aesthetics in The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*. p.131.

<sup>56</sup> Kilby, Karen. (2012) *Balthasar: a (very) critical introduction*. Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p.54.

<sup>57</sup> As James Heft states in relation to Balthasar’s style of writing, ‘There are also the particular challenges to understanding his thought which are presented by his style of writing. Almost every author who has commented upon it has noted that his truly literary German is often garbled in translation and, even when translated well, remains elusive. Heft, James. (1980) *Marian Themes in the Writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar*. Marian Studies: Vol. 31, Article 9, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> Although Balthasar’s *Theo-Aesthetics* is intrinsically linked to his *Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic* it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give an account of them here. However, inevitably there is bound to be some overlap, nevertheless the focus here will be on the works of Balthasar’s *Theo-Aesthetics*.

<sup>59</sup> The main bulk of Balthasar’s key ideas for his theological aesthetics are to be found in *The Glory of God: Seeing the Form*. (1982) Vol. 1., and in *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*. Vol. V.

Nevertheless, despite the sheer volume of text, the Germanic genre in which he writes, and the many diverse theological and philosophical sources from which he draws upon, the reader's perseverance to understand the message of *Herrlichkeit* could, I believe, prove to be fruitful.

What then is the central message of von Balthasar's great trilogy on the transcendentals that arouses such controversy? Von Balthasar argued that his main focus was,

*An attempt to develop a Christian theology in the light of the third transcendental, that is to say: to complement the vision of the true and the good with that of the beautiful (pulchrum).<sup>60</sup>*

Balthasar's contention was that since the Enlightenment the third transcendental<sup>61</sup> namely, 'beauty' had been and continues to be much neglected by theologians and philosophers. His aim was to demonstrate that beauty is of as equal importance in doing theology as is that of the good and the true, and thereby return it (beauty) to the 'main artery' of theological inquiry. Von Balthasar's approach to theology is known as theological aesthetics rather than aesthetic theology.<sup>62</sup> That is,

*The goal of the "theological aesthetic" (not "aesthetic theology" - which starts with categories of natural aesthetic experience and then uses them in theology) is to rediscover the beauty of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and the form of his grace in his saints.<sup>63</sup>*

Specifically, Balthasar's systematic approach to theological aesthetics is 'from above.' Beginning from the revelation that Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God and is as such the form of divine beauty. This will be discussed in more detail in section 2.5.1. of this thesis.

In order to realise his goal of a theological aesthetics von Balthasar set out to make a number of points: -

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<sup>60</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. Foreword.

<sup>61</sup> "Transcendental"...means, 'universal,' what is not confined but goes beyond particular categories.' Nichols, A. OP. (1999) p.2.

<sup>62</sup> More recently the concept of *the way of Beauty* (via *pulchritudinous*) (2006) has been developed from von Balthasar's findings. Also see Benedict XVI. (31st August: 2011) *General Audience at Castel Gandolfo of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on Beauty as a Way to God: Art & Prayer*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20110831.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110831.html) . (Accessed: 11 July 2020).

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Heff, J. (1980) p.50.

Firstly, in light of von Balthasar's claim, namely that beauty the third transcendental has been abandoned by theologians, philosophers and the secular world, his aim was to demonstrate how impoverished Christian thinking had become without due recourse to beauty. He argued that,

*In a world without beauty — even if people cannot dispense with the word and constantly have it on the tip of their tongues in order to abuse it — in a world which is perhaps not wholly without beauty, but which can no longer see it or reckon with it: in such a world the good also loses its attractiveness, the self-evidence of why it must be carried out.*<sup>64</sup>

For von Balthasar, the consequences of neglecting the third transcendental (beauty) could only ever result in having a devastating effect on the way we understand the good and the true. As such he argued that an impoverishment in Christian thinking has taken place.

Secondly, von Balthasar argued that, during the time of beauty's abandonment, the displaced transcendental found refuge in the metaphysics of the saints. That is, 'the saint and not cosmos... now becomes the epiphany of glory of God' (Nichols, 1999, 420). What this means is that, for von Balthasar, the splendour of Christ's beauty (the glory of the Lord) resides in and radiates from the saints.

Thirdly, von Balthasar aimed to restore aesthetics (beauty: the banished transcendental) to the main artery of theology and Christian thinking. However, Balthasar did not intend the aesthetic perspective of the transcendentals to dominate theology in the place of the logical (true) and the ethical (good), rather he aimed to demonstrate that they are inseparable and co-equal to it. Finally, he aimed to demonstrate the inseparability of fundamental theology and dogmatic theology.<sup>65</sup> Here von Balthasar's actual concern is the confrontation between beauty (creation) and revelation in dogmatic theology. Von Balthasar made no attempt to map the entire chronological historical order of aesthetics rather he selected the works of twelve theologians and philosophers, which he calls a 'symphony of theologies,' whom he thinks have

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<sup>64</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.19.

<sup>65</sup> C.f. Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. Foreword.

epitomised and formed theological thinking down through the ages. As Nichols states, von Balthasar's rationale for choosing the twelve theologians is twofold,

*Two criteria were at work... in his choice of 'stars' with which to stud the sky of his theological world: are intrinsic excellence and historical efficacy.*<sup>66</sup>

The four key points to von Balthasar's theological aesthetics project will now be discussed in more detail in the following sections, namely :

- (1) The abandonment of beauty & the impoverishment of Christian thinking
- (2) Beauty finding refuge in the saints during its time of abandonment
- (3) His attempt to restore beauty to its rightful place via a theological aesthetics
- (4) The inseparability of fundamental and dogmatic theology

### **2.3. The Abandonment of Beauty & the Impoverishment of Christian Thinking**

In the Catholic tradition Christian works of art have typically functioned as visual forms of scripture for the faithful. For example, we can see that from as early as the sixth century St Gregory the Great's famous *XIII Epistle to Serenus, Bishop of Massilia (Marseilles)* demonstrates that images depicting the beauty of the incarnate Christ and his Saints in light have enjoyed a time-honoured place in the edification, education, and spirituality of the faithful.

*Furthermore, we notify you that it has come to our ears that your Fraternity, seeing certain adorers of images, broke and threw down these same images in Churches. And we commend you indeed for your zeal against anything made with hands being an object of adoration; but we signify to you that you ought not to have broken these images. For pictorial representation is made use of in Churches for this reason; that such as are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books. Your Fraternity therefore should have both preserved the images and prohibited the people from adoration of them, to the end that both those who are ignorant of letters might have wherewith to gather a knowledge of the history, and that the people might by no means sin by adoration of a pictorial representation.*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (1999) p.415.

<sup>67</sup> Gregory the Great. *XIII Epistle of his Holiness Pope Gregory the Great to Serenus, Bishop of Massilia*. Available at: [https://biblehub.com/library/gregory/the\\_epistles\\_of\\_saint\\_gregory\\_the\\_great/epistle\\_xiii\\_to\\_serenus\\_bishop.htm](https://biblehub.com/library/gregory/the_epistles_of_saint_gregory_the_great/epistle_xiii_to_serenus_bishop.htm). (Accessed: 9 March 2019).

However, as St Gregory's letter reveals, the relationship between the arts and religion has been turbulent to say the least. The iconoclastic episodes of the eighth and ninth centuries, the English Reformation, and the 'stripping of the altars'<sup>68</sup> are just a few of the events that bear witness to this turbulent affiliation. Nevertheless, the consistent practice of using pictorial art in the Catholic tradition for the praise of God and the edification of the faithful is very much evident in the writings of St Gregory of Nyssa, St John of Damascus, St Nicholas of Cusa, St. Theresa of Avila, St John of the Cross, and St Ignatius of Loyola. They all testify to the theological value the Church and its Saints have placed on using sacred images for contemplating and encountering the beauty of the incarnate Word of God.

However, Balthasar argued that since the Enlightenment, the fields of aesthetics and theology have gone their separate ways. Von Balthasar's argument is that the concept of beauty as a characteristic transcendental quality of God was abandoned in favour of a worldly concept of beauty. He called this the 'aestheticisation of beauty. One of the consequences of this is that Art history and Theology became separate disciplines. Von Balthasar's main claim is that since the late medieval period, beauty has either been forgotten, abandoned, or not taken as seriously as the other transcendentals by either philosophers or theologians. His desire was to demonstrate the importance of beauty and the impoverishment to Christian theological thinking when beauty is regarded as mere appearance. He argued that, when one of the transcendentals is either neglected, left behind or banished from theological lines of inquiry, then there is a danger of theology slipping into a language that is incomprehensible.

*No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence exposes features on that face which threaten to become incomprehensible to man. We no longer dare to believe in beauty, and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance.<sup>69</sup>*

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<sup>68</sup> See Duffy, E. (2005) *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*.

<sup>69</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.18.



Here we see von Balthasar emphasising the now given fact (Scruton, 2009; Carnes, 2014), that one of the transcendentals namely beauty, has been neglected, abandoned, or forgotten by both philosophers and theologians. For von Balthasar, the ‘mysterious vengeance’ which has been exacted by beauty is that since it has been largely abandoned from theological inquiry, theology has become dry, dull, and uninteresting. Alongside this, the secular world replaced a theological understanding of the concept of beauty by a mere worldly understanding, namely judgments of taste and a quality that gives pleasure.<sup>70</sup> One of the reasons for this was that it wanted to free the concept of beauty from any religious connotations, so that today the consequences are that aesthetics (beauty) is a separate discipline and largely seen in secular terms.

As the Art historian Thomas Crow in his book *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art* (2017) rightly claims, since the ‘disenchantment’ of the Enlightenment Art Historians’ analysis of Christian art has ordinarily been and still is to a large extent, a dispassionate examination of the form.<sup>71</sup> What this means is that Art historians, in general, do not attempt to provide nor discover the rich theological value of Christian art as visual signs of grace to discern the revelation of the beauty of the incarnate Christ. He argues that Art historians have been largely preoccupied with divorcing the work of art from its contents (the form). That is, the theological value of the message of the subject matter is by and large either ignored or overlooked in favour of the life history of the artist, the patron or fraternity which commissioned the work and its stylistic contents. Crow argues that without the separation between the stylistic form and theological content of the image, Art history would not have developed the credibility of an independent discipline that it has today.

Consequently, the relationship between art history and theology was distanced, forgotten and one might say abandoned. Moreover, by largely separating the work of art from its theological content seems to have left it devoid of its original meaning. Thus, one could say that due to the abandonment of the

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<sup>70</sup> See Scruton, R. (2009) *Beauty*, & Carnes, N. (2014) *Beauty: A Theological Engagement with Gregory of Nyssa*.

<sup>71</sup> *C.f.* Crow. (2017) pp.1-3.

transcendental concept of beauty, a real impoverishment in the way sacred art is understood seems to have taken place.

#### 2.4. Beauty Finding Refuge in the Saints

For von Balthasar, the lived experience of ‘the saints in light’ (Colossians 1:12) play a particularly significant role in his theological aesthetics. The saints are beauty’s place of refuge during its time of abandonment. It is the ‘total self-giving prodigality’ of the saints who have received the divine grace of God that allows the beauty of Christ to radiate in them during this time of displacement by the theologians (and others).

Balthasar states that the Christian saint is the one who ‘*has made the deep-rooted act of faith and obedience to God’s inner light the norm of his whole existence*’ (Balthasar. 1982:165). He argues that,

*the forma Christi best comes to prevail and best becomes impressed on the form of the Church – in Mary, in the saints, in all those who have consciously made their own form to wane so as to yield the primacy in themselves to the form of the Church.*<sup>72</sup>

For Balthasar, the saints are resources of spiritual capital. They are authoritative figures of the Church and function as guides and mentors by providing us with examples of authentic Christian witness. They are a personalistic model of tradition that spans the ages. That is, modeling one’s life and ministry on *the forma Christi* is the task for all the faithful.<sup>73</sup> One needs only to look to the saints for inspiration and guidance in relation to the pursuit of the Christian mission to live a ‘unity of knowledge and life.’ As David Moss writes in relation to the opening remarks given by Balthasar in *Love Alone: the Way of Revelation* (1992),

*This essay, he claims, shows no other inspiration than the theological tradition of the ‘great saints’: those great lovers who know most about God and must be listened to. If this tradition is not to move our age at this moment, then, Balthasar darkly concludes, ‘there is not chance that Christianity in a pure form will be discovered at all.’*<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.256.

<sup>73</sup> Modelling one’s mission on Christ in an educational setting will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

<sup>74</sup> Moss, D. (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*. p.82.

We can see the importance that von Balthasar placed on the saints in light inasmuch as he began his first volume of his theological aesthetics (*GLI*) with three quotations from Spanish, French and German authors, whom he considered to be either saints or saintly figures.

The first quotation focuses on St John of the Cross's *Dark Night of the Soul*.<sup>75</sup> It 'speaks of the reciprocity between divine grace and the beauty of the soul formed within that beauty.'<sup>76</sup>

*La sombra que hace al alma la lampara de la hermosura de Dios sera otra hermosura al talle y propiedad de aquella hermosura de Dios...Gusta la gloria de Dios en sombra de gloria que hace saber la propiedad y talle de la gloria de Dios.*<sup>77</sup>

The second quotation is taken from Pascal's *Pensées*.<sup>78</sup> Other French thinkers such as Henri de Lubac SJ (*Nouvelle Theologie*) had an enormous influence on Balthasar's theological thought. Lubac's extensive background knowledge in patristic literature inspired von Balthasar's own to return to the Church Fathers. It is Pascal's quotation that points the reader towards the principle of the *analogy of entis*, which is of great significance for von Balthasar's concept of 'the alignment of beauty and divine grace.'<sup>79</sup>

*Je puis bien aimer l'obscurité totale; mais si Dieu m'engage dans un état a demi obscur, ce peu d'obscurite qui y est me deplait, parce que je n'y vois pas le merite d'une entiere obscurite. C'est un defect, et une marque je me fais une idole de l'obscurite, separee de l'ordre de Dieu. Or il ne faut pas adorer que son ordre.*<sup>80</sup>

In the first two quotations von Balthasar speaks of twilight and analogy, here he is largely concerned with the experience of faith and how the hiddenness of 'the form unfolds itself' as a 'radiance from within' in the life of the saints. Finally, the third quotation is taken from Johann Georg Hamann who is a

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<sup>75</sup> Balthasar gives a fuller account of the Dark Night of the Soul in *GLI*. pp. 411-17.

<sup>76</sup> Davies, O. (2004) p.134.

<sup>77</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. P. Foreword. 'The shadow that makes the soul the lamp of God's beauty will be another beauty at the measure and property of that beauty of God...Taste the glory of God in the shadow of glory that makes known the property and measure of the glory of God.' Translated by <https://www.deepl.com/translator>.

<sup>78</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. pp. 483-487.

<sup>79</sup> Davies, O. (2004) p.134.

<sup>80</sup> Balthasar. (1982), *GLI*.Foreword. 'I can love total darkness; but if God puts me in a state of half-darkness (twilight), I don't like the little darkness that is there, because I don't see the merit of complete darkness. It is a defect, and a mark I make for myself an idol of darkness, separated from the order of God. But not only His order is to be worshipped.' Translated by <https://www.deepl.com/translator>

critical reader of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Here Balthasar speaks of the Spirit and inspiration.

*Wodurch sollen wir den erbitterten Geist der Schrift versöhnen?  
'Meynst du, dass ich Ochsenfleisch essen wolle und Blocksblut  
trinken?' Weder die dogmatische Gründlichkeit pharisaischer  
Orthodoxen, noch die dichterische Uppigkeit sadducaischer  
Freygeister wird die Sendung des Geistes erneuern, der die  
heiligen Menschen Gottes trieb (εὐκαισῶς ἀκαισῶς) zu reden und  
zu schreiben.<sup>81</sup>*

Moreover, with regard to the third quotation, it is Hamann's criticism of Kant in which he rejects his theory on rationality which highlights two important trains of thought for von Balthasar. The first is to identify Christ's act of *kenosis* (self-emptying) with divine beauty while the second explores the interpenetration of reason with the senses. Davies states that there is a strong anti-Kantian vein running throughout all three of the discussions and it is this theme that is so vital to von Balthasar's thought.<sup>82</sup>

In the first of the three quotations von Balthasar cited St. John of the Cross's *Dark Soul of the Night*, which prepares the way for him to incorporate into his theological thinking the mystical or existential knowledge of God. Von Balthasar, having earlier in his career written on a number of Christian mystics, argued that,

*As an attitude, faith is the surrender of the central element of experience to the experience of Christ, and Christ's experience is one of kenotic humiliation and self-renunciation, a reality which, as we have seen, rests on the foundation of Christ's hypostatic consciousness as Redeemer. For this reason, in 'mysticism' every deeper experience (Erfahrung) of God will be a deeper entering into (Einfahren) the 'non-experience of faith, into the loving renunciation of experience, all the way into the depths of the 'Dark*

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<sup>81</sup> Balthasar. (1982). *GLI*. Foreword. Translated into English: 'How are we to reconcile the bitter spirit of the Scriptures? Do you think I want to eat ox meat and drink blood from a block?' Neither the dogmatic grounding of the Pharisaic Orthodox, nor the poetic opulence of the Sadducean freethinkers will renew the mission of the Spirit who drove the holy people of God (εὐκαισῶς ἀκαισῶς) to speak and write.' Translated by <https://www.deepl.com/translator>. NB., The Greek is misspelt in Balthasar's quotation of Hamann, i.e., in his version he places a sigma after the iota in both words. It ought to be a Rho in both cases/words. The Greek translation would then read, 'εὐκαιρῶς ἀκαιρῶς' which translates to: 'Be urgent whether the times be prosperous or adverse, whenever there is an opportunity; and when there is none, strive to make one.' That is to speak and write. According to Adam Clarke's *Commentary on 2 Timothy* the translation, εὐκαισῶς ἀκαισῶς appears in (2 Timothy 4:2) Available at: [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/2\\_timothy/4.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/2_timothy/4.htm) (Accessed: 12 May 2019). Therefore, what Hamann is saying is that they, the Pharisaic Orthodox and the Sadducean freethinkers, missed the opportunity to speak and write on God's behalf, both in and out of season.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Ibid. p.132.

*Nights' of John of the Cross, which constitutes the real mystical training for the ultimate renunciations.*<sup>83</sup>

What this means is that Christian doctrine is best expressed through living an authentic Christian life in charity and that the saints are prime examples of how this is achievable. For von Balthasar, *the form unfolds itself* in the lives of the saints. He argued that we must contemplate hiddenness of God in the saints in light, inasmuch as this is where the beauty of Christ has found refuge.

The Odes of Solomon, which date back as early as 2nd century AD, are known as the Earliest Christian Hymnbook.<sup>84</sup> In Ode 12, which is based upon a goblet of text from the gospel of Mark (7:31-37), we see the origins of the source of von Balthasar's concept of the saints as 'the interpreters of his beauty.'

*And the Most High has given his Word to his generations, (who are) the interpreters of his beauty, and the narrators of his glory, the confessors of his thought, and the preachers of his mind, and the teachers of his works....*<sup>85</sup>

In this Ode of Solomon, we see that the Most High has given his Word to his generations (the saints) and that they are the interpreters of beauty, which is clearly linked to knowledge of God (revelation). Furthermore, as Nichols states,

*Our capacity to perceive what von Balthasar calls 'the primordial phenomenon of the beautiful' is a necessary condition for our being evangelised, for receiving the gospel.*<sup>86</sup>

What this implies is that beauty is necessarily intrinsic to our faith. The importance of the primordial phenomenon of the beautiful found in the saints is one of von Balthasar's central concerns. As David Moss states, for Balthasar, those who follow Christ, be they saint, priest, or teacher are tasked with the mission of passing on the faith. And in order to do that they must be holy.

*The truth of Christian life (spirituality) is not to be discovered in some interior realm but in objective (incarnated) forms of following Christ (bishop, pastor, teacher, evangelist, poet, and so forth) ...the Christian gospel – one's own life – far from elevating*

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<sup>83</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p. 412-13.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Charlesworth, James, H. (2010) *Odes of Solomon*. Publisher James Clarke Company, Limited. p.13.

<sup>85</sup> Quotation cited in Charlesworth, James, H. (2010) *Odes of Solomon*. Publisher James Clarke Company, Limited.

<sup>86</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (1999) p.411.

*'my' own spiritual journey becomes the form through which the truth of Christian doctrine is grasped and becomes 'followable' in the Church. And followable not as some sort of abstract geographic instruction, but as the handing-over or handing-on of the very gift which makes such a way possible in the first place...In short, according to Balthasar the teacher of Christian truth is by an 'inner necessity' a saint (holy).<sup>87</sup>*

In short, for Balthasar, acquiring spiritual capital (holiness) enables the witness, namely the saint, the priest or the teacher to pass on or hand-on the faith, which is a necessary act in the evangelisation of the faithful. However, as Nichols rightly points out,

*Balthasar looks at how the saints are key forms for the Catholic Christian precisely because the image of their lives is engagingly loveable, nevertheless, his real focus is Jesus Christ himself, whom he wants to present as summing up the entire many-sided yet ultimately unitary form of God's self-revelation in salvation history.<sup>88</sup>*

## **2.5. The Restoration of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics**

In the *GLI* von Balthasar went to considerable lengths to establish the now given fact, that Theology and Philosophy have pretty much abandoned the concept of beauty in metaphysical terms.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, as mentioned above, he claimed that the forsaken transcendental beauty found refuge in the saints in light. He then embarked upon his project of restoring beauty to its former glory. How does he do that? By giving the reader a total reversal of the Kantian position. That is to say, whereas Kant begins his journey into the transcendentals by making investigations into reason (truth) *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); second edition (1787), he then moved on to exploring ethics (goodness) in *Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), and finally he completes his investigation into the transcendentals with aesthetics (beauty) in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). Whereas for von Balthasar aesthetics (beauty) is the starting point of his transcendental journey; beauty is the narrative driver for his investigations into his epic trilogy on *The Glory of the Lord*. Von Balthasar writes,

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<sup>87</sup> Moss, D. (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*. p.83.

<sup>88</sup> Nichols, A.OP. (1999) p.411.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Carnes. (2014) *Beauty: A Theological Engagement with Gregory of Nyssa*. Eugene: Cascade Books. pp.35-37.

*Beauty is the word that shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendour around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.*<sup>90</sup>

Thus, in emphasising the importance of beauty by equating it with the glory (splendour) of God, von Balthasar is able to claim that beauty is both the narrative driver and co-equal to truth and goodness. Consequently, von Balthasar is now able to realign the transcendentals by utilising an inverted critique of the Kantian epistemological order. This in turn, as Davies rightly points out, opens ‘the way for the articulation of a new structure of faith as knowing’ (Davies: 2004, p. 133).

The organising principle for von Balthasar’s new theological aesthetics is the concept of ‘circumincession’ (*περιχώρησις* = *perichoresis*). This concept is perceived as an analogy that depicts both the ecological doctrine of creation (the presence of God in the world) and the interpenetrating eternal circulation of the Trinity as the way in which the transcendentals relate to one another. This then clears the way for von Balthasar to establish a number of fundamental points, namely the importance of the function of beauty as the narrative driver and also the inseparability of the transcendentals.

The reciprocal existence of relationship between the Trinity, the circumincession (*περιχώρησις* = *mutual indwelling*), and Christ’s *kenosis*<sup>91</sup> (self-emptying) as an act of absolute love is explored and discussed at great length by von Balthasar in *GL. Vols., I. & VII*. The way that Balthasar envisages the Trinitarian relationship, acts as a model which is mirrored in the interpenetrating relationship between reason and the senses. This prepares the way for Balthasar to connect reason and the senses to revelation, which is understood as knowledge of the divine, and restores beauty to its rightful place in theological inquiry.

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<sup>90</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.18.

<sup>91</sup> However, what is underdeveloped in Balthasar’s thought, is the relationship between *kenosis* (self-emptying) and *khôra* (to leave a space, which may be occupied or filled by another). The theological investigation between imagination, *kenosis* and *khôra* is beginning to play an important element within the field of visual theology. See Hite, Jean (15th February: 2012) *Reflections on Khôra*. Available at: <https://jeanhite.wordpress.com/2012/02/15/reflections-on-khōra/>. (Accessed: 3 December 2018).

### 2.5.1. From an Aesthetic Theology to Theological Aesthetics

Under the section titled, *From an Aesthetic Theology to a Theological Aesthetics* in *GLI* (1982) Balthasar asks the question, ‘What are the concerns of a theological aesthetics?’ However, before proceeding to explore those concerns, he first asks how aesthetics is to be understood. He is aware of the dangers of thinking in aesthetic terms and thus he makes a distinction between worldly beauty (judgements of taste) and theological beauty.

Von Balthasar argued that, since the Enlightenment, discourse about judgements of beauty have been extremely critical and those that did focus on the notion of the aesthetic tended to be primarily interested in the nature of our experience and judgements about beauty and ugliness, viz., that which delights and brings pleasure or displeasure to the senses. Philosophical and theological deliberations on judgements of taste which include responses of pleasure of beauty refer to objects or nature (the material world) rather than to the transcendentals. This is what von Balthasar calls the ‘aestheticisation of the beautiful.’ He argued that by their very nature, judgements of taste are extrinsic to theological inquiry as they are concerned only with the worldly nature of beauty, viz., the subject experience of the beautiful and the standardisation or universality of judgments of the beautiful (and the ugly). What this means is that for von Balthasar, the aesthetic notion of the judgement of taste is only ever a surface inquiry. This is because it excludes the metaphysical reality of all being who is God. As Pope John Paul II said, ‘beauty is the visible form of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical condition of beauty.’<sup>92</sup>

Notwithstanding that, von Balthasar claims that there is necessarily a connection between worldly beauty and divine beauty. Balthasar asks the question, ‘Why not approach Christianity where it has become incarnate in nature?’<sup>93</sup> He adds that,

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<sup>92</sup> John, Paul, II. (4th April:1999) *Letter of his Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html). (Accessed: 20 November 2018).

<sup>93</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p. 91.



*Christianity may, of course be considered in two ways. We first have 'Christianity in itself, namely, its dogmas, its doctrines, and its cult.... secondly, we also have Christianity's radiant force, ... the poetics of Christian reality or the effect of this religion on poetry, the fine arts, eloquence, history, philosophy, and literature in general. This influence leads us to consider the transformations brought about by Christianity in human passions and the development of the human spirit. This distinction, however, does not reveal the plan of the work, but only the different of levels on which it is based. ...the criterion of truth (of both divine and total human truth, as well as supernatural and natural truth) is beauty - not only beauty's harmoniousness with man as such, but the harmony that beauty and only beauty produces and develops in man.*<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, Balthasar acknowledges the concerns that are held by some forms of Protestantism, viz., of the dangers of being lost in wonderment and awe at the beauty of a work of art. For example, concerns arise when our contemplation rests on a work of art or a sunset and we stop there without going any further (Art for art's sake). Hence, potentially there is a danger of displacing God with created things, and that this could lead to idolatry or narcissism. However, Balthasar asks a rhetorical question, cannot theology point this danger out? Von Balthasar's solution is to bring the principle of analogy of being into play. He argues that beauty is the bridge to the transcendentals and that it is the concept of the 'analogy of being' that acts as the link between the natural and the supernatural. Von Balthasar reminds us that the term the 'analogy of being' was used by St Thomas Aquinas to speak about God in relation to humanity and the world. Thus, von Balthasar employs analogical language, which means similar to or like, to speak about beauty as the splendour (glory) and the form of the incarnate Christ. For von Balthasar, it is Christ who is the bridge (The Way of Beauty) to the Trinity which he employs as the organising principle of his *theo-aesthetics*. For example, when we say, 'God is my rock,' we do not mean God is literally a rock, as this would be speaking univocally. Rather we are speaking analogically, viz., that He is similar to a rock which is solid and dependable. So, when we speak about the analogy of being, we convey that we are like God inasmuch as we are made in the image of God (Gen.1:26). Hence Balthasar argues that we can dare to say, analogically speaking, that beauty is more than a just a matter of judgements of

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<sup>94</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p. 92.

taste and pleasure, rather it is a characteristic of all being (reality) which is God.<sup>95</sup> By returning beauty to its historical origins von Balthasar seeks to purify and salvage it from its secular connotations. Thus, preparing the aesthetic to be reinstated into the heart of theological thinking.

### 2.5.2. Aesthetic Perception

With regard to aesthetic perception, we see Balthasar developing his theological aesthetics by stressing the importance of the inter-penetrating relationship between reason and the senses. Von Balthasar argues that when we contemplate a work of art, we utilise our sense of aesthetic perception which brings into play our senses of taste and pleasure. Not content to rest there he argues further that aesthetic perception of a work of art is also a cognitive act. As Davies rightly states, for von Balthasar,

*The perception of a work of art has to do with taste and enjoyment, but it is also in fact a form of cognition (a point which is less emphasised in Anglo-American tradition).<sup>96</sup>*

Precisely by emphasising the point that perceiving the aesthetic qualities in a work of art involves a cognitive act means that we acquire understanding and knowledge as well as enjoyment/pleasure. More crucially from a Christian perspective, acquiring 'knowledge' understood as 'revelation' will be fundamental to von Balthasar's project of a 'theological aesthetics.' What von Balthasar is claiming is that aesthetic perception is intrinsically linked to knowledge and thus to the revelation that Jesus is the incarnation of God. This is of great significance because von Balthasar is arguing that 'theological aesthetics' seen from the perspective of Christian revelation is now absolutely distinct from a worldly understanding of aesthetics (aesthetic theology) which tends to view beauty merely in terms of judgements of taste. As Davies rightly states, for von Balthasar,

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<sup>95</sup> The Catholic concept of analogy of being brings a distinctly different understanding of the relationship between God and his creation to that of the Protestant tradition. The Protestant tradition rejects the concept of analogy of being. The Protestant understanding of God is that He is distant, beyond our grasp and that He is distinctly not *like* us in any way. What this means is that God is divine, and we are not. Therefore, we cannot be like Him in any way. Hence the Protestant tradition rejects the concept of the analogy of being.

<sup>96</sup> Davies, O. (2004) p.133.

*Aesthetics is intimately connected with truth, goodness, and the depths of Christian revelation - thus with knowledge in its most radical and transforming sense - is intrinsic to his project.*<sup>97</sup>

Aesthetics seen as a form of revelational knowledge of the Incarnate Word of God, is seen as a gift of faith that is experienced, perceived, and recognised through the senses which necessarily includes an act of cognition. Consequently, von Balthasar is able to link human aesthetic perception (earthly beauty) to the glory of the Lord (divine beauty).

### **2.5.3. From Earthly Beauty to Divine Glory**

In relation to defining transcendental categories of being, namely the good, the true and the beautiful, von Balthasar argues that no adequate conceptual statements can be made. However, since we necessarily think in terms of concepts and need to give expression to them, he reasons that we can only do so ‘through roundabout, convergent thinking.’<sup>98</sup> In *Earthly Beauty and Divine Glory* (1983) von Balthasar explores the nature of the relationship between earthly beauty and divine glory in relation to Christian art. Von Balthasar asks the question,

*When and how transparently does Christian art reflect what in truth should be represented through beauty: the glory of triune love?*<sup>99</sup>

Here Balthasar explores when and how Christian art reflects, represents, and gives expression to the relationship between inner-worldly beauty and the divine glory of God’s love. According to von Balthasar for Christian art to authentically represent the triune love, beauty must transcend into glory. He does this by focusing on how the glorious mystery of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ translates into earthly beauty. He then asks the question, ‘Can such a thing really exist as Christian art?’<sup>100</sup>

After outlining the biblical history of depicting God in image form, von Balthasar proceeds with caution. He is somewhat sympathetic to the reasons

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<sup>97</sup> Davies, O. (2004) p.133.

<sup>98</sup> Balthasar. (Fall:1983) *Earthly beauty and divine glory*, Communion International Catholic Review. p.202.

<sup>99</sup> Balthasar. (Fall: 1983) p.202.

<sup>100</sup> Balthasar. (Fall: 1983) p.205.

that led to the iconoclastic episodes that appear repeatedly throughout history. Nevertheless, he states that since the incarnate God has revealed himself in image form, it is this that allows earthly beauty to give expression to the divine glory of God's triune love.

For Balthasar in order to judge whether a work of Christian art can indeed give expression to the beauty of the divine glory of God (and he thinks that not all can), the Christian thinker must have received and know how to utilise the gift of discernment of spirits. Alongside this Balthasar argues that some Christian art is of its time. He writes,

*We must also beware of judging a work of art according to the impression it makes on us in the twentieth century. We should evaluate it by the sensibilities of the time when it was created. A medieval choral evoked completely different feelings in its time than it would now.*<sup>101</sup>

However, Balthasar argues that not all Christian art is ambiguous. He then moves from the relationship between earthly beauty and the glory of God on to seeing works of art as an aesthetic model for the glory of God. That is, for von Balthasar, 'the aesthetic experience is an analogy of the Christian experience.'<sup>102</sup> He then lists several composers, Bach, Mozart, Roualt and Messiaen, which he believes fulfils the criteria. Nevertheless, von Balthasar remains cautious. He states that,

*There is a wide range of exciting masterworks, which seem technically to achieve the transcendence from beauty to glory, while - and because of this - their power to enchant is a warning sign.*<sup>103</sup>

For Balthasar, not only is the discernment of spirits necessary but also objectivity and aesthetic and religious training are required for interpreting the true meaning of the message of Christian art. Traditionally speaking, during the Renaissance a way that artists depicted the divine was through the perfect form. However, rather than choosing a work of art that depicts the physical beauty of the divine Christ such as Raphael's *Mond Crucifixion* (c.1502-3) [FIG. 1], not surprisingly, Balthasar presents the *Isenheim Altarpiece* of the

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<sup>101</sup> Balthasar. (Fall:1983) p.206.

<sup>102</sup> Maeseneer, de Yves. (2008) *The Art of Disappearing: Religion and Aestheticization*, in *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics*. p.103.

<sup>103</sup> Balthasar. (Fall:1983) p.206.

Crucifixion by Matthias Grünewald (c.1515) [FIG. 2] as an example of Christian art that fulfils the criteria of divine beauty to translate the message of the glory and love of God. Unlike Raphael's depiction of the Crucified Christ Grünewald's depiction of the Crucifixion of Christ shows the true horror and brutality of the passion in graphic detail. Balthasar reasons that it is,

*The ghastliness of the crucified, the seeming absence of all beauty that permits the breakthrough of the flaming mystery of the glory of love.*<sup>104</sup>

For von Balthasar, it is the wounded state of Christ that reveals and allows the beauty of God's glory and love to be seen and experienced. The sacramental wounded-ness of Christ elicits a call and response motif, which invites the viewer to share in the suffering, paradoxically beautifully healing those who are moved to respond. That is, being moved by the image of the Crucified Christ allows the beauty of God to reside within the viewer. As Balthasar explains,

*Before the beautiful - no, not really before but within the beautiful - the whole person quivers. He/she not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; he/she experiences themselves as being moved and possessed by it. [...] Such a person has been taken up wholesale into the reality of the beautiful and is now fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it.*<sup>105</sup>

In this sense von Balthasar claims that authentic Christian art acts as an *axis mundi* a point of convergence where earthly beauty and divine glory meet and ultimately unite. Being moved by the image of the crucified Christ speaks of the sacramental nature of the arts to depict the divine beauty of sacrifice, which leads to the salvation of the beholder.

It is Christ's self-emptying (*kenosis*) that provides space for the beholder to encounter the divine. Jean Hite describes this as the *khôra*,<sup>106</sup> a space where the finite meets the infinite.<sup>107</sup> For Balthasar, this point of convergence can only be accessed through the gift of grace. Balthasar alluding to Scheeben's concept of gift grace states that,

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<sup>104</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.119.

<sup>105</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GL.I*. p.220.

<sup>106</sup> The space lying between two places or limits.

<sup>107</sup> Hite, Jean. (15th February: 2012)

*God's revelation of himself, according to Scheeben, means the transporting of man from his own immanent and finite sphere into the divine, transcendental, and infinite sphere, an experience such as is portrayed, for instance, by the well-known Renaissance woodcut which shows a man piercing the sphere of the world with his head and gaping with astonishment at the mysteries beyond the world.*<sup>108</sup>

Although Balthasar utilises visual art to bring home his point, he does not actually name the engraving itself. He seemingly assumes that the reader is familiar with the piece. The woodcut which Balthasar mentions to illustrate Scheeben's concept of the gift of grace is the *Flammarion Engraving* [FIG. 3]. The artist of the engraving is unknown as is the exact date of the woodcut. It is called the *Flammarion Engraving* because the first known reference to it appeared in Camille Flammarion's book *L'Atmosphère: Météorologie Populaire* (Paris, 1888, p. 163). A caption located at the bottom of the work, now barely legible, translates to,

*A medieval missionary tells that he has found the point where heaven and earth meet.*

Seeing the engraving itself demonstrates the profundity of the image to express the *axis mundi* from earthly beauty to divine glory. Moreover, comparing the black and white version [FIG. 3] to the colour version [FIG. 4] further clarifies Balthasar's point. The coloured version of the engraving, a much later development, has the advantage of showing the viewer/reader what clearly lies beyond the earth. It majestically illustrates a more glorious rendition of the heavens than the black, grey, and white monotone hues of the earth in which the medieval missionary portrayed in the image finds himself. The image of a person discovering the space where the finite meets the infinite powerfully reveals the revelation of the beauty of God, namely God who made the heavens is more beautiful than that which can be conceived in nature. That something more glorious lies beyond, and yet as it is only attainable through the gift of grace.

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<sup>108</sup> Balthasar. (1982), *GLI*, p.106.

## 2.6. The Inseparability of Fundamental Theology and Dogmatic Theology

To reiterate, von Balthasar argued that beauty, seen as one of the transcendental properties of being, is his departure point for his theological aesthetics. In order to delineate the task and structure of his theo-aesthetics he states that historically speaking, beauty has always had two elements to it, namely, what Thomas Aquinas called ‘species’ (form) and ‘lumen’ (splendour/glory). With regard to the relationship between form and splendour, von Balthasar argues that ‘both aspects are inseparable from one another, and together they constitute the fundamental configuration of Being.’<sup>109</sup> He thus maintains that a theological aesthetic must be developed in two phases and that these two phases, namely what von Balthasar calls ‘the theory of vision’ and ‘the theory of rapture’ are just as inseparable as that of form and splendour.

*Phase I. The theory of vision (fundamental theology): aesthetic perception seen as a theory about the form of God’s self-revelation.*

*Phase 2. The theory of rapture (dogmatic theology): aesthetics as a theory of the incarnation of God’s glory and the response of humankind which is elevated by that glory.*<sup>110</sup>

Here Balthasar is arguing that, it is by the means of recovering the lost transcendental ‘beauty’ that will enable ‘the theologian’ to transform and unite two of the most important branches of theology, namely fundamental theology and dogmatic theology. As Richard Viladesau states in *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (1999),

*Balthasar holds that fundamental theology and dogmatics are finally inseparable because it is only in the light of grace that one can perceive the fact of revelation...However, the act of perceiving revelation cannot be separated from the object that is perceived: the enrapturing form of God’s beauty as shown in Jesus Christ, and especially in Christ crucified.*<sup>111</sup>

For Balthasar, the task and structure of a theological aesthetic necessarily involves the restructuring of faith as movement. That is to say, it is ‘faith as movement’ which is a central image of aesthetic perception. He argues that

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<sup>109</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.119.

<sup>110</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.125.

<sup>111</sup> Viladesau. R. (1999). USA: Oxford Press. p. 35.

‘seeing the form’ is fundamentally an act of contemplation. Balthasar calls this ‘the theory of vision.’<sup>112</sup> He argues that, when we ‘see’ the *Glory of the Lord*, in the form of the incarnate Christ through the light of faith, it is primarily an exercise in aesthetic perception. Faith as movement proceeds thus, Christ is firstly seen, that is contemplated, loved (*Eros*) and then adored. When the Christian engages in the contemplative act of ‘seeing the form’ which starts from aesthetic perception of the form (God’s self-revelation in Christ), the Christian is then moved by love and responds with adoration, ‘a theory of rapture.’<sup>113</sup> For Balthasar, it is Christian *Eros* which enables faith to be seen as movement.

*A movement of the entire person, leading away from himself through the vision to the invisible God, a movement furthermore, which the word ‘Faith’ describes only imperfectly.*<sup>114</sup>

By connecting the theory of vision (seeing the form) to the theory of rapture (adoration of the form) through the grace and gaze of love Balthasar is attempting to connect fundamental theology to dogmatic theology. He envisages seeing the form as the ‘subject element’ of faith, namely aesthetic perception which is concerned with the glory of God as incarnate Christ while the theory of rapture is seen as the ‘objective element’ of faith. As Davies points out,

*Balthasar’s restructuring of faith opens up significant and hitherto unseen perspectives on the nature of Christian life. At a single stroke, he breaks the link between faith and reason which has so dominated modern theological apologetics, while retaining faith’s cognitive character.*<sup>115</sup>

For Balthasar, the nature of Christian life is always experiential which is best seen in the lived experience of the saints in light.

## 2.7. Criticisms and Conclusions

Balthasar’s theological aesthetics investigation sets out to find and renew an interest in beauty, the lost transcendental, and to restore her to her former glory, namely to equal status to that of the true and the good. By inverting the

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<sup>112</sup> Fundamental Theology.

<sup>113</sup> Dogmatic Theology.

<sup>114</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.121.

<sup>115</sup> Davies, O. (2004) p.134.



Kantian epistemological order of the transcendentals, Balthasar's theoaesthetics is revolutionary in thought, inasmuch as he insists on seeing beauty as the narrative driver of his transcendental argument. What is of interest is that, by bringing the analogy of Being into play, beauty is no longer seen in mere worldly terms of judgements of taste and pleasure, rather it is necessarily involves a cognitive function that is characteristic of God's self-revelation Christ (form). Thus, beauty illustrates its inseparability and equality to that of the true and the good. Consequently, God's glory (splendour) is reflected onto the cosmos and into the world, and ultimately it is seen in humanity radiantly dwelling in the lived experiences of the saints in light. Thus, Balthasar has turned the traditional arguments for proofs for the existence of God on their head inasmuch as whereas traditional arguments start from nature to arrive at the conclusion that a creator exists, he starts from the position of beholding the beauty of the form, which is seen as the splendour, as the glory of God. Thus, a Christian understanding of beauty is ultimately seen as Christ personified. Hence, Balthasar's theology of aesthetics is Christologically centred.

Henri de Lubac SJ once described von Balthasar as, 'the most cultured man in Europe.' Moreover, there is vast body of constructive criticism, both positive and negative, surrounding Balthasar's theological investigations. Dr. Travis LaCouter in *Balthasar and Prayer* (2021) asks the astute question, Whose Balthasar? He then proposes and provides a comprehensive map of scholarly reactions to Balthasar's works, which he calls 'the three waves of Balthasar reception.'<sup>116</sup> LaCouter draws out the differences, and the major interpretive trends in contemporary theological approaches to Balthasarian Studies, with special attention given to English speaking critiques.<sup>117</sup> He argues that the three waves of scholarly reception can be aligned in relation to Balthasar's trilogy, namely perceiving (aesthetics), acting (dramatics), and integrating (logic) trains of thought.

According to LaCouter, von Balthasar in his lifetime drew relatively little attention from the English-speaking world. This was because his works were

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<sup>116</sup> LaCouter, T. (2021) *Balthasar and Prayer*. T & T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology. Bloomsbury Publishing. p.10.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. LaCouter, T. (2021) p.11.

not then, fully, available in English. Between 1982 and 1991 a small group of renowned theological scholars, such as Rowan Williams, Andrew Louth, Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, and Brian McNeil edited and translated all seven volumes of the *Herrlichkeit* into English. LaCouter argues that this so called first wave of commentators, on the whole applauded Balthasar for his theological aesthetics, and was championed as a kind of ‘trump card against modern relativism.’<sup>118</sup> For example, Louis Dupre famously declared that *Herrlichkeit* to be ‘among the foremost theological achievements of our century.’<sup>119</sup> Thus, Balthasar became a man of influence among the anglophone academics of the time. As LaCouter states,

*Early Balthasarians were on the whole more adulatory of than critical towards their subject, often casting him as a stand-in for orthodoxy and a bastion of ‘authentic’ Catholic thought.*<sup>120</sup>

However, LaCouter claims that the second wave of Balthasarian interpreters were far more critical than the first wave. Among these were laypeople who tried to evaluate rather than assert Balthasar’s works in relation to modern theology. Notwithstanding that, there were still some friendly commentaries in the second wave of Balthasarian readers such as Aidan Nichols OP and Fergus Kerr. Yet, by and large, the second phase of Balthasarians were openly hostile towards their subject matter. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that they did acknowledge von Balthasar’s creativity.

LaCouter states that Dr. Tina Beattie in *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (2004) is representative of the second wave of feminist commentators who dramatically and vehemently rejected Balthasar’s works. She argued that the first wave of Balthasarians tended to hide ‘the violent and sexual undercurrents,’ which must be identified and unravelled.’<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, for LaCouter, within the second wave of readers, Balthasar’s efforts were also challenged on the conservative right by Alyssa Pitstick, who attempts to vitiate his entire theological enterprise.<sup>122</sup> As LaCouter notes,

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<sup>118</sup> LaCouter, T. (2021) p.11.

<sup>119</sup> Louis Dupre in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*. P. 183. Cited in LaCouter, T. (2021) p.12.

<sup>120</sup> LaCouter, T. (2021) p.13.

<sup>121</sup> Cited in LaCouter, T. (2021) p.12.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. LaCouter, T. (2021) p.14.

*While the first wave took Balthasar almost as a stand-in for the Tradition, Pitstick sees the Swiss theologian standing squarely against the established magisterial teaching of the church. Pitstick's study is a dogged and carefully researched polemic against what she considers a serious threat to the orthodox doctrine of hell and salvation; in this way her subject matter is substantively different than the feminist critics...But she shares with them a strong, almost visceral, sense that Balthasar's theology is essentially dangerous.*<sup>123</sup>

However, one of the major criticisms of Balthasar's works in the second wave of readers is Dr. Karen Kilby. In her book *Balthasar: a (very) Critical Introduction* (2012) Kilby describes Balthasar as knowing that which it not knowable. She states that, 'he frequently seems to presume ... a God's eye view.'<sup>124</sup> For instance, firstly he gives an overview of many of the different forms of aesthetic arguments, then gives an evaluation of the theories as inadequate and then presents his own view as the only one with any real validity. In other words, according to Kilby, Balthasar seems to speak from the position of God seeing all things, viewing, and evaluating them from a position that is above all theologians, philosophers, and the reader. For Kilby, what this means is that Balthasar's claims are just too grandiose for them to be viable.

However, to a certain extent, Balthasar seems to have been aware of his own intellectual limitations inasmuch as towards the end of the foreword section of *The Glory of God: Seeing the Form*. Volume I., he states that, the scope of his work 'remains all too Mediterranean.' This statement shows a somewhat humble acknowledgement of his limitations with regard to the scope of his knowledge, and it also leaves the door open for the reader to make further investigations.

Moreover, being 'all-knowing' is not the only criticism that Kilby lays at Balthasar's door, she also says that what his model of theological aesthetics really amounts to, is a 'all-or-nothing' approach. As Kilby says,

*It seems, certain possible dangers are associated with the image of 'seeing the form' with placing this model of an aesthetic experience at the centre of a major theological endeavour... what one might call its all-or-nothing quality.*<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> LaCouter, T. (2021) p.15.

<sup>124</sup> Kilby, K. (2012) p.13.

<sup>125</sup> Kilby, K. (2012) p.54.

Here Kilby is referring to Balthasar's concept of 'seeing the form' as Christ as Revelation. What this means, from Kilby's point of view, is that the reader either sees the form of Christ as Revelation as Balthasar presents it or they do not see it at all.

Kilby's laboured criticism of Balthasar's works continues when she argues that his style of writing is more descriptive than analytical and that the influence that the mystic Adrian von Stryer had on his theological thinking, especially with regard to his writings on Holy Saturday is all too apparent. In addition to this, as a chaplain he never held a seat of authority as a theologian. Hence his theological thoughts were not under the same scrutiny as other theologians in the field. He also had his own publishing company and so became his own publisher. What this seems to imply is that much of his writing was left unexamined by his peers. Also, that his work had no real critical editorial amendments, and thus his writings by and large were left uncorrected and therefore unamended. This seems to insinuate that his work was not subjected to the same rigours as perhaps they would have been if an independent publisher had published Balthasar's writings.

LaCouter in *Balthasar and Prayer* (2021) announces his discontentment with the second-wave critics. He writes,

*My dissatisfaction with the second wave has to do not so much with any of their specific criticisms of Balthasar's admittedly adventurous theologoumena; rather, I submit that in their rush to correct the overwrought and politically motivated interpretations advanced during the first wave, they often misrepresented the particular sort of theological performance that Balthasar's writings represent...Balthasar never intended to preside over a 'system' which might be subjected to cadaverous dissection; rather, he only intended in his writing to give rise to genuine contemplation of the central Christian mysteries...The real danger of certain second-wave approaches, then, is that they risk short-circuiting the necessary process of engaging Balthasar constructively in favour of barring him outright from the guild of acceptable theological discourse (whatever that is taken to be).<sup>126</sup>*

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<sup>126</sup> LaCouter, T. (2021) p.22.

LaCouter then turns his attention to what he calls ‘the third-wave of Balthasar readers.’ He states that the third wave have developed a particular feel for Balthasar’s style, his prose, and his theological thoughts, and are able to integrate that into any number of complimentary or competing approaches. Among the third wave of Balthasarian readers is Derek Brown, who according to LaCouter, sets about recontextualis[ing] but never decontextualis[ing] Balthasar’s theology. As LaCouter rightly states,

*These readers are united by the conviction that Balthasar is a source of theology as opposed to its end.*<sup>127</sup>

LaCouter summarises the third wave of Balthasarians readers as those whose,

*Operative hermeneutic is one of critical generosity which seeks to learn from Balthasar when it is possible to so and correct him with it is necessary.*<sup>128</sup>

I for my part agree with LaCouter’s detailed and comprehensive scholarly map, which he calls the ‘three waves of Balthasar reception,’ inasmuch as there was evidently wide non-critical enthusiastic support from the first wave of Balthasarian readers, and there is certainly validity in some of the concerns raised by the second-wave critics. With regard to the current third wave of Balthasarian readers, there certainly seems to be a sense of integration, readiness to learn from, and to correct when necessary. In this context there is much to be gleaned from Balthasar’s theological thought viewed as a source of theology. As Kilby quite rightly states,

*Balthasar in fragments is important and worth pursuing, for there is much to learn from, to borrow, to think about, and to develop.*<sup>129</sup>

Therefore, inspired by Balthasar’s project of returning beauty to its rightful place in Christian thought, seen through the lens of LaCouter’s third wave position, in the next chapter this thesis explores the concept of visual theology from a Catholic sacramental perspective. Moreover, reading Balthasar’s works in LaCouter’s ‘third wave’ sense, contributes to the uniqueness of theological framework presented in chapter four of this study.

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<sup>127</sup> LaCouter, T. (2021) p.24.

<sup>128</sup> LaCouter, T. (2021) p.29.

<sup>129</sup> Kilby, K. (2012) p.167.

## Chapter 3 Visual Theology: A Literature Review: Part 2

As mentioned elsewhere, concerned with the demise in Christian practice in modern times, the thesis presents a framework for the theological interpretation of Christian art as a means of increasing spiritual capital in students and staff in Catholic education.<sup>130</sup> In order to achieve this, the literature review will explore, analyse, and evaluate literary texts surrounding the newly emergent concept of visual theology. The thesis' inquiry into the nature of the relationship between the visual arts, theology and education will be approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective.

### 3.1. Research questions

The questions that guide this inquiry vis-a-vis visual theology are as follows: - What is visual theology, and how is the concept defined and understood in contemporary scholarship? What are the guiding principles for visual theology from a Catholic perspective?

### 3.2. What is Visual Theology?

Visual theology is a newly emerging in the field of theological aesthetics. It aims to (re)unite the visual arts to theology to form a sub-discipline in its own right. In its broadest sense it is perceived as an aspect of theology that affects the way we look at, talk about, and understand God.<sup>131</sup> In 2012 Makoto Fujimura, a practicing Calvinist, artist, writer, and the current Director of the Culture Care Initiative, California, argued that,

*Not much has been written on visual theology... not only...is not much written on visual theology, any effort to bring together visual imagery and scriptures is scant.*<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Sheridan Gilley (1999) argues persuasively that affective piety, popular devotions, which constituted a central feature of the lives of working-class Catholics was lost largely in the post-Vatican II era. Gilley speaks of the decline of a whole range of societies through which Catholic community was expressed and which, from the sixteenth century onwards had been "the very life-blood of lay Catholicism." He then goes on to discuss the consequences of the decline in traditional practices of affective piety: Gilley, S. (1999) *A Tradition and Culture Lost, To Be Regained?* in Hornsby-Smith, M. P. (Ed.) *Catholics in England 1950–2000: Historical and Sociological Perspectives*. London: Cassell.

<sup>131</sup> C.f. Avanesov. (2019).

<sup>132</sup> Fujimura, Makoto. (10 April:2012) *Visual Theology*. Since Fujimura drafted this article, a website titled *Visual Commentary on Scripture* was launched in 2018 by King's College, London. It aims to unite the visual Arts to commentary on the Scriptures. This project is by and large an ecumenical undertaking of Professor Ben Quash.

Despite the increasing interest in the nature of the relationship between theology and the visual arts,<sup>133</sup> on the surface, Fujimura's claim seems to be valid. For example, if you conduct a Google search on the term 'visual theology' you will discover that there is very little information to be found with regard to a definition of the concept. In the few examples where the phrase does appear in the search engine, an explanation of 'what visual theology is' and 'how it is understood' is rarely given. That is to say, it seems to be assumed rather than specified. This is somewhat problematic, because the term 'visual theology' is readily being used increasingly in the field of theological aesthetics.<sup>134</sup> As such there is a growing need to provide a workable definition so that a consensus be achieved. Moreover, without a well-founded definition the term 'visual theology' is tantamount to a slogan or a catchphrase.

Nevertheless, what we can deduct from Fujimura's statement is that, in its simplest form visual theology is an attempt to bring imagery (visual culture) and scripture (verbal culture) together. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of the components that could constitute an adequate criterion for the concept of visual theology it is important to review the literature that surrounds it.

### 3.2.1. Tracing the Historical Roots of Visual Theology

In 2009 Robin, M. Jensen and Kimberly, J. Vrudny co-edited a book titled *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Art*. The book features a collection of fifteen essays, which comprise of four parts

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<sup>133</sup> See: Maritain, J. (1920) *Art and Scholasticism*, and later in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (1953); Bailey, Albert, Edward. (1922) *The Use of Art in Religious Education*. Cincinnati: Abingdon Press; Panofsky, Erwin. (1955) *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. London: Penguin Books; Tillich, P. (1959) *Theology of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford Press; Wolterstorff, N. (1996) *Art in Action: Towards a Christian Aesthetic*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. (1982) *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Volume I: Seeing the Form*. Leiva-Merikakis, Erasmo. (Translator.) Fessio, Joseph. S.J. and Riches, John. (Eds.) Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; Yates, W. (1987) *The Arts in Theological Education*. USA: Scholars Press; Viladesau, R. (1999) *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Begbie, J. (2002) *Sounding the Depths: Theology Through the Arts*. SCM Press, and Jensen, R. & Vrudny, Kimberly J. (2009) *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts*. Collegeville mi: Liturgical Press.

<sup>134</sup> See Jensen, Robin M. & Vrudny, Kimberly J. (Eds.) (2009) *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts*. Collegeville mi: Liturgical Press; Fujimura, M. (10 April: 2012) *Visual Theology*; Reddaway, C. (2013) *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces*; Challies, Tim. & Byes, Josh. (2016) *Visual Theology: Seeing and Understanding the Truth about God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan; Reynoso, Rondall. (2018) *Expanding Theology: An Argument for Visual Theology*, and Avanesov S. S. (2019) *On Visual Theology*. Journal of Visual Theology 1. pp.13–43.

with three essays in each section. It examines how the visual arts are useful in addressing contemporary theological questions - something that Jensen and Vrudny call, 'visual theology.'<sup>135</sup> The editors try to justify and define the term by stating that since,

*The incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity who was both image (eikon) and word (logos) affirmed that created matter could mediate uncreated and spiritual truth to humankind. Thus, sight could lead to insight; the visual could be a medium of knowing as well as showing.*<sup>136</sup>

Reflection or study of the visual arts is visual theology when,

*The nonverbal or symbolic modes of expression ... challenge the limits of the verbal.*<sup>137</sup>

What this statement implies is that, for Jensen and Vrudny, visual theology is theological reflection on works of art providing that it fulfils the criteria of the statement mentioned above. To my knowledge this is the earliest example of an attempt to define what visual theology is and what criteria is needed to validate it as such.

Of the fifteen essays in the book, the one that best describes what visual theology is and how it is to be understood is given by Cindi Beth Johnson in *Messengers of Jazz*. Here Johnson lists ten reasons why it is essential that theology and the arts ought to be studied together.<sup>138</sup> The reasons given by Johnson were taken directly from Wilson Yates' book *The Arts in Theological Education* (1987).<sup>139</sup> Johnson argues that Yates' ten reasons why it is essential that theology engages with the arts are tantamount to a vision statement.<sup>140</sup> However, Yates does not actually mention the term visual theology in his book.

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<sup>135</sup> The focus of the book is on contemporary works of art dating from the mid-twentieth century to the present. The book makes no attempt to theologically reflect upon historical works of Christian art. Neither does it reflect on the significance that they have on contemporary theological questions.

<sup>136</sup> Jensen, Robin M., & Vrudny, Kimberly J. (Eds.) (2009) *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts*. Collegeville mi: Liturgical Press. p.9.

<sup>137</sup> Quotation cited in Pereyra, David. (2015) *Book Review on Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts*. p.140.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson, Cindi, Beth, (2009) *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming to Community through the Arts*. p.202.

<sup>139</sup> Yates' main area of concern in this book was the integration of the arts into the theological studies of seminarians.

<sup>140</sup> For a detailed list of rules and guidelines for a methodology for theologians wishing to engage with the arts see Chapter 5 of Yates, W.H. (1987) *The Arts in Theological Education*. However, the actual concept of a visual theology is not mentioned.



Unfortunately, Jensen's and Vrudny's (2009) book does not allude to Yates' general guidelines in any real depth, if at all, in any of the essays featured. Moreover, Yates' vision statement by itself does not provide the reader with an adequate system in which to engage in theological reflection. What it does provide are reasons for further exploration, expansion, and research into a greater understanding of the relationship between the arts, religion, and education.

As David Pereyra in his 2015 book review on *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts* (2009) points out, according to the editors' own criteria not all the essays in the book actually qualify as visual theology. Pereyra's observation was also picked up and emphasised by Tanner Capps when she critically remarked that,

*The promise of a visual theology as indicated in the title is lacking in the main...the lack of substantial theological reflection appears to flow from the reductionist tendencies to identify Christian theology not with doctrines, habits and practices native to Christian communities, but rather with amorphous idea of 'the spiritual' that the arts and all matters of religion are absorbed into.*<sup>141</sup>

Furthermore, Pereyra in summary of the essays in the book, calls for clarity and direction, he argues that,

*The editors have tried to suggest to their readers how to engage in a theological reflection through the arts. Nevertheless, I could not find a unified methodology that would enable the reader to engage in this process...I would have liked the editors to put more effort into establishing a greater overarching framework...Although this book was published in 2009, there has been no progression in theology since then from an aesthetics perspective.*<sup>142</sup>

Moreover, it seems that Yates' observation in 1987 that further research is needed has still not been addressed fully. He stated that

*Given the richness of the Roman Catholic Church's history, the contribution it has made to western art forms and its presence as a truly international church, one might hope for further*

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<sup>141</sup> Capps, Tanner. (2011) *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 69(3). pp. 346-348. p.348.

<sup>142</sup> Pereyra. (2015) p.141.

*developments in the whole are of the arts in theological education.*<sup>143</sup>

I agree with Capps' observations inasmuch as a substantial theological reflection on the arts necessarily needs to include not only universal principles but also particulars, such as 'doctrines, habits and practices native to Christian communities.' What this means is that further research is needed to develop a methodology that is capable of forming an overarching framework for the theological interpretation of meanings of historical and contemporary works of Christian art. Especially, as Yates' states and hopes for, from a Catholic perceptive in particular.

### **3.2.2. Existing Approaches to Visual Theology**

Small steps are now being made to address the rapidly growing interest in the field of visual theology. However, the ongoing discourse is still very much at the embryonic stage. Rondall Reynoso's essay entitled *Expanding Theology: An Argument for Visual Theology* (2018), utilises Millard Erickson's evangelical definition of theology in order to attempt to build a case for works of art to be acknowledged as visual theology. For Reynoso, artists who are people of faith are deemed as visual theologians while the art which the artist produces is in itself visual theology.

### **3.2.3. Fittingness and Function**

Reynoso's criteria for a standard of art which qualifies as visual theology rests upon what he calls 'fittingness.'<sup>144</sup> In short, what this means is that the utilisation of words 'which expression is most fitting to the context.'<sup>145</sup> Reynoso then argues that, when one proceeds to apply the criteria of fittingness to 'graphic representations of theological concepts' it does not qualify as visual theology. He refers to an info-graphic WordPress representation titled *visual theology of atonement* [FIG. 5] which was posted on Tim Challies' blog page, titled *Visual Theology series of infographics*. Since then, Tim Challies and

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<sup>143</sup> Yates, W. (1987) *The Arts in Theological Education*, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press. p.48.

<sup>144</sup> The term 'fittingness' is a concept that Nicholas Wolterstorff defined as, 'similarity across modalities' in his book Wolterstorff, N. (1980: 1996) *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic*. p.99.

<sup>145</sup> Reynoso. (2018) p.7.

Josh Byers have gone on to write and illustrate a book titled *Visual Theology: Seeing and Understanding the Truth about God* (2016). Reynoso argues that,

*These graphics all function more verbally than visually. There is a lack of understanding about how the visual language works. The graphic elements are little more than a new veneer on a verbal presentation of a doctrine.*<sup>146</sup>

Hence, for Reynoso, infographics do not fulfil his ‘fittingness’ criteria for visual theology. In short, what Reynoso is saying is that, not all artistic productions are necessarily eligible candidates for visual theology. Because, for Reynoso, Challies’ infographics do not qualify as art in the real sense of the word.

However, Tim Challies in the introduction to his book *Visual Theology: Seeing and Understanding the Truth about God* (2016) argues that,

*Information graphics are means of visualising or displaying information, which makes it art, but an especially functional form of art.*<sup>147</sup>

Referring to the info-graphic’ images within the book, Challies then offers a profoundly simplistic statement saying that he ‘loves words’ and he ‘also loves images. Furthermore, Challies states that, he provides the theology (words that accompany the graphics), while Byers provides the graphics (the images that accompany the words). Challies concludes by asserting that with his words (information) and Byers’ graphics (images) we have what he calls ‘infographics.’ Challies does not give any further analysis, explanation, or definition as to what visual theology is. Neither in the introduction nor within the main body of the book. William J. Brennan III in his (2018) review of Challies' & Byers’ book states that,

*It should be noted that the book’s focus is the Christian life and how to live it and not, as its title might suggest, any or all of the classical theological loci.*<sup>148</sup>

This implies that the term visual theology, which features predominantly in the title of Challies and Byers book *Visual Theology: Seeing and Understanding*

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<sup>146</sup> Reynoso. (2018) p.18.

<sup>147</sup> Challies & Byers (2016) *Visual Theology: Seeing and Understanding the Truth about God*. p.15.

<sup>148</sup> William J. Brennan III. (2018) *Visual Theology: Seeing and Understanding the Truth about God*, Challies, Tim and Byers, Josh, Zondervan (2016) Reviews in Religion & Theology. Vol. 25. Issue.2. pp.230-231.

*the Truth about God* (2016) is merely being used to refer to the infographics in the book. What this means is that the term visual theology, in this instance, would be more akin to an advertising slogan rather than a methodology for the theological interpretation of the visual arts.

Moreover, Reynoso argues that it would be a misconception or an unjust parallel to equate info-graphic images to that of works of fine art. This is because the term infographics rightly falls into the category of applied arts. Historically speaking, the applied arts and the fine arts have been separated into different categories. For the reason that the applied arts, namely infographics are typically functional in form and purpose, whereas works of fine art are things of beauty which are considered to be objects that delight the senses and bring pleasure to the viewer, and which have no practical use. In short, the infographics images produced by Challies & Byers do not meet the criteria ‘fittingness of expression’ that a piece of fine art would accomplish. Par consequence infographics do not qualify as a piece of fine art in the proper sense of the word. That is, infographics are unable to qualify as visual theology because they do not meet the ‘fittingness’ (criteria) required for fine art.

What Reynoso’s argument amounts to is a variation on the ever-evolving debate on what can be perceived as art. The dispute between fine arts and crafts hinges on the way we understand the concept of beauty. Jacques Maritain, who like Balthasar, wrote extensively on the distinctive characteristics of beauty in *Art and Scholasticism* (1920) and later in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (1953) argued for the distinction between the fine arts and crafts to be viewed in relation to the scholastic concept of *ars*. He argued that *ars* is found in both the fine arts and crafts. Likewise, he argued that beauty is also found in both, with the proviso that the fine arts have a particular kind of beauty that is not found in crafts.<sup>149</sup>

If we return to Reynoso’s criteria of what qualifies as a visual theology, he rightly states that not all images qualify as art unless the artwork that the artist produces qualifies as art in the proper sense of the term. Thus, Reynoso’s

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<sup>149</sup> C.f. Carnes. (2014) pp.36-39.

rebuttal of Challies' and Byers' infographics being either perceived or defined as visual theology may be justified.

Furthermore, Reynoso suggests that a person who is an artist and is from a faith background is a visual theologian. What this means, in effect, is that most of the artists from the world of antiquity to the present day qualify as visual theologians simply because they practice their faith and produced works of sacred art when commissioned to do so or did so in the hope of securing a sale. This could be called an overly simplistic/loose understanding of what it means to be a theologian. However, as Dr. Rebekah Lamb in *Michael O'Brien's Theological Aesthetics* (2021) states that,

*There is a profound affordance of religious value in the very making of art, irrespective of the creedal or faith position of artists.*<sup>150</sup>

Whereas Reynoso is concerned with the fittingness of an artwork in relation to what qualifies as visual theology, for Fujimura, visual theology is an event, an action that is divinely inspired. Fujimura claims that,

*Visual theology happens, when we are engaged with scriptures, with fullness of our imaginations. (Visual Theology is Art in Action: it is Art in Action being energised by the Holy Spirit).*<sup>151</sup>

Moreover, Fujimura argues that,

*If theology is a way to illumine how God is to be understood, then visual theology is illumination of the Biblical words as expressed by God. Do the images reveal what words cannot? The Word of God is generative and gives birth to faith. Illuminations, then, should do the same. I am not arguing here to replace or compete with the Word of God at all. One can have the Word of Life at the centre of the discussion, and the role of visual design as the lens to see through. The Word of Life gives birth to sensory experiences and intuitive, tacit knowledge.*<sup>152</sup>

In his article Fujimura acknowledges that his concept of a visual theology is somewhat radical, to say the least, for a Calvinistic understanding of theology.<sup>153</sup> What Fujimura is saying is not just radical but potentially highly

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<sup>150</sup> Lamb, R. (2021) *Michael O'Brien's Theological Aesthetics*. Religions 12: 451. p. 5. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060451>. (Accessed: 21 April 2022).

<sup>151</sup> Fujimura. (2012).

<sup>152</sup> Fujimura. (2012).

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Fujimura, (2012).

problematic, theologically, and historically speaking. This is because the Calvinist tradition is known for its outright criticism of the use of images in worship. As T.J. Gorringer in *Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenges of Art* (2011) argues,

*For Calvin and for many other Reformers the second commandment made depictions of the deity impossible...At the same time Calvin agreed that the arts of painting and carving are gifts of God.*<sup>154</sup>

According to Calvin the appropriate usage of images fell into two categories.

*The first consists of histories, and the second of trees, mountains, rivers, and persons that one paints without any meaningful intention. The first kind provides instruction, the second exists only to afford us pleasure.*<sup>155</sup>

William Perkins, who was a cleric and Cambridge graduate of theology in Elizabethan England and proponent of Reformed theology, was a firm supporter of Calvinistic approach to art. He argued that,

*The image of man may be painted for civil or historical use, but not to represent God or in use of religion.*<sup>156</sup>

One of the most notorious examples from the Calvinist tradition's desecration of religious artefacts and imagery occurred at Beeldenstorm<sup>157</sup> (statue storm) in the Netherlands on the 20th of August 1566. Nicholas Sander, who was among the first wave of Catholics to be exiled from Elizabethan England, in *A Treatise on the Images of Christ and of his Saints* (1566) provides an eyewitness account of a similar event that took place in Antwerp 1566. Sander describes the fury of the iconoclasm movement that swept across Europe. Here he relays what happened [FIG.6].<sup>158</sup>

*Notwithstanding, these fresh followers of this new preaching...defaced the painted images, not only of Our Lady but of all others in the town. They tore the curtains, dashed in pieces the carved work of brass and stone, break the altars, spoilt clothes and corporesses, wrested the irons, conveyed away or break the*

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<sup>154</sup> Gorringer T.J. (2011) *Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenges of Art*. p.11.

<sup>155</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H. Beveridge. Quotation cited in Gorringer. (2011) p.197.

<sup>156</sup> Aston, Margaret, *God's saints and reformers: portraiture and Protestant England* Quotation cited in Gorringer. (2011) p.197.

<sup>157</sup> In German - Bildersturm roughly translates to image/statue storm.

<sup>158</sup> It is of interest to compare Frans Hogenberg's coloured print [FIG. 6] with that of Challies' and Byres' infographics [FIG. 5]. Both images contain text which describe the narrative. However, the artistic difference between the two images is quite stark with regard to the quality of the artwork.

*chalices and vestments, pulled up the brass of the gravestones, not sparing the glass and seats which were made about the pillars of the church for men to sit in. What shall I say about the Blessed Sacrament of the altar which they trod under their feet and (horrible it is to say!) shed their stinking piss upon it, as though, it were not Christ's own body, it were not by their own doctrine a mystical figure of his body. ... these false brethren burned and rent not only all kind of Church books, but, moreover, destroyed whole libraries of books of all sciences and tongues, yes, the Holy Scriptures and the ancient fathers, and tore in pieces the maps and charts of the descriptions of countries.*<sup>159</sup>

Sander's eyewitness account is just one of many historical documents which demonstrate how from the very beginnings of the Calvinistic tradition art in churches and in worship has been considered unacceptable for the edification, education, and theological inquiry of the faithful. So how does Fujimura reconcile his newfound belief in visual theology with his Calvinistic identity? With regard to the fact that for the last four hundred years the Calvinist tradition has held the same view on the arts, namely that they are to play no part in the Calvinistic religion and that are not to be used to represent God he argues,

*To that, I say, blame Lane Dennis of Crossway to have commissioned me to spend two years thinking about such things as an artist. No, let's not blame him, let's blame the Four Holy Gospels, and what we call the "Good News." As I spent the last two and a half years journeying with this commission, and subsequent exhibits, I am convinced that there is such a thing as a visual theology, and that it matters.*<sup>160</sup>

From Fujimura's account, his justification for his newfound belief in a visual theology was brought about by a commission to depict the Four Holy Gospels in visual form. Fujimura's visual theological thinking is quite clearly autonomous, as it is derived from outside of the orthodox Calvinist tradition. That is, to incorporate the Arts into the Calvinist tradition as a means of theological reflection, would mean a monumental shift in their historical theological position. Therefore, it may prove problematic to develop an understanding of the concept of visual theology from an authentic Calvinistic position. Thus, it would be misleading to assume that Fujimura's newly found belief in a concept of visual theology is either acceptable to or is shared by the

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<sup>159</sup> Miola, Robert, S. (2007) *Early Modern Catholicism: An Anthology of Primary Sources*. p.59.

<sup>160</sup> Fujimura. (2012).

vast majority of Calvinistic traditions, for the reason that there are no theological roots from which to draw upon or to develop his concept of a Calvinistic approach to visual theology. However, if Fujimura succeeds in reshaping and rewriting the Calvinist tradition by convincing the reader that his nascent concept of visual theology is an important subject for ecclesiastical reflection within the authority of Calvinist Church then this will indeed be an incredible achievement.

More recently in 2018 the term visual theology has appeared on a website called ‘*Visual Theology*’ which was founded by Dr. Sheona Beaumont and Madeleine Emerald Thiele, respectively. Their website statement describes ‘Visual Theology’ as,

*A series of conferences, exhibitions, and related events that explores the relationship between the spiritual imagination and visual culture.*<sup>161</sup>

The website acts as a platform on which Beaumont and Thiele hope to engage church leaders, academics, and professional artists in serious critical interdisciplinary dialogue. This is welcome news indeed. They argue that the website came about in part because,

*Sacred texts and images, and the perspectives of readers and viewers, are more hybrid now than they have ever been.*<sup>162</sup>

However, it seems to me, that the term ‘hybrid’ as utilised by Beaumont and Thiele needs more explanation, inasmuch as is it not clear if the term is being used either to simply encourage interdisciplinary and ecumenical dialogue or if it is advocating/announcing the mixing of theological traditions. Furthermore, the concept of ‘what visual theology is’ seems to have been assumed rather than specified. That is to say, simply by stating that the visual theology is a site where artists and other interested parties come together to discuss the arts, is far too broad a concept for it to have any real in-depth theological meaning. Therefore, it seems to me that without further inquiry into developing a clearer understanding of what visual theology is and how the concept is to be understood and applied, the term as presented here acts more as an umbrella or

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<sup>161</sup> Beaumont, Sheona & Thiele, Madeleine, Emerald. (Directors). *Visual Theology*. Home Page. Available at: <https://www.visualtheology.org.uk/>. (Accessed: 13 April 2020).

<sup>162</sup> Beaumont, Sheona & Thiele, Madeleine, Emerald. (Directors). *Visual Theology*. Home Page.



a slogan rather than a concept that has an adequate theological framework. In order to apply an adequate framework to case studies (works of art) what is called for is a set of well-formed theological guidelines and principles to define the concept of visual theology. A framework for visual theology ought to necessarily include aspects of metaphysics (theory of reality - God), epistemology (the theory of knowledge - revelation) and aesthetics (theory of value - sensory or sensori-emotional).

In the first edition of the relatively newly founded Russian Orthodox journal, *The Journal of Visual Theology* (2019), Editor-in-Chief Professor S. S. Avanesov introduces the journal with an essay entitled *On Visual Theology* in which he argues for the validity, range, breadth, and width that visual theology encompasses. He states that the foundation of visual theology is founded first and foremost in the Scriptures. Avanesov describes visual theology as follows,

*Visual theology is, first and foremost, visual semiotics that is based on the biblical "opsodicy"<sup>163</sup> and involves materials from many related disciplines: aesthetics, art history, architectural theory, liturgical theology, exegetics, ascetics, rhetoric, and sacramentology. Visual-semiotic practices are formed in the field of such religious experience, the worldview, and doctrinal foundations of which allow and assume the very existence of such practices and their "legitimacy." <sup>164</sup>*

However, as Avanesov writes with regard to the newly emergent field of visual theology:

*The visual, besides the verbal, carries a significant semantic load in the domain of doctrinal systematisation, as well as in the domain of liturgical activities, organisation of sacred topoi and everyday inhabited space, and is a means of fixation and demonstration of confessional identity. It would seem to be an obvious and well-known thing. However, the analysis of the visual component of religious experience still lags far behind - both in volume and depth - the analysis of verbal expressions of faith. In the epoch of the "visual turn" Christian practices of "optical" fixation and transmission of religious experience attract special attention and require special study. <sup>165</sup>*

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<sup>163</sup> Here opsodicy is understood as the relationship between cognition and recognition in relation to vision.

<sup>164</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.18.

This document was translated from Russian into English with [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator).

<sup>165</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.18.

As Avanesov quite rightly states, although it (the field of visual theology) may seem an obvious and well-known area of theological discourse the reality is far from being realised. Hence, there is need to address the immense imbalance of theological research into the visual component of religious experience in relation to the verbal/textual component of religious experience. The phrase ‘visual component of religious experience’ covers a range of academic interests and disciplines, as such it suggests that visual theology's scope is genuinely exciting. Avanesov's essay *On Visual Theology* (2019) does make some headway into what visual theology is and how it is understood within the field of theology. Avanesov states that,

*In the context of the Incarnation of God, the visual side of religious culture receives additional justification and acquires the highest semantic status. The idea of visual theology, the understanding of its subject sphere and even the term itself for this sphere are already present in contemporary theological discourse.<sup>166</sup> Of course, the application of the term "visual theology" in each particular case is very peculiar and clearly narrow (from particular ways of expressing religious faith in art to illustration of the content of the Bible or even demonology); however, together such studies should be seen as different approaches to one problem, namely to the problem of optical expressiveness of the content of religious experience in its widest range - from truths of Revelation to aesthetics of everyday things, from dogmatics to everyday communion. Clearly articulated and sufficiently grounded, this line of inquiry has an important place in the system of theological knowledge.<sup>167</sup>*

For Avanesov, there is just one problem for a plethora of approaches emanating from different areas of theological interest, which are clearly nuanced and ‘narrow, namely ‘the problem of visual/optical expressiveness of the content of religious experience.’<sup>168</sup> As such there is a need and scope for further and clearer articulation as to what visual theology is and how it is understood in each particular case as well as in a general sense. The aims and scope of the relatively newly founded Russian Orthodox<sup>169</sup> *Journal of Visual*

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<sup>166</sup> See for example: Dyrness W. A. (2001) *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*. Baker Academic; Dyrness A. (2004) *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture. The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards*. Cambridge University Press; Challies T., Byers J. *Visual Theology. Seeing and Understanding the Truth About God*. Foreword by W. Grudem. Zondervan, 2016; Working R. C. *The Visual Theology of the Huguenots. Towards an Architectural Iconology of Early Modern French Protestantism, 1535 to 1623*. Lutterworth Press. (2017).

<sup>167</sup> Avanesov. (2019) pp.39-40.

<sup>168</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.40.

<sup>169</sup> To date, almost all the contributions to the journal seem to come from Eastern Europe and as such there is a real need for the journal to redress the balance and include Western European authors. If it does this then, in time, it could prove to be an exciting breakthrough for research into the field of visual theology.

*Theology* (2019), attempts to rectify the imbalance with regard to both volume and depth of analysis between visual and verbal expressions of faith by covering a range of different spheres of interest.

However, the *Journal of Visual Theology* produces two copies per year and has published five editions to date, all of which emanate from the Russian Orthodox tradition. Although Avanesov does refer to scripture and some of works of the early Church Fathers<sup>170</sup> in his account of what visual theology is and what it consists of, there is no reference whatsoever to key documents emanating from Roman Catholic teachings of the Church. Consequently, there is still much work to be done with regard to: defining and developing visual theology's theological meaning in each particular sphere; developing visual theological methodologies, and visual theological frameworks for interpreting the theological meaning of Christian art as 'visual expressions of the content of religious experience' in relation to Scriptural text, Catholic Church teaching, and the practices of the faithful.

Dr Chloe Reddaway's (2013) doctrinal thesis *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces, and the modern viewer* is primarily concerned with developing a methodology for the interpretation of historical Christian images for the 'ideal viewer'. Although visual theology is used in the title of her thesis Reddaway does not explicitly state what she means by the term visual theology. Notwithstanding that, what she claims is that the arts are an underused theological resource and that Art historians are poorly equipped and have little desire to make theological interpretations of historical Christian images.<sup>171</sup> According to Crow (2017 & 2019) Reddaway's observations still hold true today.

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<sup>170</sup> Namely, Hildebrand, D. von. (1998) *New Tower of Babel*. Selected Philosophical Works. Transl. into Russian by A. I. Smirnov. St. Petersburg. (1998). John of Damascus (1997) - Saint John of Damascus. Works. *Christological and polemical treatises. Words on Marian feast days*. Transl. into Russian, comm. by priest M. Kozlov and D. E. Afinogenov. Moscow. (1997) and John Chrysostom (1999) - *Works of the Holy Father of our John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople*. Transl. into Russian. Vol. 6. 2. Moscow (1999).

<sup>171</sup> Reddaway, C. (2013) *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces, and the modern viewer*. Kings College, London. Pp.10-13. Available at: [https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/visual-theology-in-14th-and-15th-century-florentine-frescoes\(820ba67a-1f99-4f1b-8230-43552009dd4c\).html](https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/theses/visual-theology-in-14th-and-15th-century-florentine-frescoes(820ba67a-1f99-4f1b-8230-43552009dd4c).html). (Accessed: 20 November 2018).

Thomas Crow in *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art* (2017) persuasively explained one of the reasons why Christian art is an ‘underused resource’ and of little theological interest to art historians. Crow argues that, since the ‘disenchantment’ of the Enlightenment art historians’ analysis of Christian art has ordinarily been and still is to a substantial extent a dispassionate examination of the form. What this means is that art historians do not, in general, attempt to provide nor discover the rich theological and doctrinal value of Christian art. He argues that art historians have been largely preoccupied with divorcing the work of art from its subject matter, viz., the theological value of the image has tended to be overlooked in favour of asking questions about the production of the image, the artist, and artistic elements within the image. For example, the line, value (contrast - light and shadow), colour, form, shape, and space (vanishing point in the painting), spatial organisation, location, and positioning of the work in relation to the viewer-spectator. Crow argues that without the separation between the artistic elements and the theological values within an image, Art history would not have developed the credibility of an independent discipline that it has today.

However, from a theological perspective the disinterest, on the part of the art historian and others, in pursuing and researching the theological value of an image’s subject matter, its narrative, has created a void between its content and its meaning. Thus, the value of theologically reflecting upon encountering the form portrayed within the image, namely the relationship between the viewer and the beauty of the incarnate Christ (and the lived experiences of His saints) has largely been overlooked, ignored, or not fully realised by the art world. Par consequence, comparatively speaking little research has gone into developing methodologies for the theological interpretation of Christian art.

Notwithstanding that, Reddaway’s (2013) thesis seeks to address the void by developing a methodology for ‘enriching the theological experience of the viewer’.<sup>172</sup> Reddaway contends that,

*The ideal viewer is imagined as a modern Christian viewer of any denomination not opposed to Christian images. This definition can*

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<sup>172</sup> Reddaway. (2013) p.13.

*reasonably be extended to include a non-Christian modern viewer sympathetic to Christianity and to the purposes of this project.*<sup>173</sup>

This description of the ideal viewer is somewhat problematic from a Catholic perspective. For while there are many universal principles that pertain to all Christians, there are particular principles and guidelines that are only applicable to certain traditions. For example, the sacramental perspective, the saints in light and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Why is this important? It is important from a number of positions, viz., theological, educational, and ecclesial. As Joel Green explains in *Practicing Theological Interpretation* (2011), ‘theological interpretation is identified especially by its self-consciously ecclesial location.’<sup>174</sup> Therefore without particular reference to which ecclesial tradition/location the theological interpretation of the work of art is actually portraying the meaning of the message in the image is, at best, an ecumenical version of Christianity, at worst, there is a danger of slipping into a hybrid of Christian traditions. Par consequence the theological meaning of the message could be somewhat bewildering for formation and evangelisation purposes, especially for those who are not yet fully familiar with their own ecclesial guidelines and principles. Therefore, from a Catholic perspective, Reddaway’s methodology for the interpretation of meanings of historical works of Christian art is inadequate, in the fuller sense (*sensus plenior*),<sup>175</sup> as a didactic tool for evangelising, the intentional formation of disciples, and the raising up of faith leaders in the Catholic tradition. That said, Reddaway’s methodological approach to historical works of Christian art aims at being nondenominational and as such has the potential to enrich the theological experience of the viewer in an ecumenical sense.

### **3.3. A Sacramental Worldview**

This section of the chapter will attempt to bring clarity and insight into the way in which Catholics understand the arts by arguing that Catholics have a sacramental worldview, and that this necessarily extends towards the way they theologically interpret and understand the arts. Here I argue that the arts

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<sup>173</sup> Reddaway. (2013) p.12.

<sup>174</sup> Green, Joel, B. (2011) *Practicing Theological Interpretation*. P. Introduction.

<sup>175</sup> The fuller sense is the 14th principle of the twenty principles of Catholic interpretation for the theological interpretation of the Bible. For the full list of principles see footnote 241. p.106.

viewed as ‘theological aesthetic resources’ may enable the faithful, and others, to encounter the Divine and grow in holiness. That this may have edifying, evangelising and educational benefits. That is to say, utilising a sacramental worldview, inspired by von Balthasar’s Christocentric concept of beauty, a deeper understanding of Christ through the arts may be possible.

What exactly is a sacramental worldview? ‘A sacramental worldview perceives the mysteries of God hidden in material creation.’<sup>176</sup> In short, a typical example of a sacramental worldview is illustrated by the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, when according to legend in 1540 he instructed the Jesuits to go out and ‘find God in all things.’<sup>177</sup> What this means is that a sacramental worldview is not a concept but rather ‘a way of life’. Seeking holiness in one’s life is an essential characteristic of Catholicism and of course other faiths. However, the sacramentality of life is centred on seeking and encountering the real presence of God in the world, through Christ with thanksgiving. It is life called to the service of others in the things of God (‘love one another as I have loved you.’ Jn. 13:34).<sup>178</sup> That is, a profound commitment to work for justice and peace.

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<sup>176</sup> Watson, J. (6th July: 2018) *A Sacramental Worldview*. Available at: <https://integratedcatholiclife.org/2018/07/watson-a-sacramental-worldview/#:~:text=A%20sacramental%20worldview%20perceives%20the%20mysteries%20of%20God,transubstantiated%20into%20the%20Body%20and%20Blood%20of%20Christ>. (Accessed: 11 March 2021).

<sup>177</sup> ‘Finding God in all things’ is a central theme of Ignatian spirituality. However, the actual phrase as an aspect of their spirituality was only popularised in the 1970s. It was Fr. Joseph DeGuibert SJ., groundbreaking work, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice* (1953) who largely responsible for promoting St Ignatius’ mystical side. Before that, according to Fr Barton T. Geger. SJ. in *Prayer in the Jesuits Constitutions* (2020) ‘the Jesuits were accustomed to speaking of Ignatius as an ascetic and a soldier’ (2020). DeGuibert took the phrase ‘*finding God in all things*’ from the primary sources of the *Jesuit Constitutions*, no. 288.

‘All Should strive to keep their intention right [*intencion recta*], not only in regard to their state of life but also in all particular details, in which they should aim always at serving and pleasing the Divine Goodness for its own sake and because of the incomparable love and benefits with which he has anticipated us, rather than for fear of punishment or hope of rewards, although they ought to draw help from these also. They should often be exhorted to **seek God our Lord in all things** [*a bus car en todas cosas Dios nuestro Señor*], removing from themselves as far as possible love of creatures in him, in conformity with His holy and divine will (Jesuits Constitutions, no., 288).’

Geger SJ. astutely notes that in the original Spanish text of the primary sources it reads not ‘*finding*’ but rather ‘*seeking*’ God our Lord in all things’ Geger. SJ. (2020) p.19. It was Fr. Jenonino Nadal, who was St Ignatius’ contemporary interpreter, who described him in this way, ‘In all things actions and conversations he was a contemplative in action something he expressed habitually in the world; we must **find God in all things**,’ Geger. SJ. (2020) p.19. Furthermore, there are many variations of the phrase, and the shorter phrase *todas las cosas* (all things) appears in hundreds of St Ignatius’ letters cf. Geger. SJ. (2020). See Josef Stierli SJ. (1977) *Seeking God in All Things in Ignatius of Loyola His Personality and Spiritual Heritage 1556 - 1956: Studies on the 400th Anniversary of His Death*. pp.134-162. However, the saying, ‘*finding God in all things*,’ or any variation on the saying were in all probability derived from St. Thomas Aquinas who said that ‘God is in all things, and innermost.’ *Summa Theologica. Whether God is in all things?* Question 8. Article 1.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Pope Francis (2014) *The Sacraments: A Chain of Grace*.

It is the sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, which enables the Holy Spirit to work in, through and with the faithful.<sup>179</sup> Pope Francis says that participation in the sacraments act as a chain of grace which allows the faithful to encounter the presence of Christ in the nowness of the moment ('I am with you always, to the end of time' Mt. 28:20).

*The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Saviour.*<sup>180</sup>

Michael P. Murphy in *What Is the Catholic Imagination?* (2019) states that the Catholic imagination,

*Refers to the faculty of creatures for critical, contemplative, and intellectual engagement with the living God. It is a habit of making and seeing with a long tradition to consider and continually retrieve. To follow its most articulate commentator, Hans Urs von Balthasar (who never used the term explicitly), the Catholic imagination is implicit in any theological aesthetics, taking the form in Balthasar of lay and clerical "styles"—styles of creativity in prayer, prose, and poetry inseparable from "unique divine mission" and particular 'historical existence.'*<sup>181</sup>

W. J. Hill commenting on Edward Schillebeeckx's *Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God* (1964) argues that,

*An encounter with God is always sacramental, i.e., achieved in visibility, a visibility that points beyond itself thus involving sign-mystery.*<sup>182</sup>

That is to say, the sacraments and the sacramentals function as 'the juncture where God and humankind meet in mutual availability.'<sup>183</sup> With a sacramental worldview there is an expectation that they will encounter the presence of God in the here and now. As Andrew Greeley in *The Catholic Imagination* (2001) states,

*Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, saints and religious*

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<sup>179</sup> 'The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance toward the perfection of charity.' CCC. (2003) para.1212.

<sup>180</sup> CCC. (2003) para.1129.

<sup>181</sup> Murphy, Michael P. (September: 2019) *What Is the Catholic Imagination?* Available at: [churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/what-is-the-catholic-imagination/](http://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/what-is-the-catholic-imagination/). (Accessed: 2 March 2022).

<sup>182</sup> Hill, W. J. (1964) *Christ, The Sacrament Encounter with God*. p.172.

<sup>183</sup> Hill, W. J. (1964) p.173.

*medals, rosary beads and holy pictures. But these Catholic paraphernalia are mere hints of a deeper and more pervasive religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see the Holy lurking in creation...The Catholic imagination can appropriately be called sacramental. It sees created reality as a 'sacrament,' that is, a revelation of the presence of God.*<sup>184</sup>

Furthermore, Greeley argues that a Catholic worldview is distinctly different to that of other Christian traditions. He notes the works of David Tracy, especially his *Analogical Imagination* (1982), who provided a fundamental insight to the sacramental worldview in the Catholic tradition.

*Catholic theologians and artists tend to emphasise the presence of God in the world, while the classic works of Protestant theologians tend to emphasise the absence of God from the world. The Catholic writers stress the nearness of God to His creation; the Protestant writers the distance between God and His creation; the Protestants emphasise the risk of superstition and idolatry, the Catholics the dangers of a creation in which God is only marginally present...Catholics tend to accentuate the immanence of God, Protestants the transcendence of God...Neither propensity is superior to the other...Nonetheless, they are different one from another.*<sup>185</sup>

Therefore, if we apply a sacramental worldview to the way we understand Sacred Art we arrive at the notion of encountering the presence of divine in the here and now. Through sacramental imaginative contemplation the arts may allow us to aesthetically experience and so encounter the beauty of Christ.<sup>186</sup> This is achieved in part by exploring and contemplating the Scriptures, doctrines, and the sacred traditions of the Church through the visual arts. What this means is that, when the viewer presents him/herself before a sacred work of art it may act as a point of encounter with the beauty of divine reality. As Dr. Jacob Phillips in *Mary, Star of Evangelisation: Tilling the Soil and Sowing the Seed* (2018) writes in relation to evangelising power of the arts *via pulchritudinis*,

*We might well ask what it would mean to evangelise along the via pulchritudinis. To flesh this out a little, let us think of great works of Christian art, like the paintings of Michelangelo, Fra Angelico, or Caravaggio, or maybe architectural masterpieces like St Peter's Basilica or Santiago de Compostela. As means of evangelisation, examples like these transmit the Gospel message –*

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<sup>184</sup> Greeley. (2001) *The Catholic Imagination*. p.1.

<sup>185</sup> Greeley. (2001) p.5.

<sup>186</sup> The sacramental imagination is sometimes referred to as the Catholic imagination.



*they communicate the reality of Christ and his Church – in ways which perhaps mere words and assertions cannot achieve.*<sup>187</sup>

That is, ‘genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Saviour, the Holy One and Sanctifier.’<sup>188</sup> As Richard Viladesau in *The Beauty of the Cross* (2008) states,

*Contemporary scholarship recognizes that art and music are themselves a way of thinking and communicating, with a complex relationship to verbal/conceptual thought. At one extreme, they may be independent, and convey their own kind of message, one that is untranslatable into wordy...On the other hand, they may serve a complementary role to words and concepts: expressing ideas, illustrating them, extending their reach into the realm of affect and desire, sometimes adding to ideas another meaning that has an ambiguous relationship with their purely conceptual content.*<sup>189</sup>

Hence, the power of the arts when approached *via pulchritudinis* function as a means of communicating God’s love. An encounter which increases the spiritual capital of the believer and leads to an ever-deeper evangelisation of the soul. That is, the ‘Beauty of the Arts’ has the capacity to lead the viewer to an encounter with ‘the Beauty of Christ, Model and Prototype of Christian Holiness’ in a way that words, by themselves, may fail to communicate. Moreover, as Caldecott states in *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (2012)

*Famous paintings in galleries and books, or religious icons and architecture, can be shown to be full of symbols as well as interesting patterns. Modern education tends not to pay attention to the symbolic properties of things, but symbols, metaphors, and analogies help to connect everything together.*<sup>190</sup>

### **3.3.1. The Sacramental Perspective in the Context of Catholic Education**

In this section the concept of visual theology will be explored from a Catholic sacramental perspective in the context of Catholic education, in particular, Professor John Lydon’s claim that, modelling one’s ministry on Christ, on the part of teachers, is of critical importance for passing on the faith (Cf. Lydon:2011). In what follows the thesis evaluates Lydon’s claim alongside the benefits of sacramental engagement in the liturgy, and how that leads to a

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<sup>187</sup> Phillips, J. (2018) *Mary, Star of Evangelisation: Tilling the Soil and Sowing the Seed*. p.88.

<sup>188</sup> CCC. (2003) para.2502.

<sup>189</sup> Viladesau, R. (2008) *The Beauty of the Cross*. Oxford Press. p.4

<sup>190</sup> Caldecott, S. (2012) *Rethinking the Foundations of Education*. p. 115.

better understanding of the aesthetic features that surround us, such as frescoes, paintings, and sculptures.

Lydon in *Laying the Groundwork for the next 70 Years – The Spiritual Challenge* (2014) highlights one of most critical issues that headteachers are currently facing, namely the global phenomena of transitioning from a ‘totally Catholic culture’ to a ‘fragmented Catholicism’ which has taken place in schools and colleges in recent times. Lydon states that,

*When the Second Vatican Council was convened in 1962 about 75% of those teaching in Catholic schools across the world were priests or religious. In such a context the faith was not primarily about passing on of information through formation programmes but “a lived tradition passed on in the very lives of the teachers themselves.”<sup>191</sup>*

Furthermore, Lydon states that,

*This situation was replicated globally, particularly in the USA where 86% of staff in Catholic schools were religious compared to 4.4% currently.<sup>192</sup>*

He argues that since the dramatic decline of Religious Orders and priests in Catholic education the task of spiritual leadership is now primarily the responsibility of the Head-teachers. Lydon’s main area of concern is with the impact that this phenomenon has had upon Catholic school Head-teachers’ role as spiritual leaders. He argues that,

*The principal impact on Catholic school leaders of the shift from a totally Catholic culture to a “fragmented Catholicism” in which the traditional axis of home/school/Parish has less impact relates to the increase in significance of their role as spiritual leaders of their school communities.<sup>193</sup>*

Although Lydon argues that it is the headteachers who are primarily responsible for faith education of the school, he extends the responsibility of spiritual leaders to include ‘leadership teams or core groups of committed teachers’ (Lydon. 2014, p.7). However, this is somewhat problematic as statistical evidence has also proven that the personal practice of faith amongst the laity in leadership roles in Catholic education has also fallen dramatically.

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<sup>191</sup> Lydon. (2014) *Laying the Groundwork for the next 70 Years – The Spiritual Challenge*. p.5.

<sup>192</sup> Lydon. (2014) p.5.

<sup>193</sup> Lydon. (2014) p.7.

For example, when Lydon drafted his paper in 2014 55% of teachers in Catholic maintained schools were Catholic. In a more recent census conducted in 2021 the CES maintains that only 48% of teachers in Catholic schools are Catholic.<sup>194</sup> These figures seem to indicate that a fragmented Catholicism amongst teachers working in Catholic schools is fast approaching the norm. Furthermore, Lydon asks out of those teachers who identify as being Catholic, in the CES census, how many actually fulfil the criteria of what it means to be a practicing Catholic? A practicing Catholic is defined as,

*Someone who has been sacramentally initiated into the Catholic Church and who adheres to those substantive life choices which do not impair them for receiving the sacraments of the Church and which will not in any way be detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of the school.*<sup>195</sup>

The actual number of teachers who actually sacramentally practice their faith is assumed to be far fewer than the 48% highlighted in the CES 2021 report. For Lydon, what this means is that in Europe there is now a growing culture of ‘believing without belonging’ amongst Catholic teachers. That is to say, the discrepancy between believing (people who profess a faith) without belonging (people who do not actually practice the faith) is on the increase within Catholic education.

Alongside this, the dichotomy of the pervading phenomena of ‘*The Two Cultures*’<sup>196</sup> has had a profound impact on the way we learn and interact and hence, on the way we pass on the faith. That is, there seems to be a real moving away from a personal subjective ‘learning from’ which facilitates faith development to an objective factual ‘learning about’ other cultures for the

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<sup>194</sup> CES (2021) *Digest of 2021 Census Data for Schools and Colleges in England*. p.5.

<sup>195</sup> Stock, M. (2009) *Catholic Schools and the Definition of a Practicing Catholic*, Birmingham, Archdiocese of Birmingham Schools Commission. Mgr. Stock, now General Secretary of the Bishops’ Conference of England & Wales, repeats this definition in his revised (2012) publication *Christ at the Centre*. London: CTS. p.30.

<sup>196</sup> The ‘Two Cultures’ phenomena refers to C. P. Snow’s experience of being both a scientist and a writer, which he describes in a paper he presented at the Rede Lecture in 1959. He argued that the two disciplines of which he was professionally acquainted with, namely, the sciences and the literary Arts were of equal intelligence but rarely interacted. He went on to argue that ‘the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups.’ What is more, ‘between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension - sometimes hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding.’ Snow, C. P. (1998) *The Two Cultures*. Cambridge University Press. pp.3-4. Along similar lines Balthasar’s developed Snow’s argument which he called the ‘Two Spheres’ phenomena in his essay *On the Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time*. (Spring:1993) *Communio* 20. pp.147-87. Balthasar argued that there are notable limitations to phenomenology in relation to theological discourse because of an ever-increasing secularisation had dethroned the Church from its undisputed position as the crowning of worldly domains, which in turn made it appear subordinate to worldly structures. He argued that the ever-increasing dichotomy between the Church and the world, Christianity and culture, philosophy and theology are the ‘Two Spheres’ in which we live and experience God.

purpose of understanding others and gaining ‘real and true knowledge’ (cf. Rudge. 2008, pp.100-3). This reflects the scientific driven assessment structured pedagogy which seems to dominate both our culture and our schools. As Stratfor Caldecott in *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education* (2017) states,

*In the modern world, thanks to the rise of modern science and the decline of religious cosmology, the arts and sciences have been separated and divorced...and we have lost any clear sense of who we are and where we are going.*<sup>197</sup>

More recently, Caldecott in *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (2012) argued that ‘the public school system has long been a cultural disaster.’<sup>198</sup> This, he believes, is due to society rejecting the notion of objective truth. As Caldecott states,

*The gravest threat our civilization faces is in fact not ecological but philosophical. It is the widespread belief that there is no objective truth and no ‘true’ way of considering the world and its history, only a plurality of subjective points of view, each point of view being of equal value and deserving equal respect.*<sup>199</sup>

Caldecott asserts that due to this seemingly prevailing worldview, ‘our curricula have become fragmented and incoherent because we have lost any sense of how knowledge fits together’ (Caldecott. 2012 p.7). He argues that for education to be truly effective, it needs to be based on the knowledge, purpose, and nature of human life, which he states is something the modern relativist think is importable.<sup>200</sup> Thus, Caldecott argues that there is a need to rediscover the unity that it has long since been lost. For Caldecott, it is beauty that holds that key to this lost unity.

*Beauty is the radiance of the true and the good, and it is what attracts us to both...If beauty is a key to that lost unity, it is because beauty (according to medieval philosophers) is one of the ‘transcendental’ properties of being, that is, found in absolutely everything that exists.*<sup>201</sup>

The role that beauty plays in education will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

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<sup>197</sup> Caldecott, S. (2017) *Beauty for Truth’s Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press. p.11.

<sup>198</sup> Here Caldecott is referring to the educational system in the USA, yet it can be equally applied across the Catholic educational world. Caldecott, S. (2012) *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education*. USA: Angelico Press. p.7.

<sup>199</sup> Caldecott, S. (2012) p.7.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Caldecott, S. (2012) p.8.

<sup>201</sup> Caldecott, S. (2017) p.32.

In relation to the mission and purpose of Catholic schools and colleges Cardinal Vincent Nichols states that it is,

*The conviction of faith, and the desire to witness to it specifically in the world of education, is the ultimate rationale for our Catholic schools and colleges.*<sup>202</sup>

In response to the demise of Christian practice among the teaching profession, Lydon argues that in order to carry out the mission of passing on the faith within an educational setting there needs to be a ‘critical mass’ of well informed and committed Catholic teachers. As a remedy for the declining numbers of teachers who have a ‘conviction of faith and the desire to witness to it’ in educational settings Lydon puts forward a number of key components that may enable spiritual capital to flourish. He provides four distinct components for advancing spiritual capital in teachers:

*To undertake a MA in Catholic School Leadership*

*Consult retired Headteachers - ‘Peer Mentors’*

*Participation in the Mass*

*The Power of Witnessing - through modelling one’s ministry on Christ*

Lydon suggests that the MA in *Catholic School Leadership* is a viable strategy for increasing the spiritual capital in staff in Catholic schools and colleges. The programme is designed to equip those in positions of leadership with the principles and practices of the Catholic faith. It is divided into four modules: Catholic Education; Leadership and Management; Research Methods, and Spiritual and Theological Foundations. Furthermore, Lydon suggests that retired head-teachers could act as ‘sources of faith’ and be a critical influence for those who are aspiring to positions of leadership.

The role and mission of the teacher as witness, mentor, and guide is strongly linked to Balthasar’s understanding of mission, especially as seen in the lived experience of the saints in light, inasmuch as the conviction of faith is rooted in mirroring Christ.

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<sup>202</sup> Westminster Diocese - *Our Catholic Schools: Their Identity and Their Purpose*. p.2. Available at: [rcdow.org.uk](http://rcdow.org.uk). (Accessed: 26 June 2020).

*All the saints---they especially---realize how inadequately they fulfill their mission, and they are to be taken seriously when they insist on their inadequacy. What matters about them is not their personal “heroic achievement” but the resolute obedience with which they have utterly surrendered themselves to serving a mission and have come to see their very existence in light of it.*<sup>203</sup>

Balthasar’s description of the saints attitude towards service, as part of who they are called to be, is echoed by Lydon’s concept that the role of the teacher in Catholic education is seen primarily in terms of vocation. That is, teaching is not just about delivering a course well, rather it is imbued with theological obligations, where faith and the desire to witness to it is illustrated by modelling one’s ministry on Christ. As Balthasar writes in relation to people of faith,

*...people are overtaken by an unexpected vocation in the midst of their ordinary lives and entrusted with a theological role. The event is totally unexpected; not only are there no exceptions to this rule: it is very often underlined by the paradox that the man chosen is apparently the least suited to the task...*<sup>204</sup>

With respect to objective forms of following Christ, David Moss writes in relation to Balthasar’s understanding of the theology and sanctity of Christian life as a means of Christian witness.

*The great saint-theologians drew no distinction between Christian life and Christian doctrine, frequently writing one into the other, because the fullness of truth of the One whose very life reveals the truth of God – Jesus Christ. What this means is that just as the truth of Christian life (spirituality) is not to be discovered in some interior realm but in objective (incarnated) forms of following Christ (bishop, pastor, teacher, evangelist, poet, and so forth), so the nature of this ‘theological existence’ admits to no prior philosophical (and later psychological) description that would allow one to prescind from the properly doctrinal. The truth of doctrine, in speaking of ‘things eternal,’ illuminates and directs, while never abandoning, the creaturely struggle for holiness – and vice versa.*<sup>205</sup>

Alongside this Lydon looks at the importance of sacramental participation in the liturgy of the Mass to build spiritual capital in the faithful, which is then passed on by evangelising the culture in which we live. He argues that a number of section 48 inspections highlighted the importance of students and

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<sup>203</sup> Balthasar. 2SS.p. 27.

<sup>204</sup> Balthasar. TD III. p.263.

<sup>205</sup> Moss, D. (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*. p.83.

staff experiencing Liturgical worship in schools and colleges as a significant means of building up the faith.<sup>206</sup> The quality of the experience of attending Mass was judged as either outstanding or good in many of schools in the Diocese of Westminster. The Mass is viewed as open to everyone who attends the schools and colleges.

Lydon in *The Contemporary Catholic Teacher: A Reappraisal of The Concept of Teaching as a Vocation in the Catholic Christian Context* (2011) refers to Dr Ann Casson's research into the celebration of the Mass in schools and other places of Higher Education as a means for building community. Casson argues that based upon relational theology, the Mass functions as means of remembering the Catholic tradition. In addition to this the Church teaches that the sacrament of the Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life' (CCC. 2003. para.1324-1327).

Notwithstanding that, the main point that Lydon makes in his book (2011) is that it is 'the power of witness' that brings about a real growth in spiritual capital. Lydon states that,

*While all the above are key constituents in promoting spiritual capital, witnessing to Catholic identity through modelling one's ministry on that of Christ is key.*<sup>207</sup>

While I would agree with Lydon on his list of components for advancing the spiritual capital in teachers and others in Catholic education there is one noticeable component that is missing, namely the role that the arts play in relating our lived tradition in the context of the liturgy and our everyday culture. As Caldecott states,

*When we come to Mass – or to the nearest equivalent of that liturgy our faith permits – we should be able to experience a sense that here, all the threads of our education are being brought together. If we don't, something is wrong with our education or our liturgy. Science, and art, mathematics and ethics, history and psychology, the worlds of nature and the spirit, are all present in a liturgy that gives them a home and a meaning.*<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> 'What is Section 48? Under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005 the bishop has the right to inspect any Catholic school or college within his Diocese to evaluate the quality of Religious Education and the Catholic nature of the school. In the Diocese of Salford these inspections are carried out on a cyclical basis by trained inspectors, the majority of whom are current diocesan serving headteachers.' Diocese of Salford website. Available at: <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/education>. (Accessed: 23 May 2020).

<sup>207</sup> Lydon. (2014) p.8.

<sup>208</sup> Caldecott, S. (2017) *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press. p.131.

Encountering the beauty of the Incarnate Word of God in and through the arts, which form part of our everyday lives, has been a time-honoured way of worshiping, communicating, and building spiritual capital in the faithful in a Catholic educational setting. However, this important and underused resource seems to have been overlooked, or not fully utilised as it might be. Realising the role of that beauty plays in education is vital if we are to link our sacramental faith to the culture in which we live. That is, a sacramental worldview is key to understanding the nature of the relationship between God and the Catholic Church, and that extends towards the way the arts are understood in a Catholic educational setting. Sacred art is sacramental in nature. It re-members, re-creates and re-presents the beauty of the incarnate God. Paul Thek, a Catholic-raised artist once stated that,

*Art is Liturgy, and if the public responds to their sacred character, then I hope I realised my aim, at least at that instance.*<sup>209</sup>

The newly emergent field of visual theology is a way of nurturing the notion of habitus both in staff and in students. Lydon eludes somewhat the importance of embodiment of culture, and building upon Professor Gerald Grace's concept of spiritual capital, argues that,

*The notion that habitus is a perennial as opposed to a transitional reality constitutes a seamless connection between the work of Bourdieu and Grace on the one hand and Aquinas on the other.*<sup>210</sup>

Whereas Grace's focus in *Catholic Schools: Mission, Markets and Morality* (2002) was on the influence that headteachers have as 'resources of faith' Lydon explores the notion of habitus with regard to extending the capacity to embody spiritual capital to that of 'leadership teams or core groups, committed teachers' and chaplains. Lydon does not give a full account of nature of culture but does provide a glimpse by comparing Thomas Sergiovanni's and John Corbally's a definition of culture to that of Marcellin Flynn's definition of Catholic culture.

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<sup>209</sup> 'Art is Liturgy' is a quotation by an American artist called Paul Thek (1933-1988), which was taken from an interview with Harald Szeemann, that was conducted in 1973. Available at: [www.kolumba.de/?language=eng&cat\\_select=1&category=47&artikle=422](http://www.kolumba.de/?language=eng&cat_select=1&category=47&artikle=422). (Accessed: 7 June 2020).

<sup>210</sup> Lydon. (2014) p.10.



In response to the mass exodus of Religious Orders from Catholic Education Lydon explores the challenges of nurturing and sustaining a ‘critical mass’ of people in key positions within the Catholic Education system. He defines ‘critical mass’ as persons who are ‘baptised and practicing Catholic.’<sup>211</sup> Lydon’s burning concern is that,

*A critical moment has been reached when there is a need to move from defining spiritual capital to researching effective means of sustaining it.*<sup>212</sup>

However, how spiritual capital is defined and understood is of some theological importance here. I would argue that the term spiritual capital is noteworthy similar to the concept of ‘the universal call to holiness.’ The universal call to holiness is a teaching of the Catholic Church that states that all people are called to be holy (Matthew 5:48), and to grow in holiness. One of the many examples of this teaching is provided in *Lumen Gentium* (Chapter V) which provides an in-depth account of the universal call to holiness.

*It is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.*<sup>213</sup>

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II argued that the call to holiness is not just a state but also a task of all the faithful. The major task of the faithful is to evangelise, to pass on and communicate the message of Christ’s love. Evangelisation is strongly linked to spiritual capital inasmuch as we grow in holiness by exercising it and passing it on. Therefore, it is not only religious, priests, headteachers, leadership teams, committed teachers and chaplains, but all members of the Church who are called to embody spiritual capital, to grow in it, and pass it on (evangelise). In other words, ‘spiritual capital’ is a term

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<sup>211</sup> Lydon. (2014) p.11.

<sup>212</sup> Lydon. (2014) p.13.

<sup>213</sup> *Lumen Gentium*. (1964) Chapter 5. para.40.

that is similar to that of the concept of ‘the universal call to holiness’ inasmuch as we are called to the service of others.

However, the advantage of Grace’s term ‘spiritual capital’ is that it opens the discussion to other non-theological disciplines like that of sociology, history, and philosophy. Perhaps disciplines that would not necessarily be so readily interested in pursuing research into what it is to be holy and who is capable of possessing it. However, there is of course a danger in using secular language to define the universal call to holiness, namely that people are not *au fait* with the language of the Church and the rich historical theological discourse on holiness that exists. That said, I do agree with Lydon inasmuch as it is time to retain from defining and to start to research effective means of sustaining and growing in spiritual capital. Not just for those in positions of leadership, but for all those in education including the students.

As mentioned earlier, Lydon contends that one of the most critical issues facing headteachers is the global phenomena of transitioning from a ‘totally Catholic culture’ to a ‘fragmented Catholicism.’ Tim Gorringer in *Earthly Visions* (2011) highlights the importance of the function that the arts play in integrating a fragmented society. He claims that ‘the job of art is redemptive in bringing humankind from a fragmented to an integrated state.’<sup>214</sup>

However, Richard Pring in his book *Philosophy of Educational Research* (2004) states that,

*The Dearing Report (1994) in Britain proposed that the humanities and the arts should no longer be part of the compulsory National Curriculum after the age of 14. No argument was forthcoming why priority should be given to science and mathematics. But clearly this was an educational judgement.*<sup>215</sup>

In short, this means that the Dearing Report's educational judgement downgrades the value of the arts as a pedagogical experience. Pring responds by arguing that there is a long tradition of a distinctly Christian understanding of education which has not been fully realised by the report (Maritain, 1937 &

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<sup>214</sup> Gorringer, T.J. (2011) *Earthly Visions*. p.18.

<sup>215</sup> Pring. (2004) p.12.

1943; Carr, Haldane, McLaughlin, 1995, and Pring 1995). This raises the question; to what extent does the ‘distinctly Christian understanding of education’ necessarily value and therefore include the usage of the arts as theological aesthetic resources in an educational setting?

This thesis will argue that a strategy for increasing spiritual capital in staff and students ought to include further research into the effects of employing visual theology in educational settings. For example, further research needs to be conducted vis-à-vis exploring the relationship between the aesthetic experience and the spiritual experience, and the relationship between beauty and holiness to fully realise the role the arts play in maintaining a Catholic ethos. That is, the visual arts seen as ‘theological aesthetic resources,’ could provide a distinct and valuable component for increasing and enabling spiritual capital to flourish in leadership teams, committed teachers, chaplains and students and others in Catholic Education.

### **3.4. Understanding the Arts in the Context of the Catholic Tradition**

Historically speaking, from as early as the second century, the arts have been an invaluable, if somewhat under used resource for the evangelisation and sanctification of the faithful and the praise of God.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, the arts have functioned as means of illustrating, exploring, contemplating, and illuminating the deep theological truths of the Gospels, the doctrinal concepts of the Church, and the cultural world in which people live. Alongside this, sacred and devotional art has played a significant role in the development of the History of Art in the Western world.

However, the historical relationship between the ecclesial world and the arts has been at times somewhat problematic.<sup>217</sup> Just call to mind the iconoclastic

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<sup>216</sup> It is not the aim of this thesis to give an exhaustive account of the historical development of Catholic Art. The history of Catholic Art is far too extensive to mention in fine detail here. Rather the hope is to highlight some of the important historical events that have significantly marked the relationship in the last two thousand years. This is done with the aim of providing a backdrop for a discussion on a Catholic understanding of Art and situate it in the present context. For a full and comprehensive account on the history of art see Gombrich, E. H. (2006) *The Story of Art*. London: Phaidon Press. Also see Hitchcock, J. (2013) *History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium*. Ignatius Press.

<sup>217</sup> This is what is known as the ‘idolatry question.’ At times, there has been a certain uneasiness within the Church about depicting the invisible God in image form for fear that it would lead to idolatry. Confusion and tension were caused by the seemingly conflicting passages in the Old Testament, ‘You shall not make for

episodes of the Eastern and Western Churches in the 8th, 9th and 16th centuries and the growing secular paradigm of the art world since the Renaissance in which the ‘cult of the artist’ took precedence over the narrative of the subject matter.<sup>218</sup> All of which added to the ‘on — off,’ relationship between the arts and the Church. Moreover, since the Enlightenment the estrangement between the arts and the Church intensified and continued into the modern era.

Notwithstanding that, more recently there has been a flurry of interest in the field of visual theology, Robin, M., & Vrudny, K. J. (2009); Fujimura, M. (2012); Reddaway, C. (2013); Challies, T., & Byers, J. (2016); Reynoso, R. (2018), and Avanesov. (2019). Visual theology is a newly emergent sub-discipline which attempts to explore the mutual benefits of bringing theology and the arts into dialogue to form an academic discipline. As this is field is only just becoming prominent there is little in-depth analysis of assessing how much ‘theological capital’<sup>219</sup> appears in any given work of Christian art, and what this means for the faithful today. Moreover, visual methodologies for how the arts are theologically understood from a Catholic perspective have yet to be fully explored and developed.

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yourselves a graven image’ (Deut. 5:6-9; Exodus 20:4; Leviticus 26:1, Numbers 33:52) and the New Testament, ‘Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).

<sup>218</sup> Vasari, G. (2008) *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Translated by Julia Conway Bondanella & Peter Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics.

<sup>219</sup> I have derived and developed the concept of ‘theological capital’ from Bourdieu, P. (1986) *The forms of capital*. In J. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood. pp. 241-258. The concept of ‘theological capital’ I defined as: -

1. The process of deciphering and assessing how much theological depth/value there is in any given work of art. For example, the process of theological exegesis on the narrative of the subject matter to discover how much theological capital is contain within any given work of art. This process includes deciphering where the narrative is derived from, namely the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Mystical writings of the Saints, the doctrines of the Church, Sacred tradition, the Golden Legend, and non-canonical gospels. Assessing whether the theology found within a work of art is valid and or up to date, etc.

1.1 From a Catholic perspective ‘Theological Capital’ is understood in light of the canonical Scriptures and Sacred tradition (doctrines and teachings) as interpreted by the magisterium of the Catholic Church.

1.2 Theological Capital could also be understood from other religious worldview provided it is stated which religious worldview it is referring to, i.e., analysis of ecumenical Theological Capital in a work of art as well or instead of Catholic Theological Capital.

### 3.4.1. Towards a Catholic Understanding of the Arts

Is there such a thing as a Catholic understanding of the arts?<sup>220</sup> Given the long if somewhat turbulent history of the relationship between the arts and the Church this might seem an incredible question to ask. However, there has been much debate down the ages as to what, if at all, this looks like. In *Art and Sacrament*, which featured in *Epoch and Artist* (1959), the engraver, artist, and poet David Jones states that he was asked to write on the arts from a Catholic perspective. Jones bemoaned the impossibility of the task and likened it to setting out in a rowing boat to cross the Seven Seas in a weekend.<sup>221</sup> He argued that,

*There are no such things as a Catholic arts or painting and engraving or the Catholic art of writing prose and poems; but these things happen to be mainly the arts of which I have any contractual experience, or which I try my hand at from time to time.*<sup>222</sup>

Jones, after dismissing the possibility of a ‘Catholic arts,’ stated that, although the dictum ‘art for art’s sake’<sup>223</sup> holds the same assertion as ‘art is the sole intransitive activity of man’<sup>224</sup> he preferred the latter phrase because he thought that it was far less ambiguous. What he meant by this is that for him, art is a distinctive characteristic of human nature. Furthermore, Jones claimed that all art is ‘sign-making’ and that only man is capable of being a ‘sign-maker.’ He likened the ‘sign-making’ of the artist to the ‘sign-making’ of Christ celebrating the Last Supper in the Upper Room. What this seems to imply is that for Jones, the process of making art is a quasi-sacramental event.

In order to unpack this statement, it is necessary to explain how sacramentals differ from sacraments. St Augustine of Hippo defined the sacraments as ‘the visible sign of an invisible grace.’ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that, ‘Sacraments’ are ‘instituted directly by Jesus Christ, and they

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<sup>220</sup> Section 3.4.3.-3.4.8. Morrison, C. r.a. (2021) *A Catholic Understanding of the Arts in Reclaiming the Piazza III Reclaiming: Communication Catholic Culture*. Eds. Convery, R., Franchi, L., & Valero, J. Herefordshire: Gracewing. pp. 57-76.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Jones, D. (1959) *Art and Sacrament in Epoch and Artist*. London: Faber. p.144.

<sup>222</sup> Jones, D. (1959) p.144

<sup>223</sup> In its simplest form ‘art for art’s sake’ is understood as, art serves no other purpose but its own.

<sup>224</sup> Jones, D. (1959) p.149.

function *ex opere operato* (from the deed done), meaning, they do what they signify. Whereas ‘Sacramentals,’ mainly given to us by the Church (after Christ) throughout the centuries, work by virtue of the faith placed in them (*ex opere operantis*), and by virtue of the faith, work, and prayers of the Church (*ex opere operantis Ecclesiae*).’<sup>225</sup>

Jones argue that ‘man is unavoidably a sacramentalist and that his works are sacramental in character.’<sup>226</sup> Thus, Jones reasoned that, all art and not just Sacred Art is sacramental by nature. He argued that this was not a theological question but rather an anthropological question. This is because he was not concerned with looking at the qualities but rather at the act of creating art which, he believed, is exclusive to humankind. That is, for Jones, it is the arts that makes us fundamentally different from all non-human beings, namely, the heavenly angels and the animal kingdom. This he explained is the difference between ‘doing and making.’ For example, when bees build their hives, they are just ‘doing’ what bees do, whereas when an artist is producing a piece of art, he/she is ‘making’ something new which points beyond itself. This is reminiscent of G.K. Chesterton’s argument for the arts, namely, that

*A monkey cannot do it (produce a work of art); and when a man does it, he is exercising a divine attribute.*<sup>227</sup>

However, it was recently reported that the anthropologist Desmond Morris held a solo exhibition (December 2019) at a Mayfair art gallery, which featured the art works of his one-time companion, a chimpanzee called ‘Congo,’ which had a collective price tag of over £200,000. In an interview for the Times newspaper Morris said that ‘I had a particularly intelligent chimpanzee. He became obsessional. He never got rewarded for it. It was art for art’s sake.’<sup>228</sup> ‘Congo,’ has enjoyed quite a following. Famous collectors of his works include Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, and Salvador Dali.

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<sup>225</sup> CCC. (2003) *Sacraments and Sacramentals*. para.1127.

<sup>226</sup> Jones, D. (1959) p.155.

<sup>227</sup> Chesterton, G. K. (December:1922) *Are the Artists Going Mad?* The Century Magazine. Vol. 105. No. 2. p.277.

<sup>228</sup> Morris, Desmond. (7th October 2019) *Wild at Art*. The Times Newspaper. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/wild-at-art-desmond-morris-to-sell-chimps-abstract-works-for-200-000-x7m0cjrr>. (Accessed: 7 October 2019).

Moreover ‘Congo’ is not the only ‘ape artist’ to have his artistic works sold on the open art market. There are other ape artists e.g., an orangutan called Alex, Sophie the gorilla, Rudi Valentino the orangutan and Koko the gorilla, all of which have had their works of art sold at a considerable cost. Morris claimed that Congo’s works of art were not just ‘splish splash’ rather they had patterns which varied. ‘This thematic variation is the essence of human art.’<sup>229</sup> Morris’ claim implies that art is not the sole intransitive activity of humankind after all. That is to say, perhaps apes are also ‘sign-makers’ and capable of re-presenting something of the other in their artwork.

Rowan Williams in his book *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (2006), argues that the philosopher Jacques Maritain and the artist Eric Gill heavily influenced Jones. He states that, for Jones, ‘watercolour does not allow you to escape from two dimensions; it obliges you to translation or transubstantiation.’<sup>230</sup> What this means is that for Jones, the arts, by *esse*, re-present something of the other and have a sense of transcendence about them. That is, they are not merely imitations or reproductions of something else, they are something in their own right. However, Jonathan Miles in *David Jones: The Maker Unmade* (1995) argues that, making theological parallels between what takes place in the process of making a work of art and equating it to that which takes place in the liturgy of the Eucharist would be ‘*the Protestant idea of the significant relation between bread and body*.’<sup>231</sup> Because when producing a work of art, ‘*no real magic occurs,*’ *whereas transubstantiation in the sacramental context is magical.*<sup>232</sup>

Williams argues that Miles was right to challenge Jones over the usage of the word transubstantiation in the process of art making. However, Williams states that what Jones was really saying was that the arts are ‘*things that give more than they have*’<sup>233</sup> despite the religious convictions of the artist. Furthermore, the artist is not concerned with reproducing qualities.<sup>234</sup> Nevertheless, Jones clearly states in *Art and Sacrament* (1959), that his chief concern was the

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<sup>229</sup> Morris. D. (7 October: 2019).

<sup>230</sup> Williams, R. (2006) *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*. p.60.

<sup>231</sup> Cited in Williams, R. (2006) p.62.

<sup>232</sup> Cited in Williams, R. (2006) p. 61.

<sup>233</sup> Williams, R. (2006) p. 62.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Williams, R. (2006) p.62.

sacramental character of the arts and that he understood the word sacramental as equated with, likened to the ‘sign-making’ that took place in the Upper Room.<sup>235</sup> What this implies is that, for Jones, whether we acknowledge it or not, the arts are sacramental by nature. Hence Jones’ concept of the nature of the arts is akin to that of Karl Rahner’s well known axiom of the ‘anonymous Christian.’ Rahner argued that non-Christian people who follow their conscience ‘accept the salvific grace of God, through Christ, although (they) may never have heard of the Christian revelation.’<sup>236</sup> In criticism of Rahner’s ‘anonymous Christian’ axiom Pope Benedict XVI explained that,

*The Christian, therefore, coincides with the human and, in this sense, every man who accepts himself is a Christian even if he does not know it. It is true that this theory is fascinating, but it reduces Christianity itself to a pure conscious presentation of what a human being is in himself and therefore overlooks the drama of change and renewal that is central to Christianity.*<sup>237</sup>

In short, for the Pope Emeritus, you cannot be a Christian without conversion (change) which is dependent on assent. In other words, a person would necessarily have to acknowledge that they are a Christian in order to be a Christian (confession of faith). In our context a person would have to adopt a Christian, sacramental worldview to see the arts as sacramental. This is somewhat problematic because not all Christians have a sacramental worldview (that is, hold to the teachings of sacramental theology). For example, while some of the Protestant traditions do hold to a sacrament worldview some do not. This means that you could still be from the Protestant tradition and not assent to a sacramental worldview. This is not so within Catholicism<sup>238</sup> as a sacramental worldview is foundational to their faith. Therefore, from a Catholic perspective, it is neither the nature of the arts nor the beliefs of the artist but is rather by the nature of the faith of the viewer towards the arts that makes the arts sacramental.

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<sup>235</sup> Cf. Jones, D. (1959) pp.161-162.

<sup>236</sup> D’ Costa, Gavin. (1985) *Karl Rahner’s Anonymous Christian: A Reappraisal*. Modern Theology. Vol.1. Issue 2. pp. 131-148. p.137.

<sup>237</sup> Benedict XVI. (2015) *An Interview of his Holiness Pope Benedict with Fr. Jacques Servais, SJ*. Available at: [www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of). (Accessed: 15 January 2020).

<sup>238</sup> Can we ask the question, is there such a thing as a Catholic understanding of the arts? This very much depends on how we understand the word Catholic. If Catholic is understood as defined by the Roman Catholic Church, then there are all sorts of particulars that are connected to it which are not connected to other denominations understanding of the arts.



### 3.4.2. The Current Context

The question that will guide us through this section of the chapter is: how do people who have declared a certain affiliation towards a particular belief system, namely, Catholicism, theologically interpret, engage with, and participate in the arts?

Towards the close of the Vatican II Council, speaking to artists from the Sistine Chapel, Pope Paul VI in an attempt to renew the relationship between the Church and the arts publicly decried the ‘separation’ between the arts and the Sacred which, he argued, had typically characterised the 20th century.<sup>239</sup> With notable similarity the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar in his writings on *The Glory of God: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. I: Seeing the Form*. (1982) attempted ‘to develop a Christian theology in the light of the third transcendental...to complement the vision of the true and the good with that of the beautiful (*pulchrum*).’<sup>240</sup>

To reiterate, Balthasar’s contention was that since the Enlightenment the third transcendental, namely, ‘beauty’ had been much neglected by philosophers, theologians, and the Art world. Moreover, the way that the concept of beauty is understood had changed from an ontological to a post-metaphysical form of thought. He called this the ‘aestheticisation of beauty.’ That is, a definition of beauty that does not make any theological claims.<sup>241</sup> He claimed that, without due recourse to ‘beauty,’ Christian thinking had become dry, dull, and impoverished. He states that,

*In a world without beauty — even if people cannot dispense with the word and constantly have it on the tip of their tongues in order to abuse it — in a world which is perhaps not wholly without beauty, but which can no longer see it or reckon with it: in such a*

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<sup>239</sup> Cf. Paul VI. (8th December: 1965) *Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Address of his Holiness Pope Paul VI to Artists*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19651208\\_epilogo-concilio-artisti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651208_epilogo-concilio-artisti.html). (Accessed: 17 January 2020). For an in-depth account of the relationship between the Church and art since Vatican II see Mantovani, Mauro. (2014) *Church and Art: From the Second Vatican Council to Today*. Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage Historical Technical Journal. Volume 14. pp.127- 143.

<sup>240</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. Foreword.

<sup>241</sup> For an understanding on beauty that does not make any theological claims see Scruton, Roger. (2011) *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*world the good also loses its attractiveness, the self-evidence of why it must be carried out.* <sup>242</sup>

Balthasar's aim was to return aesthetics (beauty) to the 'main artery' of theological inquiry by demonstrating that beauty is of as equal importance in doing theology as is that of the good and the true. For Balthasar, reuniting theology to aesthetics necessarily includes a theological understanding of the concept of beauty that is Christocentric by nature. That is to say, 'Truth is beautiful in itself.' Balthasar argues that we can dare to say, analogically speaking, that beauty is more than a just a matter of judgements of taste and pleasure, rather it is a characteristic of all being (reality) which is God.<sup>243</sup> This led Balthasar to argue that beauty is the starting point of all theological inquiry.

Pope John Paul II in his *Letter to Artists* (4th April:1999) stated that, 'Beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence.'<sup>244</sup> Moreover, every Pope since the Second Vatican Council has called for the relationship between the arts and the Church to be renewed and reconciled. One of the ways in which the Church envisions an authentic reformulation on the teaching of Sacred Art within contemporary culture is by emphasising the beauty of the divine. The Church's threefold theory on beauty as put forward in the PCC's concluding document, *The Via Pulchritudinis (The Way of Beauty): Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue* (2006) consist of three strands: <sup>245</sup>

*1. The Beauty of Creation*

*2. The Beauty of the Arts*

*3. The Beauty of Christ, Model and Prototype of Christian Holiness*

The Catholic Church's focus on the 'Beauty of the Arts' *via pulchritudinis* is seen as a means for the edification of the faithful, the evangelisation of culture and a didactic educational resource. The PCC explains that,

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<sup>242</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.19.

<sup>243</sup> The Catholic concept of the analogy of being brings a distinctly different understanding of the relationship between God and His creation to that of the Protestant tradition. The Protestant tradition tends to emphasis the absence of God, that there is a distance between God and His creation, that He is beyond our grasp, and that He is distinctly not *like* us in anyway. That is, God is divine, and we are not. Therefore, we cannot be like Him in anyway. Hence the Protestant tradition rejects the concept of the analogy of being.

<sup>244</sup> John, Paul, II. (4th April:1999) *Letter of his Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_23041999\\_artists.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html) (Accessed: 20 June 2020).

<sup>245</sup> PCC. (2006) *The Beauty of the Art*. Para.III.

*The work of art is not "beauty" but its expression, and it possesses an intrinsic character of universality if it obeys the canons, which naturally fluctuate for all art is tied to a culture. Artistic beauty provokes interior emotion, it silently arouses astonishment and leads to an "exit from self," an ecstasy.*<sup>246</sup>

Pope John Paul II argued that ‘In order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art.’ He then went on to ask, ‘Does art need the Church?’ This is because a major concern of the Catholic Church is ‘the exclusion of religion from the public square.’<sup>247</sup> In the context of the volatile relationship between the arts and the Church this phenomenon has become widespread.

Neil McGregor, who was the Director of the National Gallery, London (1987-2002) and British Museum (2002-2015) respectively, in his book *Living with the Gods* (2018) argues that since the Renaissance, the ‘cult of the artist’ has been so dominant within the Art world that the religious subject matter in art is considered no more than ‘a backdrop’ to showcase the artists’ skills.<sup>248</sup> What this means is that, due to an overriding interest in the artistic elements and the ‘cult of the artist,’ investigation into how we understand the ‘theological capital’ within works of art and what it means for the faithful today has been, in general, either forgotten, ignored or not fully explored in any real depth by the Art world.

### **3.4.3. Seeing is An Act of Choice**

John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (2008) argues that ‘looking’ is an act of choice. ‘We only ‘see’ what we look at.’<sup>249</sup> For instance, in his commentary on the National Gallery’s catalogue entry for the painting the *Virgin of the Rocks* by Leonardo di Vinci he writes that,

*The entry on the Virgin of the Rocks is one of the longest entries. It consists of fourteen closely printed pages. They do not deal with the meaning of the image. They deal with who commissioned the painting, legal squabbles, who owned it, it’s likely date, and the families of its owners. Behind this information lie years of research. The aim of the research is to prove beyond any shadow*

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<sup>246</sup> PCC. (2006) *The Beauty of the Art*. para.III.2

<sup>247</sup> John, Paul, II. (4th April:1999). para.12.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. McGregor, N. (2018) *Living with the Gods*. pp.268-282.

<sup>249</sup> Berger. (2009) *Ways of Seeing*. p.8.

*of doubt that the painting is a genuine Leonardo. The secondary aim is to prove that an identical painting in the Louvre is a replica of the National Gallery version.*<sup>250</sup>

Berger's astute observation of the years of meticulous research on the *Virgin of the Rocks* by National Gallery reveals that they did not, as he says, 'deal with the meaning of the image.' This way of 'seeing' a sacred work of art is all too commonplace within the Art world. The Art historians, in this case, clearly chose not to 'see' the theological meaning of the image. This could be called a deprivation of theo-aesthetic knowledge. Consequently, from a theological perspective, the lengthy commentary on the *Virgin of the Rocks* is somewhat impoverished and incomplete because the theological meaning of the image has been overlooked. What this means is that it leaves the viewing public without vital information with respect to the subject matter. As the PCC states in the *Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly: The via Pulchritudinis, Way of Beauty: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue* (2006),

*A combined effort must be taken to overcome a difficulty which has arisen due to the cultural climate nourished by art criticism broadly influenced by materialist ideologies. Highlighting only the aesthetic-formal aspect of works, without interest for the content which inspired such beauty, such ideologies sterilise art, stemming the living and life-giving stream of spiritual life, limiting it to the world of emotions.*<sup>251</sup>

To reiterate, one of the reasons why the theological subject matter in Christian art has been of little interest to art historians is persuasively explained by Thomas Crow in *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art* (2017). Crow states that the vast majority of artwork from the fourth to eighteenth century was made for some religious purpose or another. However, since the 'disenchantment' of the Enlightenment art historians' analysis of Christian art has ordinarily been and still is to a considerable extent a dispassionate examination of the form.

What this means is that, in general, art historians do not attempt to provide nor discover nor understand the rich theological capital found within Christian art. That is to say, detailed examination of the Theological, Scriptural and

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<sup>250</sup> Berger. (2009) p.22.

<sup>251</sup> PCC. (2006) *The Beauty of the Art*. para.III.2

Doctrinal fidelity within the image are often overlooked in favour of technical idioms and aesthetic elements. Inasmuch as greater weight is given to revealing the clarity of the composition, i.e., the line, texture, colour and space, than the theological capital within the image. Crow argues that without separating the theological meaning of the subject matter from the artistic elements of the composition, art history would not have developed the credibility of an independent discipline that it enjoys today.<sup>252</sup> This can be called the secularisation of Art appreciation.

However, in a more recent article published in the journal *Art and Christianity* 99 (2019), Crow refined his argument and claimed that art historians have shown some interest in ‘what’ the symbols and allegories in religious art mean, however, ‘the proportion that religious art is about religion is about all that can in the end be said.’<sup>253</sup> For Crow, what has been,

*Left out of the account has been much in the way of measuring, not ‘what’ but ‘how much’ of religion there is in religious art-or, better to say, how much theological depth is present in a given work.*<sup>254</sup>

He then concludes that from a purely academic perspective there is now a need to redress the balance. This is reminiscent of Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the role of religion within the public square, namely, that it is only useful ‘as a potential source of insights that can be appropriated for his (the discipline in hand) own purposes.’<sup>255</sup>

In light of similar findings, the PCC issued a statement in the concluding document of the Plenary Assembly, the *via Pulchritudinis, Way of Beauty: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue* (2006), which calls for the issue to be addressed. They declared,

*Faced with widely spread atheist and ideological interpretations, the need is felt for a major work of theoretical reformulation of the teaching of sacred art, based on an authentic Christian vision.*<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Cf. Crow, T. (2017) *No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art*. p.5-7.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Crow, T. (2019) *What? Versus How Much?* *Art and Christianity*. Issue 99. p.2.

<sup>254</sup> Crow. T. (2019) p.2.

<sup>255</sup> Wolterstorff, N. (1997) *An Engagement with Jürgen Habermas*. p.102.

<sup>256</sup> PCC. (2006) para.III.2

#### 3.4.4. The Sacred and the Profane

In this section we will explore and discuss whether a sacramental worldview of the arts necessarily holds that the arts per se are sacramental.<sup>257</sup> Catholic Church teaching states that,

*There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be thus directed toward the sanctification of man and the praise of God.*<sup>258</sup>

What might a ‘proper use of material things’ mean in relation to what qualifies as sacramental art?

Chris Ofili’s *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996), [FIG. 7], a work of art which sold for £95.6 million in 2015, caused outrage for its use of elephant dung for the breasts of Mary while the butterfly shaped icons which surround her are made from cutouts of women’s genitalia which were taken from pornographic magazines. This work of art caused controversy because it used the profane to depict the sacred. Mauro Mantovani argues that the Catholic Church has always reserved the right to sanction what is fitting for the sanctification of the faith.<sup>259</sup> Both the then Mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani and the then Archbishop of New York Cardinal John Joseph O’Connor claimed that Ofili’s work was not only ‘an attack on religion itself’ but also ‘on the Catholic Church.’ However, Ofili argued that it is a matter of interpretation. For him, it was an expression of his faith and as such he believes his depiction of *The Holy Virgin Mary* to be a modern-day work of sacred art.

However, for the Catholic Church, in order for a work of art to fit into the category of sacramental art it must make ‘proper’ use of material things for the sanctification of the faithful. What this means is that there are principles, guidelines, and limits as to what material things are deemed as fitting. The use of pornography is not an appropriate ‘material for the sanctification of humankind and the praise of God’ because it attacks, in this case, the human dignity of women which is the very bedrock of Catholic Social Teaching.

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<sup>257</sup> It is not the intention here to give a full account of the debate on the sacramentality of art, as this would go beyond the remit of this thesis, rather the aim is to highlight a particular case, namely Chris Ofili’s *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996) so as to demonstrate some things that need to be taken into consideration in relation to the authenticity of sacred art as the Catholic Church sees it.

<sup>258</sup> CCC. (2003) Section II. Chapter Four. *The Sacraments of Christ*. para.1670.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. Mantovani, Mauro. (2014) *Church and Art: From the Second Vatican Council to Today*. p.127.

Therefore, while Ofili's depiction of *The Holy Virgin Mary* may be considered by some in the Art world to be a highly valuable piece of sacred modern art, it does not qualify as Sacred Art in the eyes of the Church because it has transgressed the norms of Catholic Church teaching.

Consequently, what Ofili's depiction of Mary amounts to, is no more than a private expression of his faith. This is because for works of art to be sacramental,<sup>260</sup> in the Catholic sense of the word, they need to be objects that are capable of encouraging devotion or spiritually aid the person/s who encounter them in a way that incorporates or is compatible with the Scriptures and Church teaching. This is achieved, in part, by making 'proper use of the material things' available to the artist. Thus, quite clearly, the Catholic Church teaches that not all art per se qualifies as sacramental art.

We have looked at the proper use of materials in relation to sacramental art. We now turn to the Scriptural and doctrinal fidelity of the subject matter within sacred art.

### **3.4.5. Theological Capital and Affective Piety in Sacred Art**

To reiterate, despite a recent flurry of interest in theology of the arts, in the modern era the analysis of assessing how much 'theological capital' appears in any given work of Sacred Art and how it is understood has been largely overlooked, ignored, or not fully explored by both theologians and the Art world alike. To gain a deeper understanding of the arts from a Catholic perspective it is important to explore the Scriptural, doctrinal, and devotional elements within the image. Here the thesis leads the reader through a theological reflection on a work of art by Giotto (school of).<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> The image itself does not necessarily have to be of a holy person/s for it to be understood as sacramental work of art. A work of art that depicts a glorious sunset or a person standing on a mountain looking over a valley might evoke feelings of transcendence. This is known as encountering Christ through 'The Beauty of Creation.'

<sup>261</sup> Theological and Practical Tips: on what to look for in sacred art:

In order to assess the amount of Theological Capital within a work of sacred art and how that is understood from a Catholic perspective it is necessary to ask some questions.

Title - if known — may give a clue as to what the subject matter is.

Is the subject matter biblical, devotional or from sacred tradition, i.e., *The Golden Legend*?

How many doctrines, if any, are present in the work of art?

What are the doctrines that are present?

What period is from?

In the Lower Church of the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi, between the northern transept and the nave, there is a small chapel dedicated to St Mary Magdalene. The chapel was designed, and possibly in part painted, by the thirtieth century artist Giotto who is known as the father of the renaissance because of his focus on emotion and natural representation of human figures. The chapel consists of seven frescoes which depict the life of St Mary Magdalene. Luciano Bellosi in his book on *Giotto* (2017) gives the title of the lunette fresco, which is situated on the left wall of the chapel as, *Communion and Ascent into Heaven of Mary Magdalene* <sup>262</sup> [FIG. 8]. Without even looking at the fresco the title ought to ring theological alarm bells. It informs us that something is not quite right. This is because according to both Scripture (Jn. 20:17) and doctrine (Apostles Creed) Christ alone has the power to ascend into heaven unaided. '*Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the 'Father's house'*'.<sup>263</sup>

However, when we look at the lunette fresco, we notice that the Magdalene is not actually ascending but is being taken up into heaven with the help of the angelic host. The theological term for this is Assumption rather than Ascension. According to Church teaching, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1st November: 1950), the only women who has ever been assumed body and soul into heaven is the Holy Virgin Mary.<sup>264</sup> There is no evidence either from the gospels or from doctrine that Mary Magdalene was ever assumed into heaven. Therefore, we can safely assume that this scene is a myth derived from sacred tradition. Moreover, there are numerous images of St Mary Magdalene being assumed into heaven. This is because artists in the Middle Ages utilised stories taken from the Golden Legend, and other manuscripts, to depict the archetype

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Is the theology up to date?  
 Are the doctrines still valid? Were they ever valid? What are the implications for viewers/believers today?  
 Have they got the right person?  
 Eyes - who is looking at who?  
 Hands - are they pointing to someone/thing?  
 Gestures - imagine yourself in the posture - what does it feel like?  
 Light & shadow - where does the light come from - who does the light rest upon?  
 Colours - what do they signify?  
 Signs & symbols - what do they represent?

<sup>262</sup> Bellosi, Luciano. (2017) *Giotto*. Florence: Scala. p.79.

<sup>263</sup> CCC. (2003) para.661.

<sup>264</sup> The Old Testament states that Enoch and Elijah also went up to heaven. This is somewhat problematic because doctrine states that was the first person to open the heavens was Christ.



penitent. Thus, the fresco is rich in theological capital because, in an educational context, it could function as an excellent pedagogical resource for discussing the theological differences between doctrinal concepts of Ascension and Assumption.

In light of what we have discussed the reader may be wondering if the lunette fresco is sacramental as it is neither scripturally nor doctrinally correct. From a sacramental worldview perspective how much theological capital there is in a work of art cannot be separated from how it is spiritually understood. This is because we need to do more than just decipher and decode the amount of valid theological capital there is in the work of art if we are to understand how the faithful may receive grace and so encounter the beauty of the incarnate Christ.

Traditionally, Sacred Art functioned as a didactic theological and spiritual aesthetic resource that brought the viewer into dialogue with the divine.<sup>265</sup> Sacred images were thought to edify and sanctify the faithful by evoking emotional thoughts which may lead to the transcendent. That is to say, spiritual enrichment may be acquired through ‘imaginative contemplation’<sup>266</sup> of the beauty of the incarnate Christ and artistic depictions of the lived lives of the saints. Sacramental imaginative contemplation<sup>267</sup> does not attempt to discover whether or not the message in the painting is biblically accurate,

*Rather I let myself, having taken on a character I feel comfortable with (whether that be disciple, Pharisee, or anonymous bystander), interact with Jesus and the others in ...the story. Letting the imagination flow freely, it is good not to worry if the story develops differently from the Gospel.*<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> See Walter, P. (2015) *Sacraments in the Council of Trent and Sixteenth-Century Catholic Theology*. The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology. (Eds). Hans Boersma & Matthew Levering.

<sup>266</sup> Mendicant Spirituality and Devotional Art:

Imaginative contemplation - originated from the Franciscan and Cistercian traditions of the early 12th century and employs a ‘reflection and profit’ motif. By the late medieval period art was being commissioned by the mendicant orders and used for devotional practices. For example, one of the most influential Franciscan texts is *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (Meditations of the Life of Christ). Traditionally attributed to St. Bonaventure the text was written for the nuns for the purpose of imaginative contemplation - affective piety. In the contemporary era the Jesuits (among others) use Sacred Art to aid imaginative contemplation in retreat settings, and other places. Michael Ivens SJ explains the use of preludes and points of imaginative contemplation in Ignatian spirituality in *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: A Handbook for Retreat Directors*. (2016).

<sup>267</sup> Andrew Greeley in *The Catholic Imagination* (2001) states that, ‘Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, saints and religious medals, rosary beads and holy pictures. But these Catholic paraphernalia are mere hints of a deeper and more pervasive religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see the Holy lurking in creation...The Catholic imagination can appropriately be called sacramental. It sees created reality as a ‘sacrament,’ that is, a revelation of the presence of God’ Greeley. (2001) p.1.

<sup>268</sup> Birchall, David. (2018) *What is Imaginative Contemplation?* in *Pathways to God*.

Richard W. Southern in his book *The Making of the Middle Ages* (1953) noted a sharp shift in the spiritual soliloquies and devotional practices during the Middle Ages. He argued that the ‘mood of emotional tenderness... runs through the literature and the arts of the twelfth century.’<sup>269</sup> Affective piety, which Southern described as a highly emotional devotional practice was exemplified by the writings of St Francis, among others, which became an important part of the spirituality of the Franciscan monks, nuns, and confraternities in the High Middle Ages. The main way of practicing affect piety was through imaginative contemplation. Southern argued that theologically speaking this type of piety reflected the shift in the way we think about salvation (the doctrine of soteriology). Here we see the God of tenderness and compassion emerging through the humanity of Jesus. Hence, although Giotto’s fresco of the Magdalene is neither based upon Scripture nor doctrine it was no less inspiring for the faithful than the deep theological truths of the Gospel.

Alongside this, the scene depicted in the lunette fresco also portrays the sacramental life of Magdalene. The Magdalene actually appears twice within the fresco. In the lower register/level of the fresco the image of the Magdalene is seen kneeling and receiving Holy Communion, which ultimately connects her (and the faithful) to the divine. What the artist is communicating through the fresco is that by participating in the sacrament of the Eucharist the penitent sinner is in the process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Affective sacramental imaginative mediation upon the fresco illustrates the message that through the sacraments, an encounter with the divine is possible. This can be called transformative education in image form. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI states,

*May the visits to places filled with art, then, not only be opportunities for cultural enrichment – that too – but may they become above all moments of grace, incentives to strengthen our bond and our dialogue with the Lord...*<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Southern, R. W. (1953) *The Making of the Middle Ages*. p.221.

<sup>270</sup> Benedict XVI. (31 August: 2011) *General Audience at Castel Gandolfo of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on Beauty as a Way to God: Art & Prayer*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20110831.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110831.html). (Accessed: 11 July 2020).

### 3.5. Current Definitions of Visual Theology

My literature search into the concept of visual theology has discovered that there is no clear/standard consensus on how it is either defined or understood. For instance, Jensen & Vrudny, (2009), visual theology is understood ‘as a medium of knowing as well as showing ... [where] the nonverbal or symbolic modes of expression ... challenge the limits of the verbal.’ Whereas for Fujimura, (2012), understands it as the ‘illumination of the Biblical words’ ... while for Challies and Byers, (2016), visual theology is understood as the act of illustrating scripture with word-graphics images which they call infographics. For Reynoso, (2018), it is simply works of fine Christian art which have been produced by a practicing Christian. While, Avanesov, (2019), understands visual theology as ‘visual semiotics that is based on the biblical opsodicy,’<sup>271</sup> which seems to be the most developed understanding of the concept to date. Nevertheless, as Avanesov rightly states, there are a number of disciplines that have different approaches to same problem, namely ‘the problem of visual expressiveness of religious experience in its widest range.’<sup>272</sup> Par consequence there is a certain amount of elusiveness, ambiguity, or elasticity with regard to defining the concept of visual theology.

### 3.6. Towards a Clearer Understanding of Visual Theology

In order to come to a clearer understanding of how visual theology is understood it is necessary to have a concise definition. The Oxford dictionary defines theology as:

*1. The study of the nature of God and religious belief. (Noun)*

*1.1. Religious beliefs and theory when systematically developed.*

The Oxford dictionary defines the word visual as: <sup>273</sup>

*1. Relating to seeing or sight - ‘visual perception’ (adjective) (usually visuals)*

*1.1. A picture, piece of film, or display used to illustrate or accompany something (noun).*

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<sup>271</sup> Opsodicy relates to the relationship between cognition and recognition in relation to vision.

<sup>272</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.40.

<sup>273</sup> The origins of the word visual comes from ‘Late Middle English (originally describing a beam imagined proceeding from the eye and make vision possible): from late Latin visualis, from Latin visus ‘sight,’ from videre ‘to see.’ The Oxford Dictionary.

Visual theology is understood here as:

1. The study of the nature of God, and religious belief in visual forms of expression.

- 1.1. The study of theologically reflecting upon the meaning of visual forms of religious experience (in this case Christian art).

This definition, which is at its embryonic stage, will be built upon and developed further in chapter 4.

The thesis argues that visual theology includes and goes beyond the work of art itself, inasmuch as it involves the process of theologically interpreting what the image means for the beholder today. This is because works of Christian art necessarily need to be theologically interpreted to gain any real depth of meaning for the viewer. Alongside this, the usage and application of the term visual theology is of some importance. As Richard Pring in his book *Philosophy of Educational Research* (2004) argues,

*Definitions are not confined to ostensive or stipulative ones. Getting at the meaning of a word requires close examination of its usage - complex logical interconnections entailed by its use in different contexts. After all, the meaning of a word is its uses in a language with agreement not only in its definition in terms of other words but also in its application to experience.*<sup>274</sup>

In light of this, to what extent do the visual arts act as means of encountering the divine in contemporary Catholic education? The usage and application of visual theology, in practical terms, will be explored, researched, and reappraised in chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis.

### **3.7. Literature Review: Conclusion**

To conclude the key objectives of the literature search were to critically analyse, explore, and evaluate the literature text in relation to the newly emerging field of visual theology with a particular emphasis on how it is understood from a Catholic sacramental perspective.

The second chapter, the literature review (part 1), brought to light that Balthasar in his book *The Glory of the Lord: Theological Aesthetics* (1983)

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<sup>274</sup> Pring, R. (2004) *Philosophy of Educational Research*. 2nd edn. p.10.

argued that since the Enlightenment, the notion of a transcendental understanding of aesthetics has either been ignored or abandoned and consequently theology had become dull and uninteresting. Furthermore, he expressed the regret of 'the aestheticisation of beauty' in the contemporary era. Balthasar's goal in *GLI* was to return aesthetics to the 'main artery' of theological inquiry. He claimed that all theological inquiry necessarily starts from a theological concept of beauty, which he called 'Theological Aesthetics.' That is to say, if we are to gain a fuller understanding of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ, it is necessary to assent to a theological understanding of beauty as a transcendental property of God, which is inseparable and of as equal importance to that of the good and the true.

In relation to criticism of Balthasar's theological thought Kilby argued that Balthasar seems to speak from the position of God seeing all things, viewing, and evaluating them from a position that is above all theologians, philosophers, and the reader. What this means is that for Kilby Balthasar's claims are just too grandiose for them to be viable. However, Kilby, who LaCouter places in wave two of 'the three waves of Balthasarian reception,' also mentions that Balthasar theo-aesthetics had original thoughts and ideas, and that these are worth further exploration and development.

Along similar lines to Balthasar's claim, namely the aestheticisation of beauty, the Catholic Church argues that there is a need to reformulate the teachings of Sacred Art within contemporary culture. They encourage theologians, artists, and educationalists to develop new means of interpreting a threefold theory, namely *via pulchritudinis*, 'The Beauty of Creation' and 'The Beauty of the Arts' which ought to lead the faithful (and others) to encounter 'The Beauty of Christ, Model and Prototype of Christian Holiness.' Thus, the arts have the ability to visualise the ineffable.

Alongside this, the literature review (part 2) explored the historical roots of visual theology which aims to (re)unite the fields of the visual arts and theology and so form a discipline in its own right. Moreover, the literature review discovered that visual theology is still at the embryonic stage. As such definitions are scarce, and somewhat underdeveloped, and ambiguous. The

purpose of a clear definition is that we can begin to understand, more fully, the concept presented to us. On the grounds of clarity and understanding the thesis offered a preliminary definition of visual theology, namely,

1. The study of the nature of God and religious belief in visual forms of expression.

- 1.1. The study of theologically interpreting the meaning of works of visual art (usually Christian art, yet not limited to).

The literature review also brought to light that Sacred Art, in particular, contains what I call ‘theological capital.’ The thesis argued that assessing the amount of theological capital within any given work or art ought to be of interest to all those who are concerned with the arts, namely artists, art historians, theologians, teachers, and others interested in the theological interpretation of Christian art. Hence, there is need for a theological aesthetic framework for the exegesis of Christian images.

## **Chapter 4 A Theological Aesthetic Framework for Christian Art**

The literature review established that there is both a need and a call for an authentic Catholic theological framework for the interpretation of Christian art. It argued that there has been much scholarly debate with regard to the nature of the relationship between theology and the arts and how they interact (Maritain, J. (1920: 1953); Bailey, A. E. (1922); Panofsky, E. (1955); Tillich, P. (1959); Balthasar. (1982); Yates, W. (1987); Wolterstorff, N. (1996); Viladesau, R. (2000), and Begbie, J. (2002). However, by way of comparison, relatively little scholarly research has gone into finding a suitable framework for the theological interpretation of the Christian images. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this lacuna by creating a new theological framework for the interpretation of Christian art, which has been inspired by and developed from the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

The first part of this chapter explores and evaluates current theological and art historical methodologies for the interpretation of the visual arts. In the second part of the chapter, the thesis considers and analyses the relationship between text and image in the Catholic tradition for possible similarities and discrepancies and argues that a purely textual hermeneutical method is insufficient to interpret the theological capital found within sacred images. Finally, the thesis examines how textual, cultural and art historical methodologies can be employed to inform a methodology for the theological aesthetic exegeses of Christian art. This is based on Balthasar's assertion that the revelation of the beauty of the incarnate God (love) is an essential hermeneutical<sup>275</sup> presupposition for a theological aesthetic interpretation of Christian text, which, arguably, equally applies to art.

The thesis proposed framework for the theological aesthetic interpretation of Christian art may be useful as a didactic tool for increasing spiritual capital, formation and evangelisation of students and staff in Catholic education (and possibly elsewhere). Consequently, it may also help to (re)-connect Art historians and Theologians and be a resource that could possibly enrich the

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<sup>275</sup> Hermeneutics is understood as a theory or methodology of interpretation of any written text. This could equally apply to images. The words exegesis and hermeneutics are sometimes used interchangeably.

viewer's understanding of historical and contemporary Christian images. This will be approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective.

The questions that will guide the inquiry in this chapter are as follows: -

- What frameworks are most suited to a theological interpretation of Christian art?
- What criterion is necessary for a Catholic understanding of the visual arts?

#### **4.1. The Need for a Catholic Theological Framework for Christian Art**

The historical-critical method, which began in the 17th century and gained popularity in the 19th and 20th century opened a new era of investigation into Biblical studies, hence since the Enlightenment a plethora of methodologies both old and new have been developed for the theological interpretation of Biblical Scripture.<sup>276</sup> As Pope John Paul II stated,

*The study of the Bible is, as it were, the soul of theology, as the Second Vatican Council says, borrowing a phrase from Pope Leo XIII (Dei Verbum, 24). This study is never finished; each age must in its own way newly seek to understand the sacred books.*<sup>277</sup>

However, in comparison to theological methodologies for the interpretation of sacred text, relatively few methodologies or frameworks have been developed for visual theological interpretation of Christian images.<sup>278</sup> It is the contention of this thesis that if we are to gain a better understanding of Scripture as expressed in visual form (the arts), then it too needs to be addressed anew in each generation so as to gain a greater understanding of what it means for us today. As the Pontifical Council for Culture (PCC) stated,

*Faced with widely spread atheist and ideological interpretations, the need is felt for a major work of theoretical reformulation of the teaching of sacred art, based on an authentic Christian vision.*<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> E.g., The new historicism, feminist criticism, postcolonial/liberationist criticism, and rhetorical criticism while more classical hermeneutical methods come under the 'historical-critical banner of source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism.' Pontifical Biblical Commission. (6th January:1994) *Interpretation of Bible in the Life of the Church*. Preface. Available at: [https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp-FullText.htm](https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm). (Accessed: 8 September 2020).

<sup>277</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission. (6 January:1994) Preface.

<sup>278</sup> For a comprehensive insight into visual methodologies in art history see Rose, G. (2016) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Material*. 4th edn. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

<sup>279</sup> Pontifical Council for Culture. (March 2006) *Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly, The Via Pulchritudinis, Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*. pp.27-28. para.III.2.



What this statement demands is that in order to read and fully comprehend a Christian work of art there is a need for a ‘theological aesthetic’ interpretation of art. Moreover, the PCC states that,

*To be fully heard and understood, Christian artwork needs to be read in the light of the bible and the fundamental texts of Tradition to which the experience of faith refers. If beauty is to speak itself, it must learn its own language, cause of admiration, emotion, and conversion. With the language of beauty, Christian artwork not only transmits the message of the artist, but also the truth of the mystery of God meditated by a person who reads it to us, not to glorify himself but to glorify the Source. A combined effort must be taken to overcome a difficulty which has arisen due to the cultural climate nourished by art criticism broadly influenced by materialist ideologies. Highlighting only the aesthetic-formal aspect of works, without interest for the content which inspired such beauty, such ideologies sterilise art, stemming the living and life-giving stream of spiritual life, limiting it to the world of emotions.*<sup>280</sup>

What this statement highlights is that art criticism, as mentioned elsewhere, tends to focus on the material and aesthetic qualities of the arts rather than the theological significance of the content of the image for the faithful today. Therefore, in order to read and fully comprehend a Christian work of art from a Catholic perspective what is needed is a ‘theological aesthetic’ interpretation of art.

Dr Chloe Reddaway in *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces* (2013) also highlighted the need for a methodology for the theological interpretation of art. She writes,

*Scholarly discussion in the field of theology and the arts has focused on: the significance of the arts for theology and how the two interact; specific pieces of art, or particular religious themes in artworks; and the artist as interpreter of source texts engaging in a visual exegesis which is contained within art works. There is little discussion, however, of an appropriate methodology for the theological interpretation of art.*<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> PCC. (March 2006) p.24. para.III.2.

<sup>281</sup> Reddaway. C. (2013) *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces*.

Hence, she argues that what is needed is a theological hermeneutical model for the exegesis of images. As the literature review established, Reddaway's methodology<sup>282</sup> is useful but incomplete from a Catholic perspective (this will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter).

Consequently, the thesis proposes to address the issue by presenting an interpretive framework for a theological aesthetic understanding of Christian art for increasing spiritual capital within a Catholic educational context. This is inspired by and developed from the theological aesthetic works of Hans Urs von Balthasar, with particular reference to his project of restoring beauty to the main artery of theological inquiry. The theological aesthetic framework incorporates the exegetical notion of hierarchical 'ways of beholding the form' (*blepó*, *theóreo*, and *horaó*) through the transcendent gaze of 'the graced eyes of faith' through *the site of its beholding*.<sup>283</sup> Alongside this, the thesis follows Reddaway's lead in drawing upon methodologies from cultural history, namely 'seeing things their way' and its equivalent in art history, the 'period eye.' This will be approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective.

#### **4.2. Methodologies for the Theological Interpretation of Christian Art**

The literature search highlighted that Jensen & Vrudny in *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts* (2009); Reddaway in *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces* (2013), and more recently S. S. Avanesov in *On Visual Theology* (2019) are among the few who have put forward theories and methodologies for the theological interpretation of Christian images.

As mentioned in the literature review, for Capps, owing to Jensen's & Vrudny's focus on all things spiritual there was a 'lack of substantial theological reflection' to their method, whereas for Pereyra their methodology

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<sup>282</sup> Although Reddaway's work addresses similar material to this account, and while there is agreement in certain areas, the main argument for the theological interpretation of meanings of historical and contemporary Christian art, the approach and its significance are quite different inasmuch as my theological aesthetic framework will be approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective, which is based upon and incorporates the Scriptures, the teachings of the Catholic Church, the lived lives of the saints in light, and the practices of the faithful.

<sup>283</sup> For Balthasar, the fundamental point is that God revealed Himself in history (Hebrews 1:1-2).

lacked unity and an overarching theological framework.<sup>284</sup> Hence, it would seem that there is a general consensus that Jensen's & Vrudny's methodology needs to be developed further for it to be an adequate means for the theological interpretation of sacred images. By way of comparison the literature search established that Reddaway's theological hermeneutical methodology for the interpretation of historical sacred art (2013) has been developed more fully.

Reddaway argues that although art historical methodologies provide valuable insights, they are inadequate from a theological perspective. This is because, in general, they tend to overlook, ignore, or do not fully explore the theological significance found within the image. Furthermore, she claims that theological methodologies for the arts are rare and that there are 'none which specifically deals with the exegesis of images' (Reddaway, 2013, p.15). Whereas Avanesov's visual semiotic approach to visual theology implies that his emphasis is placed upon the study of symbols rather than hermeneutical interpretation. As Dr Sérgio Tavares explains that,

*Semiotics focuses on the study of symbols; hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. While one is focused on the text, the other is focused on the reader.*<sup>285</sup>

Notwithstanding that, Avanesov's article *On Visual Theology* (2019) is more about what visual theology is not, namely it 'is not so much art history or the history of Christian art,' and why it is a valid form of theology rather than a methodology for hermeneutically interpreting Christian art *per se*.<sup>286</sup> For Avanesov's visual theology is,

*The visual semiotics of the religious experience; and all that it incorporates which includes, 'many related disciplines: aesthetics, art history, architectural theory, liturgical theology, exegetics, ascetics, rhetoric, and sacramentology.'*<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> See chapter three for a more detailed analysis of Jensen's & Vrudny's methodology.

<sup>285</sup> Tavares, S. (2018) *What is the Difference between Semiotics and Hermeneutics*. Available at: <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-semiotics-and-hermeneutics>. (Accessed: 20 February 2021).

<sup>286</sup> Alongside that Avanesov explores, amongst other things, optical language within the OT and NT as means of statements of faith to legitimising the authenticity of visual theology as 'a specific cognitive programme and an academic field' in its own right. That is, Avanesov explores the relationship between vision and cognition (optodicy) from the position of apprehending the voice/message of God. For example, "and God saw", "look at the lilies of the field", "so look", etc....

<sup>287</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.18.

Whereas Reddaway's theological hermeneutical model for the interpretation of historical Christian images draws upon the following methodologies:

*The literary critical method of reader criticism; the theological approach known as reception studies; its comparator, cultural history, with its project of 'seeing things their way;' and its counterpart in art history of acquiring the 'period eye.'*<sup>288</sup>

Reddaway argues that her methodology is primarily aimed at increasing the modern-day Christian viewer's understanding of sacred historical images. As mentioned elsewhere, what this amounts to essentially a 'quasi-ecumenical' methodology for the interpretation of historical images. Although Reddaway's methodology is both insightful and possibly enriching for the 'ideal viewer,'<sup>289</sup> it falls short on a number of levels.<sup>290</sup> That is, from a Catholic perspective, it does not explicitly incorporate all of the confessional elements which are required for the formation and evangelisation of participants in the divine mystery of salvation. As the encyclical *Dei Verbum* points out,

*It is clear, therefore, that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.*<sup>291</sup>

This statement demands that, from a Catholic perspective, any theological interpretation of sacred text or images must necessarily include sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teachings of the Magisterium for it to be considered authentic vision of Christian thinking within the Catholic Church. Therefore, Reddaway's quasi-ecumenical approach is insufficient for our purposes, namely a theological aesthetic framework that will aid the interpretation of Christian art in the light of the living sacred Traditions of the faithful, the sacred Scriptures and the teachings of Magisterium of the Church

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<sup>288</sup> Reddaway, C. (2013) p.16.

<sup>289</sup> That is, Reddaway states that, 'The ideal viewer is imagined as a modern Christian viewer of any denomination not opposed to Christian images. This definition can reasonably be extended to include a non-Christian modern viewer sympathetic to Christianity and to the purposes of this project.' Reddaway, C. (2013) p.13.

<sup>290</sup> For a more detailed argument on why Reddaway's methodology for the interpretation of Christian art falls short from a Catholic perspective see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>291</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. (18 November:1965) *Dei Verbum*. No.10. c. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html). (Accessed: 10 October 2021).

for the instruction of the faithful (and possibly others) within a Catholic educational setting.

Therefore, by way of contrast to Reddaway's quasi-ecumenical approach and Avanesov's visual semiotic approach to visual theology, the thesis' proposed approach will incorporate the confessional elements of perceiving, beholding, encountering the presence of God the sacramental imagination, which leads to a participation in the mystery of salvation. In which, the theological aesthetic interpretation of historical and contemporary works of Christian art function as a means of prompting the sanctification of the faithful within a Catholic educational setting (and possibly elsewhere). This is inspired and developed from a critical analysis of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics in which he asks the question, 'How can the revelation of God's free grace be perceived in the world?' Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics, in particular, focuses upon the uniqueness of beauty of the form found in the incarnate Christ; how the beauty of Christ was perceived and found refuge in the lives of the saints during the time of its abandonment, and what it means for the faithful today.

#### **4.3. Sites, Modalities and Methods in the Visual Arts**

In the last section of the chapter, we investigated and considered existing contemporary theological methodologies for the interpretation of Christian art. In this section we explore and critically analyse current methodologies for the visual arts, and how they might aid as well limit a theological aesthetic understanding of the arts. As Stuart Hall astutely points out,

*It is worth emphasising that there is no single or 'correct' answer to the question, what does this image mean?* <sup>292</sup>

Gillian Rose in *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Material*, (4th Ed) (2016) gives an overview and critical reflection on an eclectic range of visual methodologies for undergraduate students who wish to critically engage with visual historical and contemporary material. In the introduction to the book Rose encourages the reader to ask the question, 'How useful is it (the methodology/framework) in achieving a critical methodology

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<sup>292</sup> Hall, S. (ed.) (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage. pp.1-12. Quotation cited in Rose. (2016) p.21.

for visual images?’<sup>293</sup> To do that she introduces the reader to her own critical visual theoretical framework. Rose’s framework consists of four sites <sup>294</sup> at which visual images make their meaning known, namely: -

The site of *production*

The site of *the image or object itself*

The site of *its circulation*

The site of *its audiencing*

Rose describes *the site of production* as - the place where the how image was made; *the site of the image or object itself* - pertains to the visual contents of the image; *the site of its circulation* is where the image travels, and *the site of its audiences* is where the image encounters its viewers. Rose explains that these four sites make visual images culturally known and meaningful by exploring, interpreting, and analysing,

*...How an image is made, what it looks like, where, and how it travels, and how it is seen.*<sup>295</sup>

Moreover, with regard to *the site of its audiences* and how they view images Rose argues that,

*The notion that different audiences might react differently to the same image is rarely emphasised conceptually by either mainstream semiology or psychoanalysis...*<sup>296</sup>

Hence, relatively little research has been conducted with regard to an audience with a particular worldview. My framework for the theological aesthetic interpretation of Christian art, seeks to redress the balance by considering how the image is encountered and understood by the modern-day believer through what I call *the site of its beholding: the moment when the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith*. This will form part of a theological framework, which has the potential of acting as a didactic tool for the formation and evangelisation of students in a Catholic educational context.

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<sup>293</sup> Rose. (2016) p.22.

<sup>294</sup> Site-specific art theory is understood as a particular place - location of a commissioned work of art, which if removed from the site loses its meaning. See Serra, Richard. (2006) *Art and Censorship in Ethics and the Visual Arts*. Edited by Elaine King and Gail Levin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Here Rose extends the meaning of ‘site’ to four specific areas where images make their meaning known.

<sup>295</sup> Rose. (2016) p.374.

<sup>296</sup> Rose. (2016) p.376.

Therefore, utilising and developing Rose's critical visual framework, the thesis' criteria for theologically interpreting works of Christian art, consist of four sites:

The site of *production* - where and how the image is made

The site of *the image* - its visual contents

The site of *its circulation* - where it travels

The site of *its beholding* - the moment when the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith

#### 4.3.1. The Site of Its Beholding: A Catholic Approach to Visual Theology

As mentioned in the last section, I have replaced Rose's fourth site, '*the site of its audiencing* (where the viewer encounters the image and how it is understood),' with what I call '*the site of its beholding; the moment when the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith.*' In what follows I will explore how a sacred image can be approached, encountered, and theologically understood by the beholder.<sup>297</sup>

St Irenaeus of Lyons maintains that,

*The glory of God is humanity, fully alive; the life of humanity consists in beholding God* (Against Heresies, Book 4, 20:7).

According to the Biblical scholar M. O. Evans the word 'behold' is of interest in relation to Christ Jesus as far as,

*We cannot clearly and fully behold the outshining of spiritual grandeur in Christ Jesus, but in the gospel, God accommodates and adjusts the vision as we are able to bear it, and the glory beheld becomes glory imparted to (and reflected by) the beholder.*<sup>298</sup>

What this means is that the act of beholding the Christ (even if 'we see but a dim reflection as in a mirror,' 1 Corinthians 13:12) bears transformative qualities which en-Christens the believer. That is, in beholding the glory of

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<sup>297</sup> It is a given that non-believers can glean something of great significance from a sacred image without the grace of faith and without attaching a sacramental understanding to it. However, the focus of this thesis is to ascertain how a person of faith (and others who are open to a Catholic ethos) approach a sacred image from a Catholic sacramental perspective.

<sup>298</sup> Evans, M.O. *Beholding*. Available at: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/beholding/>. (Accessed: 26 June 2021).

Christ the beholder is open to the process of being transformed into the likeness and image of God. Thus, the beholder participates in the divine mystery of salvation by receiving and then reflecting the glory which is transmitted through the beholding. As Balthasar writes,

*We 'behold' the form; but, if we really behold it, it is not as a detached form, rather in its unity with the depths that make their appearance in it. We see form as the splendour, as the glory of Being.*<sup>299</sup>

For Balthasar, when perceived through the graced eyes of faith, the act of beholding the beauty of the form as the splendour of Christ, leads to:

*A mediating vision which occasions a 'rapture' and a 'transport' to an 'Eros-love' for those 'things unseen' which had announced themselves by appearing in the visibleness and revelation of the Incarnation.*<sup>300</sup>

This opens the believer to hold-dear, love, cherish and worship the Christ in the light of the Sacred Scriptures, the lived tradition, and in accordance with the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, Balthasar argued that the occasions of a 'rapture' and a 'transport' to an 'Eros-love' is identified through two moments, namely 'beholding' and 'perceiving.' As Balthasar stated,

*If all beauty is objectively located at the intersection of two moments which Thomas calls species and lumen ('form' and 'splendour'), then the encounter of these is characterised by the two moments of beholding and perceiving (Wahr-nehmen - to take to be true) of the beautiful ('aesthetics' in the sense of Critique of Pure Reason) and the doctrine of the enrapturing power of the beautiful are complementarily structured, since no one can really behold who has not also already been enraptured, and no one can be enraptured who has not already perceived. This holds equally for the theological relationship between faith and grace, since, in giving itself, faith apprehends the form of revelation, while grace has from the outset transported the believer up into God's world.*<sup>301</sup>

Balthasar utilised the term *Wahrnehmen* to combine the two moments of perceiving and beholding. This denotes their inseparability as well as their complementarity to the enrapturing. What this means is that, in perceiving and

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<sup>299</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.119.

<sup>300</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.117.

<sup>301</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.10.



beholding we are able to comprehend the beauty of the form, and we understand the splendour of the form by being enraptured. It is this that takes/ transports the believer beyond themselves into the realm of the divine.

More recently Maggie Ross in an essay titled *Behold Not the Cloud of Experience* in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England Exeter Symposium VIII* (2013) highlighted the profound biblical significance of the word ‘behold’ (OT Hebrew = *hinneh*; NT Greek = *ἰδοὺ*) and its relevance for us today. She states that,

*The word behold is arguably the most important word in the Bible, and its significance is transmitted through the early history of Christianity into the Middle Ages. Behold is not an archaic word; it is still used intuitively and correctly, if infrequently, in the media and in ordinary conversations.*<sup>302</sup>

Ross argues that the use of the word ‘behold’ is crucial to understanding ancient and Middle Age text (which I argue that could equally apply to understanding historical and contemporary works of Christian art). Starting with the book of Genesis and ending in the book of Revelation Ross selects some of the most important occasions when the word ‘behold’ is uttered by God and his Angelic host to the faithful.

*Behold! I have given you every herb...and every tree...and every beast...and every fowl...and everything that creepeth... (Genesis 1:29-30)*

*Behold! I have seen the suffering of my people. (Exodus 3:7)*

*Behold! I am laying in Zion a foundation stone. (Isaiah 28:16)*

*Behold! I am sending my messenger. (Malachi 3:1)*

*Behold! the bridegroom comes. (Matthew 25:6)*

*Behold! You shall conceive. (Luke 1:31)*

*Behold! I bring you good tidings. (Luke 2:10)*

*Behold! the Lamb of God. (John 1:29)*

*Behold! the hour comes. (John 16:32)*

*Behold! I show you a mystery (1 Corinthians 15:51)*

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<sup>302</sup> Ross, M. (2013) *Behold Not the Cloud of Experience* in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, (Edited by E.A. Jones). Exeter Symposium Volume VIII. pp. 29-50. p.30.

*Behold! he is coming with the clouds, and everyone shall see him.*  
(Rev.1:7)

*Behold! the Lion of Judah.* (Rev. 5:5)

*Behold! the tabernacle of God is within you.* (Rev. 21:3) <sup>303</sup>

Alongside Ross's selective list of the biblical utterances of the word behold, there are many other theologically significant instances when it is used. For instance, we find it in Marian statements,

*Then the angel tells Mary, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus* (Luke 1:31).

*And Mary said, Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word* (Luke 1:38).

*Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!* (John 19:25-27).

Yet, perhaps the most relevant usage of the word behold, for believers today, occurs during the celebration of the Eucharistic Mass at the fraction or breaking of the bread, when the priest elevates the host and proclaims:

*Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world* (Jn. 1:29). *Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb* (Rev. 19:9).

In the Gospel according to Luke the road to Emmaus passage tells us that Jesus is recognised in the breaking of the bread, 'their eyes were opened' (Luke 24:35). The optical language of perceiving Christ points the reader back to the Last Supper and forward to the Eucharist Mass, where the words 'behold the Lamb of God, behold he who take away the sins of the world'... are proclaimed. Here the word 'behold' is not deemed archaic language, rather it plays a significant role in the life of the modern-day believer (inasmuch as it is heard at every Mass). Thus, the words which were spoken by John the Baptist (Jn. 1:29) and John the Evangelist (Rev. 19:9) are as relevant for the faithful today as they were to those who proclaimed and witnessed to them in ages past.

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<sup>303</sup> Ross, M. (2013) p.29.

In New Testament Greek the word βλέπει appears in the discourse which immediately precedes John the Baptist's announcement, namely 'Τῇ ἐπαύριον βλέπει τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐρχόμενον πρὸς αὐτόν και λεγει, Ἴδε... 'On the next day he sees Jesus coming to him, and he says, 'behold...' (John 1:29). The usage of the word βλέπει is of interest as it means; to see; to view; to look; sight, and to perceive. If we take βλέπει to mean 'to perceive,' then, *firstly*, John the Baptist 'perceives' Jesus coming towards him and *secondly*, he 'beholds' him. This reminds us of Balthasar's two moments, namely 'perceiving' and 'beholding,' which he argues characterises and enables an encounter with the two moments of 'form' and 'splendour.' This is a moment of revelation, of enrapture, and of thanksgiving. Through John the Baptist the Holy Spirit has revealed who Jesus really is and what he has come to do.

Moreover, the act of beholding the Lamb of God during the breaking of the bread, prepares the faithful to receive that which they behold. The act of beholding is of profound theological significance as it recognises Jesus as the Christ, his sacrifice, and his salvific powers. It reminds them that they are blessed because they have been called to participate in the Eucharistic feast, which unites them in love and calls them into communion with God and the heavenly host. Thus, these words are life-giving. As Pope John Paul II said in his *Encyclical Letter Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, 'The Church draws its life from the Eucharist.'

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II writes in relation to the Eucharist's influence on the arts and he says that,

*It can be said that the Eucharist, while shaping the Church and her spirituality, has also powerfully affected 'culture,' and the arts in particular...The architectural and mosaic splendours of the Christian East and West are a patrimony belonging to all believers; they contain a hope, and even a pledge, of the desired fullness of communion in faith and in celebration... Within this context of an art aimed at expressing, in all its elements, the meaning of the Eucharist in accordance with the Church's teaching...As history shows and as I emphasised in my Letter to Artists (1999), the Church has always left ample room for the creativity of artists.*<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> John, Paul II (17 April: 2003) *Encyclical Letter Ecclesia De Eucharistia* of his Holiness Pope John Paul II. Chapter 5. Para. 49-50. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_20030417\\_eccl-de-euch.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_eccl-de-euch.html). (Accessed: 16 May 2021).

The Eucharistic meaning expressed through and within a sacred image, namely beholding the beauty of the form and splendour of God, reminds the beholder that Jesus is in the midst of the people (John 1:29), that he was slain yet is now alive, that the sins of the faithful are forgiven, that they are called to be in communion with him and the saints in light (Revelation 19:9), and that they are one body (1 Cor. 10:17). In this sense, *the site of its beholding; the moment when the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith* enables an act of spiritual communion to take place. That is, grace is received when the believer through an act of faith and love is transported beyond the image in front of them into the realms of the divine by a desire to receive that which they behold, namely the Christ, into the heart and soul. The beauty of the act of spiritual communion is that it can take place anywhere, even in a gallery or in classroom setting. That is, it is not site-specific. Thus, the visual arts through the act of beholding the beauty of the form have the potential capacity to evoke, remind, call, transport and elevate the believer to participate in an act of spiritual communion. In short, the beholder is not merely viewing the sacred image to ‘look at,’ understand, and enrich their knowledge (the aesthetic experience), rather through *the site of its beholding* they strive to united themselves to that which they behold, namely the beauty of the form and splendour of Christ (the spiritual experience).

However, despite the seemingly obvious theological importance of the word behold, it has fallen out of fashion with modern-day biblical translators. As Dr. Leah Zuidema explains in *Behold, Behold, Behold!* (March: 2015),

*A quick search at BibleGateway.com shows that behold appears 1,298 times in the original King James version (published in the early 1600s), and 1,242 times in the 1599 Geneva Bible. But behold is used less and less in contemporary translations. In the New King James version, behold is used only about half as often—586 times. And in translations that more closely echo contemporary English, the word is a rarity, appearing only 27 times in the New Revised Standard Version, once in the New International Version, and not at all in The Message.*<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> Zuidema, L. (March: 2015) *Behold! Behold! Behold. In all things*, Dordt University: Publication of the Andreas Centre. Available at: <https://inallthings.org/lent-behold-behold-behold/?highlight=Zuidema%2C%20L>. (Accessed: 20 March 2021).

A similar fate befell the English translations of the Roman Catholic Bible. For instance, in the Douay-Rheims Bible (1610) the word ‘behold’ appears 1089 times while in the Knox bible (1945) it appears only 46 times, and in the New Revised Standard Bible – Catholic Edition (NRSV-CE) (1990) the word behold appears a mere 26 times.

According to Marianna Ricciuto in *English Translations of the Roman Catholic Bible in the 20th Century* (2006) the rationale behind the monumental change in translation is that,

*The English-speaking Catholic would have found the language of the bible to be at odds with his or her own vernacular.*<sup>306</sup>

Thus, in an attempt to eliminate archaic language and antiquated phraseology, modern-day translators of the Bible significantly reduced the usage of the word behold in the English translations of the Bible.<sup>307</sup> This is somewhat surprising as the word behold is of prime importance to people of faith today. That is, it is proclaimed at the centre of the Eucharist feast during the breaking of the bread. *Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.*

Moreover, Ross argues that due to the theological significance attached to the word behold, the abandonment of the word by modern-day biblical translators carries profound consequences for the modern-day believer’s ability to comprehend the true meaning of the text (*image*).<sup>308</sup> This has led to the misreading of biblical texts and has significantly altered the theological meaning of the Gospel message. What Ross means by this is that, in effect the contemplative element of text is altered, lost, or not reached when the word ‘behold’ is replaced by the words ‘look,’ ‘lo,’ ‘here,’ or ‘see.’ That is, the words which the modern-day translators of the Bible have used to replace the word behold do not carry the same weight, dignity, and liminality to them. As Ross writes,

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<sup>306</sup> Ricciuto, M. (2006) *English Translations of the Roman Catholic Bible in the 20th Century*. Para. III. Available at <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~cpercyc/courses/6362-ricciuto.htm>. (Accessed: 20 March 2021).

<sup>307</sup> In the English translations of the Bible the word “behold,” replaced the Hebrew word *hinneh* in the Old Testament and the Greek word *idou* in the New Testament.

<sup>308</sup> My emphasis.

*The word behold is a liminal word; it signals the threshold of contemplation, where the self-conscious mind stops analysing and becomes attentively receptive, open in an ungrasping and self-emptying way to irruption from the deep mind.*<sup>309</sup>

If we take a look at the meaning of the word ‘behold’ in Latin, namely ‘*ecce*,’ we begin to discover the transitional capacity which it evokes. The priest before giving Holy Communion holds the host up and says to the faithful,

*Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi. Beati qui ad cenam Agni vocati sunt.*

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in a homily entitled *On the Eucharist* (Sermon 57), explains that the text is rightly understood as meaning,

*Behold the mystery of your salvation laid out for you; behold what you are, become what you receive.*<sup>310</sup>

The meaning which St Augustine attaches to the act of beholding the Lamb of God during the Mass is of profound theological value. *Ecce*, in this sense, means far more than simply, *pay careful attention to what is to follow; it is especially important!* It implicitly implies that a transformative process is taking place, which is of great Christological significance. The beholder becomes what he/she receives, namely the beauty of the form, which ultimately leads to unification with the Trinity. It is the unity between the beholder and that which is beheld that enables the beholder to share in the glory of God.

St Augustine’s thoughts were echoed and developed in the writings of John Duns Scotus (1265/66–1308). For Duns Scotus, unification is of cosmological importance as it is the means by which God shares and imparts his glory to the beholder and the natural world.

*We can deny that predestination concerns persons only, for if God can love a good other than himself, not only when it is a person, but also when it is a nature, then for its sake he can also select and ordain in advance some good suitable to it. Consequently, he can*

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<sup>309</sup> Ross, M. (2013) p.29.

<sup>310</sup> Today, St Augustine’s words have been shortened and made responsive by the Society of St. John the Evangelist: V/Behold what you are. R/ May we become what we receive.

*choose (1) glory and (2) the union as the means of glory, not only for the person, but for some nature.*<sup>311</sup>

For Duns Scotus the primary reason for the Incarnation is unification with God and all creation, rather than the remission of sin.<sup>312</sup>

In Spanish, the word ‘behold’ is translated as ‘contemplan,’ which simply means to contemplate. A prayer by St John of the Cross emphasises the importance of beholding the beauty of God, and the unity that that brings.

*Let Your divinity shine on my intellect by giving it divine knowledge, and on my will by imparting to it the divine love and on my memory with the divine possession of glory.*

*Let us so act that by means of this loving activity we may attain to the vision of ourselves in Your beauty in eternal life. That is: That I be so transformed in Your beauty that we may be alike in beauty, and both behold ourselves in Your beauty, possessing now Your very beauty; this, in such a way that each looking at the other may see in the other his own beauty, since both are Your beauty alone, I being absorbed in Your beauty; hence, I shall see You in Your beauty, and You shall see me in Your beauty, and I shall see myself in You in Your beauty, and You will see Yourself in me in Your beauty; that I may resemble You in Your beauty, and You resemble me in Your beauty, and my beauty will be Your beauty and Your beauty my beauty; wherefore I shall be You in Your beauty, and You will be me in Your beauty, because Your very beauty will be my beauty; and therefore we shall behold each other in Your beauty.*

*...By Your purity, O divine Wisdom, many things are behold in You through one. For You are the deposit of the Father’s treasures, the splendour of the eternal light, the unspotted mirror and image of His goodness.*<sup>313</sup>

For St John of the Cross, unity with God enables the beholder to see the beauty of God and be transformed and so share in the splendour and of the beauty of Christ. Moreover, if we take a look at the meaning of the word behold in Old English then we begin to see the theological significance attached to it.

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<sup>311</sup> From *Ordinatio* III, dist. 7, q. 3, in corp., resp. 2, translated by Allan Wolter, (1988) *Four Questions on Mary*. Santa Barbara, CA: Old Mission Santa Barbara. p.29. Quotation cited in Bychkov, Oleg. V., & Fodor, J. (2016) *Theological Aesthetics After von Balthasar*. p.68.

<sup>312</sup> The theme of unity rather than remission of sin is echoed in the thoughts of Balthasar in the *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (2003): ‘Not redemption from sin, but the unification of the world in itself and with God is the ultimate motivating cause for the Incarnation and, as such, the first idea of the Creator, existing in advance of all creation.’ Balthasar. (2003) *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*. Translated by Brian E. Daley. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. p.272.

<sup>313</sup> St John of The Cross. Available at: <https://carmelitesofboston.org/prayer/prayers-of-our-carmelite-saints/prayers-of-st-john-of-the-cross/>. (Accessed: 17 January 2021).

*Old English bihaldan (West Saxon behealdan) "give regard to hold in view," also "keep hold of; belong to," from be - + haldan, healdan (see hold (v.)). Related: Beheld; beholding. A common West Germanic compound, compare Old Saxon bihaldan "hold, keep," Old Frisian bihalda "hold, possess, keep, protect, save," Old High German bihalten, German behalten, but "[t]he application to watching, looking, is confined to English."*<sup>314</sup>

‘Behold’ (*bihaldan*) when taken as meaning ‘belong to,’ is profoundly theologically significant as it attaches the beholder to that which is beheld. Consequently, the same meaning is not reached when the word behold has been translated to either ‘look,’ ‘lo,’ ‘here,’ ‘see,’ or other synonyms.

Ross argues that the word behold is liminal inasmuch as it begins, or opens the believer, to the initial transitional process of ‘en-Christing.’ The act of beholding the sacred takes the contemplative to the threshold of eternal unity with the divine. As Julian of Norwich writes in *Revelations of Divine Love*,

*It is God's will that we seek Him, to the beholding of Him, for by that He shall show us Himself of His special grace when He will. And how a soul shall have Him in its beholding...*<sup>315</sup>

Julian explains to the reader that the ‘two workings (workings) seeking and beholding,’ became evident to her in the vision that she sought and received of Christ’s Passion in *The Second Revelation*. She explains that ‘seeking’ God is a grace given through the teachings of the Church and is commonplace to all, while the beholding, or mystical seeing, is a special grace resulting from God’s good pleasure (provenance), which is accessed through contemplative prayer, one could add contemplative reading and contemplative viewing of an image/object.

Moreover, Julian tells the reader that she learnt that ‘seeking is as good as beholding,’ and yet one must strive, through contemplative prayer to ‘seek Him to the beholding.’ She conveys to the reader that seeking God is ‘pleasing to Him, for His working is privy, and He willeth to be perceived.’<sup>316</sup>

<sup>314</sup> *Behold*. Online Etymology Dictionary. Available at: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/behold>. (Accessed: 18 January 2021).

<sup>315</sup> Norwich, Julian. (2015) *Revelations of Divine Love: A New Translation by Barry Windeatt*. Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics. Chapter 10. p 21.

<sup>316</sup> Norwich, Julian. (2015) Chapter 10. p.21.



At first glance Julian's 'two workings seeking and beholding' are intriguingly similar to that of Balthasar's 'two moments of perceiving and beholding.' Julian in her *showings*, gives co-equity of importance the two workings of 'seeking' and 'beholding,' while Balthasar combines his two moments of 'perceiving' and 'beholding' with the term *Wahrnehmen* (to take to be true), which denotes their inseparability. Alongside that, he states that, you cannot behold that which you have not first perceived. An interesting point of departure is that, for Julian, one must seek God with faith, hope and charity to the beholding of Him. Whereas for Balthasar it is Christ's love and hope rather than ours that we accord full credit.

*Faith is the one which contains everything that follows; it is that act of beholding the form of Jesus which at the same instant both achieves insight and is overpowered by what is incomprehensibly greater: it achieves the insight that it is to this man that we must accord full credit regarding his love, his hope, and his reliability in keeping his own word.*<sup>317</sup>

For Julian, the beholding of God,

*Is most worship to Him and profit to thyself, and [the soul thus] most receiveth of meekness and virtues with the grace and leading of the Holy Ghost.*<sup>318</sup>

Similarly, for Balthasar, the act of 'beholding the form' perceived through the graced eyes of faith, expresses our love and worship for Him.

Just how influential Julian's 'two workings of seeking and beholding' were on Balthasar's own theological thought on the 'two moments of perceiving and beholding' is unclear. We know that Balthasar was familiar with the works of Julian of Norwich, because in *The Glory of the Lord, Vol. 5: The Realm of Metaphysics in The Modern Age* (1990) he dedicates pp. 85-88 to her in relation to God's universal providential love, 'All will be well, all manner of things will be well'. Alongside this we also know that during a dictation session of the *Book of All Saints* Balthasar asked Adrienne von Speyr about Julian,

*Is she correct on the whole?' Speyr replies, 'Yes, she is. She is very childlike in her vision. She accepts things just as they are offered*

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<sup>317</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GL I*. p.200.

<sup>318</sup> Norwich, Julian. (2015) Chapter 10. p.21.

*to her, and she carries them around with her. She does not separate herself from her experiences, but she does not at the same time accord them an undue importance. She is humble.*<sup>319</sup>

However, Balthasar does not say anything about Julian's 'two workings of seeking and beholding.' Notwithstanding that, while Julian gives a fuller account of the role of 'seeking' God to the beholding of Him, Balthasar's account is more detailed and theologically developed in relation to the act of beholding God. If we apply Balthasar's concept of 'perceiving' and 'beholding' to viewing Christian art, then the believer encounters<sup>320</sup> the beauty of the form and splendour of God through *the site of its beholding*, which is perceived through the graced eyes of faith. The act of beholding attaches the beholder to that which is beheld. This, in part, is achieved through sacramentally imaginative contemplation of the image and the receiving of special graces, which allows the beholder to be enraptured and transported beyond the image to the realms of divine love. That is, the believer is not merely viewing the image, but rather they are (open to) participating in an act of spiritual communion. Thus, *the site of beholding the form* functions as bridge to the transcendental.

#### 4.3.2. The Theological Aesthetic Thread

Moreover, Rose argues that each of the four sites, namely *the site of production, the site of the image, the site of its circulation and the site of its audiencing*, could possibly and often are approached from a number of different methods. This is known as the mixed method approach. She argues that the benefits of using a mixed method approach is that it allows a fuller, deeper, and more diverse investigation into the meaning of the image. Notwithstanding that, there are limits and possible dangers in using a mixed method approach inasmuch as the methods may not be compatible. That is,

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<sup>319</sup> Quotation cited in *Catholic Commentary on Julian of Norwich*. Available at: <https://rccommentary2.blogspot.com/>. (Accessed: 19 January 2021).

<sup>320</sup> Pope Francis in his first *Pentecostal homily* (7 May: 2013) placed a great emphasis upon the centrality of the theme of encounter in relation to Christian thinking. He said that '*In this 'stepping out' [of ourselves] it is important to be ready for encounter. For me, this word is very important... Because faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others.*'

What this means is that faith is always a personal encounter with the divine, but it is never private. That is to say, we do not pray side by side, but rather in communion with the saints in light and in relation to the other. '*The Church, our mother, responding to God by faith as she teaches us to say both, 'I believe' and 'We believe'.*' Francis. (7 May: 2013) *A Homily of his Holiness Pope Francis on the Solemnity of Pentecost*. Available at : [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130519\\_omelia-pentecoste.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130519_omelia-pentecoste.html). (Accessed: 20 January 2021).

some have found that a mixed method approach could cause incoherence at the theoretical level (Hall, 2013; Lewis et al., 2013; Rose, 2016). Alongside this, Rose warns us that there is also danger in using an eclectic range of methodological strategies inasmuch as, ‘everyone sees things their own way.’ Nevertheless, there are strong advantages in using an appropriate method for a particular site/s, especially when it comes to focusing on researching the relationship between *the site of the image*, its intended audiences, and the theological meaning of the image in historical and contemporary culture.

Therefore, inspired by Balthasar’s theological aesthetic approach I propose to utilise and develop a framework which will function as a methodological umbrella, and is thereby applicable to all *four sites*. As will be established in what follows, the advantages of the theological aesthetic approach is that it provides continuity, and thus avoids incoherence at both the theoretical and practical levels.

Furthermore, Rose suggests that each of the four sites, as mentioned above, have three distinct aspects, which she calls modalities, namely: -

*The technological modality*

*The compositional modality*

*The social modality*

To describe *the technological modality* Rose utilises Mirzoeff’s definition of technology, namely ‘any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil paintings to television and the Internet.’<sup>321</sup> Thus, Rose argues that the technological aspect is relevant to all four sites, namely how the image is made, how is it circulated, how it is displayed and its visual effects. While no formal definition is given for *the compositional modality*, she describes it as incorporating formal strategies and qualities within an image, such as content, line, colour, and space. Rose then outlines *the social modality* as referring to the political, economic, institutions and practices in which the image/object is viewed and used.

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<sup>321</sup> Rose. (2016) p.25.

As mentioned elsewhere the focus of my thesis is the theological aesthetic significance of Christian images, and how they are interpreted in light of the third transcendental beauty, namely Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God. How they have the capacity to function as a bridge to the transcendental, which goes beyond the mere ‘viewing’ of the Christian message, as well as how they interact within the realms of our daily existence. According to Rose’s visual framework this would place the theological significance of the image into the category of the social modality.<sup>322</sup>

However, from a Catholic theological perspective, the aim of Catholic Faith is to seek and respond to the love of God. Hence, it is more than just a mode of life, rather it encompasses by definition the entirety of life in all its fullness. Therefore, the beliefs of the faithful, the Scriptures and teachings of the Catholic Church cannot be assimilated into a subcategory of *the social modality*. As Reddaway (2013), McGregor (2018), and Crow (2019) astutely state, inevitably a methodology for the interpretation of Christian art will draw upon art history for its context but cannot be restricted to its methods and content because of the consistency in which it overlooks the theological significance of images.<sup>323</sup> Consequently, from a Catholic perspective, Rose’s list of modalities is insufficient. Hence, a Catholic visual framework for the interpretation of Christian art necessarily includes what this thesis calls ‘*the theological aesthetic thread*.’ The thesis argues that it is this that will inevitably reveal and enable a deeper and more profound appreciation of what Christian images express and mean for the faithful (and others) today.

As mentioned above, the thesis developed the first part of Rose’s visual framework criteria by replacing ‘the site of *its audiencing*’ with ‘the site of *its beholding*.’

The site of *production* - where and how it is made

The site of *the image* - its visual contents

The site of *its circulation* - where it travels

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<sup>322</sup> Rose argues that the social modality, is concerned with, ‘*the economic, political, and institutional practices and relations that produce, saturate and interpret the image*.’ Rose, (2016) p.374.

<sup>323</sup> C.f. Reddaway. (2013) pp.15-16; McGregor (2018) pp. 268-282, and Crow. (2019) pp.2-3.

*The site of its beholding - how the image is encountered by the beholder  
in the light of faith*

Alongside that I have developed it further by adding a fourth aspect, namely  
*‘the theological aesthetic thread.’*

The *technological* modality

The *compositional* modality

The *social* modality

The *theological aesthetic thread*

The structure of the framework for the theological aesthetic interpretation of Christian images is now complete. The focus of this thesis will be on *the site of the image*, namely the theological significance of the subject matter of the image, and *the site of its beholding; the beauty of the form*,<sup>324</sup> which is approached through the lens of a *‘theological aesthetic thread,’* with its project of hierarchical ways of beholding the beauty of the form through the receptive openness of the graced ‘eyes of our minds and hearts’.<sup>325</sup> The theological aesthetic aspect of my framework for the interpretation of Christian art will be developed further in the next section.

#### **4.4. The Relationship between Text and Image in the Catholic Tradition**

In the last section we looked how meaning is derived from the visual arts through sites, modalities, and theological aesthetic frameworks. In this section we turn to the relationship between text and image in the context of the Catholic tradition.

##### **4.4.1. Similarities and Differences between Text and Image**

Historically speaking, sacred texts and sacred images within the Catholic tradition have shared a similar theological function. According to Thomas Aquinas, images in the Church served a threefold purpose:

*Firstly, for the instruction of the uneducated in place of books;  
secondly, for illustrating and remembering the mystery of the  
incarnation; and thirdly, for awakening the passion of devotion,*

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<sup>324</sup> Inevitably there will be a certain amount of overlap between these and the other for said sites.

<sup>325</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.120.

*which is kindled more effectively on the basis of viewing than through hearing.* <sup>326</sup>

In a similar fashion John of Genoa in *Catholicon* (1286), a late thirteenth-century dictionary, describes the function and purpose of images as follows,

*Know that there are three reasons for the institution of images in churches. First, for the instruction of simple people, because they are instructed by them as if by books. Second, so that the mystery of the incarnation and the examples of the Saints may be more active in our memory through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.* <sup>327</sup>

John of Genoa's dictionary entry on the purpose and function of images within an ecclesial setting is slightly developed, but closely based upon Thomas Aquinas' threefold definition. This in turn was based upon St. Gregory the Great's letter to the Bishop of Marseilles on the legitimacy of the use of images in Christian worship.

Similarly, William Durand of Mende (1230 -1296) stated in *Rationale Divinorum Officium* that,

*The Agathensian Creed forbids pictures in churches: and also, that that which is worshipped and adored should be painted on the walls. But Gregory says that pictures are not to be done away with because they are not to be worshipped: for paintings appear to move the mind more than descriptions: for deeds are placed before the eyes in paintings, and so appear to be actually going on. But in description, the deed is done as it were by hearsay: which affects the mind less when recalled to memory. Hence also it is that in churches we pay less reverence to books than to images and pictures.* <sup>328</sup>

Richard Viladesau in *The Beauty of the Cross* (2006) states this demonstrates that in the Middle Ages the West was now beginning to understand the power of images as distinct forms of communication and reflection. As the Dominican Fra Michele da Carcano OP explained and expanded on in a sermon published in 1492:

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<sup>326</sup> Cf. ST II-II, 81, 3 ad 3. Aquinas, T. (1947) *Summa Theologica*. Translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm>. (Accessed: 20 January 2020).

<sup>327</sup> John of Genoa: Joannes Balbus, *Catholicon*. (Venice, [1497] P. V. vr. (s.v. Imago). English translation cited in Baxandall, M. (1988) *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. 2nd edn. p.41.

<sup>328</sup> Cited in Viladesau, R. (2006) *The Beauty of the Cross*. NY: Oxford Press. p.6.

*...Images of the Virgin and the Saints were introduced for three reasons. First, on account of ignorance of simple people, so that those who are not able to read the scriptures can learn by seeing the sacraments of our salvation and faith in pictures. It is written; 'I have learned that, inflamed by unconsidered zeal, you have been destroying the images of the saints on the grounds that they should not be adored, but we blame you for breaking them... For it is one thing to adore a painting, but quite another to learn from a painted narrative what to adore. What a book is to those who can read, a picture is to the ignorant people who look at it. Because in a picture they who know no letters may yet read.' St. Gregory the Great wrote these words to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles. Second, images were introduced on account of our emotional sluggishness; so that men who are not aroused to devotion when they hear about the histories of the Saints may at least be moved when they see them, as if actually present, in pictures. For our feelings are aroused by things seen more than by things heard. Third, they were introduced on account of our unreliable memories...Images were introduced because many people cannot in their memories retain what they hear, but they do remember if they see images.*<sup>329</sup>

Here Fra Michele da Carcano OP emphasises the didactic stimulative qualities of the arts to arouse devotion in the faithful. As will become evident in the quotes that follow, the function of the arts seems to become more informatively didactic. This resonates with von Balthasar's argument on concerns on the about the abandonment of beauty. For example, the Council of Trent addressed the function of art during the Twenty-Fifth Session, in December 1563, in the Decree on *The Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of the Saints, and on Sacred Images*, stated that:

*And the bishops shall carefully teach this, -that, by means of the histories of the mysteries of our Redemption, portrayed by paintings or other representations, the people is instructed, and confirmed in (the habit of) remembering, and continually revolving in mind the articles of faith; as also that great profit is derived from all sacred images, not only because the people are thereby admonished of the benefits and gifts bestowed upon them by Christ, but also because the miracles which God has performed by means of the saints, and their salutary examples, are set before the eyes of the faithful; that so they may give God thanks for those things; may order their own lives and manners in imitation of the saints; and may be excited to adore and love God, and to cultivate piety.*<sup>330</sup>

<sup>329</sup> Fra Michele da Carcano: *Sermones quadragesimales fratris Michaelis de Mediolano de deem precepts* (Venice: 1492) pp. 48-49 (Sermo XX, De adoration). Cited in Baxandall, M. (1988) *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. 2nd edn. p.41.

<sup>330</sup> *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (1978) ed. by Schroeder, H.J. OP. Rockford: Tan Books. p.235. The full text of this decree is accessible online in an edition of the Council documents edited and translated by J. Watworth (1848) London: Dolman. Available at: <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html>. (Accessed: 2 February 2021).

Furthermore, for the fifteenth century Florentine merchant Giovanni Rucellai, a prominent patron of the arts, the main motivation for collecting art was trifold. He exclaimed that they gave him,

*The greatest contentment and the greatest pleasure because they serve the Glory of God, the honour of the City, and the commemoration of myself.*<sup>331</sup>

Michael Baxandall in *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Second ed. 1988) states in relation to the function of the arts that,

*...For our purpose it is usually enough to know the obvious, that the primary use of the picture was for looking at: they were designed for the client and people he esteemed to look at, with a view to receiving pleasing and memorable and even profitable stimulations.*<sup>332</sup>

Although the purpose of art might seem obvious to Baxandall, namely that it is one of appreciation and profit. This seriously underestimates the theological function of the arts. That is, that the primary function of the arts was to serve and glorify God, to illustrate and make more memorable the Incarnation, and the lived experiences of the saints, to instruct the faithful, and excite devotion.

Alongside that, although sacred texts and sacred images function in not exactly the same way, but in a similar fashion, their hierarchal status and media characteristics are significantly and notably different. That is, the Scriptures have been recognised and ratified<sup>333</sup> as holding primacy of place as the authoritative source of Divine revelation. Whereas the theological and historical discourse on the arts has generally centred on the legitimacy of their use in worship. Nevertheless, as Reddaway argues,

*Many aspects of textual interpretation can legitimately be applied to images. Of course, images do not function precisely as texts do, and cannot be translated into texts without reduction and*

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<sup>331</sup> Baxandall. (1988) p.2.

<sup>332</sup> Baxandall. (1988) p.3.

<sup>333</sup> The Catholic canon of the Holy Sacred Scriptures was drawn up by St Athanasius in 367AD. The canon contains a list of 73 sacred books from both the Old and New Testaments which were formally approved by Pope Damasus I in 382 AD., and they were ratified by the Councils at Hippo and Carthage in 397AD. St Athanasius' list of 73 books were reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1546AD. This set of books, known as the Bible, functions as the divinely inspired word of God for the wellbeing of the Church.



*alteration, but much of the basic methodology of textual interpretation applies.*<sup>334</sup>

This is because theology is based on authority (revelation), and since sources of revelation are documented in the Scriptures, this ordinarily puts constraints on it to the extent that it has to engage with philological and historical studies, alongside other related studies including hermeneutical critical interpretive questions. Notwithstanding that, von Balthasar attempted to set theological aesthetics free from the constraints of philological and historical studies by arguing for the formal unity of the Scriptures in the lives of the faithful based on the Divine revelation that God has revealed himself in history (Hebrews 1:1-2). As such he argued that Catholic Biblical hermeneutics<sup>335</sup> and its historical-critical method are 'almost unacceptable' for doing theology. He says that,

*The study of the 'sources' of revelation, and particularly Biblical studies with all its annexes, has become strictly historical to an almost unacceptable degree and, at least for a time, has seized the lead in theology, even over dogmatics...But such research can establish only what Augustine calls the historia and Origen the littera. The properly theological dimension, however, begins only with the intellectus (Augustine), the spiritus (Origen), the content of revelation, precisely God's theo-logy discerned in and through human history: what the ancients call the sensus spiritualis and the intellects fidei, which can indeed be fostered by a comprehensive understanding of history, but which can in no way be extracted from history by 'exact scientific method' ....True theology begins only at the point where 'exact historical science' passes over into the science of faith proper - a 'science' which presupposes the act of faith as its locus of understanding.*<sup>336</sup>

Reddaway's generic quasi-ecumenical method seems to allow for this.

However, it does not go far enough inasmuch as the profession of faith as

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<sup>334</sup> Reddaway. (2013) p.17.

<sup>335</sup> The principles of textual interpretation (Biblical hermeneutics) deals with issues such as:

What is the 'formal' interpretation of this text?

What is the 'official' interpretation of this text?

How do people interpret the text who are experts on the history, politics, culture, life, times, customs, etc. of the writer?

What did the author intend to say?

What message did the author intend to convey?

Is the use of a particular word, grammatical construction, verb tense, etc., significant in this instance?

Who were the author's readers or listeners, culturally, etc.?

How was the text interpreted by the author's contemporaries? Reinckens, R. (2013) *The Principles of Textual Interpretation: Biblical Hermeneutics*. Available at: <http://www.godonthenet/evidence/intpret.htm>. (Accessed: 7 February 2021).

For Balthasar, what is omitted from the list of issues is the act of faith as a locus of understanding.

<sup>336</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. pp.74-75.

defined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith clearly states that, '*I also firmly accept and hold each and everything definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.*' Moreover, what von Balthasar is referring to here is the fourfold '*senses of Scripture,*' as cited in the CCC.

*According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral, and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church.*<sup>337</sup>

For von Balthasar, what this means is that while theological aesthetics needs to have a comprehensive understanding of historical truths (literal) as presented by historical criticism and engage with philological truths, the main task of theology is largely concerned with what this means and how it is understood in the light of faith (spiritual) today. For von Balthasar, this is achieved through a personal act of faith which is received through the gift of grace, and that is mediated through the pattern of faith as presented by the Church. This is largely a Thomistic understanding of the science of theology, and that an act of faith is only possible by what St. Augustine described as *fruitio*<sup>338</sup> which constitutes an eschatological anticipation within faith.<sup>339</sup> It is only in this dimension, as Balthasar states that,

*The vision of the distinctly theological 'form' and its specific beauty are possible. Only here can the act be accomplished which the Augustinian tradition describes as fruitio: the act which alone can open up the theological content of such 'form' and which, in particular, constitutes an eschatological anticipation that occurs within faith and is demanded by faith.*<sup>340</sup>

It is this that gives theology its 'place of honour' which makes it unique and autonomous from all other forms of science. That is, the beauty of the theological interpretation of the spiritual meaning of the text/image has the ability to move the reader/beholder beyond themselves, which transforms the

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<sup>337</sup> CCC. (2003) para.15.

*'A medieval couplet summarises the significance of the four senses: The Letter speaks of deeds, Allegory to faith. The Moral how to act; Analogy our destiny.'* CCC. (2003) para.118.

<sup>338</sup> Augustine in the first book of *De doctrine Christiana* (395) made a distinction between enjoyment (*fruitio*) 'to cleave to something in love for its own enjoyment,' and to use (*uti*) 'to refer to the object to achievement of what one love's. See O'Donovan, O. (1982) "*Usus*" and "*Fruitio*" in Augustine "*De Doctrina Christiana* I". The Journal of Theological Studies, 33(2), New Series. pp.361-397.

<sup>339</sup> C.f. Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.76.

<sup>340</sup> Balthasar. (1982) p.76.

life of the reader in the here and now. In short, von Balthasar is arguing that we must foster historical criticism's insights, but we must constrain it from usurping theological territory. This is because the principles of textual interpretation ordinarily do not consider the spiritual dimensions of faith. As II Vatican Pontifical document *Dei Verbum* states,

*Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation.... By the same word of Scripture, the ministry of the word also, that is, pastoral preaching, catechetics and all Christian instruction...*<sup>341</sup>

Balthasar echoes this statement when he says that there must be fluidity of transition between the scholarly and the spiritual so that it may 'be allowed to develop and unfold in the very midst of the most stringent scientific form.'<sup>342</sup> The problem of interpretation of biblical text in relation to its pastoral meaning is not a contemporary one, as the Pontifical Biblical Commission states in *Interpretation of Bible in the Life of the Church* (6th January:1994),

*The problem of interpreting the Bible is not a modern invention, as one would sometimes like to believe. The Bible itself attests that its interpretation presents various difficulties. Alongside clear texts it contains obscure passages. Reading certain passages from Jeremiah, Daniel wondered for a long time about their meaning (Dn. 9: 2). According to the Acts of the Apostles, a first-century Ethiopian was in the same situation regarding a passage from the book of Isaiah (Is 53 7-8), recognising that he needed an interpreter (Ac 8: 30-35).*<sup>343</sup>

However, Pontifical Biblical Commission's document highlights both the value and limitations of the historical-critical method. It states that,

*Of course, the classic use of the historical-critical method reveals certain limits since it restricts itself to the search for the meaning of the biblical text in the historical circumstances of its production and is not interested in the high potentialities of meaning that have manifested themselves in the course of the later epochs of revelation, Biblical and Church history. However, this method has contributed to the production of works of biblical exegesis and theology of great value... Nevertheless, whatever its validity, the historical-critical method cannot claim to be sufficient for everything.*<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. (18 November:1965) *Dei Verbum*. para.24.

<sup>342</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GLI*. p.78.

<sup>343</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission. (6 January:1994) *Interpretation of Bible in the Life of the Church*. Available at: [https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp-FullText.htm](https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm). (Accessed: 8 September 2020).

<sup>344</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission. (6 January:1994).

With regard to the relationship between text and reader ‘the history of the effects’ the Pontifical Biblical Commission says that,

*Biblical exegesis could only benefit from this research, especially since philosophical hermeneutics for its part affirmed the necessary distance between the work and its author, as well as between the work and its readers. In this perspective, the story of the effect caused by a book, or a passage of Scripture has begun to be included in the work of interpretation (Wirkungsgeschichte).<sup>345</sup> Efforts are made to measure the evolution of interpretation over time according to the concerns of readers and to evaluate the importance of the role of tradition in clarifying the meaning of biblical texts... Moreover, the reader is never an isolated subject, but belongs to a social space and is situated in a tradition... Furthermore, we must be careful not to privilege one or the other moment in the history of the effects of a text to make it the only rule of its interpretation.<sup>346</sup>*

More recently, the argument against the historical-critical method continues as Martin Dale writes,

*One salient characteristic of our current situation is...that the time has come to “dethrone” historical criticism as the reigning paradigm of scriptural exegesis for the sake of recovering a theological interpretation of the Bible on behalf of the church.<sup>347</sup>*

Both the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document and Dale’s statement echo and confirm von Balthasar’s concerns about historical criticism as the ‘reigning paradigm’ in exegetical research of Biblical text. Therefore, what is required is a theological aesthetics method of interpretation of text and image to recover the spiritual significance for the faithful.

#### **4.4.2. Status, Characteristics & Foundational Principles of Catholic Interpretation**

It is von Balthasar’s contention that all theological enquiry necessarily begins with a transcendental understanding of the beauty of the Incarnate Christ.<sup>348</sup>

That is to say, Christ’s act of *kenotic* self-emptying love, seen as Divine

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<sup>345</sup> Mark Knight in *Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory* (2010) argues that ‘Gadamer’s broader thesis in *Truth and Method* ... suggests that the purpose of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is to enable an interpretative conversation rather than to define a new scientific methodology.’ Knight, M. (2010) *Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Volume. 33 Issue. 2. pp.137-146. p.137.

<sup>346</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission (6 January:1994).

<sup>347</sup> Martin, Dale B. (2008) *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press. p.3.

<sup>348</sup> See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Revelation for the salvation of humanity, is a hermeneutical presupposition for theological exegesis of sacred text, which could equally be applied to images. This is necessarily based upon faith grounded in the living tradition of the Church, the Scriptures, and the teachings of the Magisterium. Hence, human discourse about God albeit critical hermeneutics in literature, epistemology, historical criticism, etc., cannot be the starting point of theological aesthetic interpretation. They are useful and necessary, but they are always secondary. What this means is that there is a clear and explicit hierarchical status attached to sacred sources of revelation. As Frank Burch Brown writes,

*Religious truth that is expressed beautifully, figuratively, and artistically has long had the reputation of being (at the very most) a vivid but less precise expression of what can be said more properly in systematic, conceptual discourse...Similarly, for the Church's ongoing interpretation of the truth as truth, the inquirer has looked not to its poetry and art or even to its liturgy (though these are acknowledged to have their own unique value) but rather to doctrinal statements and theological texts.*<sup>349</sup>

This is because the Catholic Church is hierarchical by nature. As Thomas McGovern states,

*Because the Church, to fulfil its mission, has been hierarchically constituted and endowed with a teaching authority, in the proclamation and interpretation of the Scriptures of the New Testament, the Magisterium exercises a specific function: to conserve, defend, and transmit the deposit of Revelation. The Magisterium cannot prescind from the writings of the New Testament, nor do the latter substitute the Magisterium.*<sup>350</sup>

Notwithstanding that, according to the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020, pp., 69-78) there are seven sources from which the catechist/theologian draws upon to gain understanding of the message of God, namely:

*The Word of God in Sacred Scripture and in Sacred Tradition (the Church Fathers and Mothers)*

*The Magisterium*

*The Liturgy*

*The testimony of the saints and martyrs (lived experience)*

*Theology*

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<sup>349</sup> Cited in Viladesau. (2000) p.127.

<sup>350</sup> McGovern, T. (2004) *Vatican II and the Interpretation of Scripture*. Homiletic & Pastoral Review. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. pp.6-16. p.10.

## *Christian Culture*

### *Beauty*

Depending on the subject matter and the context the catechist/theologian may choose to emphasize or draw upon any of the diverse sources, with the proviso that they are always interactive and interrelated. Holding all these sources in balance avoids a one-dimensional catechesis. As the *Directory for Catechesis* states,

*The sources which catechesis draws upon are to be considered as being interrelated: one points to the other, while all can be traced back to the word of God, of which they are an expression.*<sup>351</sup>

What this means in our context is that Christian images function as expressions of the sacred Scriptures. As the CCC states,

*The beauty of the images moves me to contemplation, as a meadow delights the eyes and subtly infuses the soul with the glory of God.*<sup>352</sup> ... 'Similarly, the contemplation of sacred icons, united with meditation on the Word of God and the singing of liturgical hymns, enters into the harmony of the signs of celebration so that the mystery celebrated is imprinted in the heart's memory and is then expressed in the new life of the faithful...' <sup>353</sup>

Notwithstanding that, Richard Viladesau in *Theology, and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric* (2000) considers how art could function as a theological text. He states that,

*My present concern is with forms of art, especially the pictorial that in a certain analogous sense may serve as theological texts in themselves - that is, without the necessity of accompanying words.*<sup>354</sup>

For Viladesau, art may serve as a theological text in two ways. *Firstly*, as an embodiment of tradition, namely as Christian practice which expresses the human situation. *Secondly*, art is understood as a theological text in its correlational function. Moreover, the functionality of art as theological text works in two very distinct ways, namely as an aid to the history of theology and art as art itself, which can reflect Christian values, ideas, and beliefs.

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<sup>351</sup> Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation (2020) *Directory for Catechesis*. (2020) p.72.

<sup>352</sup> St. John Damascene, *De Image*. 1, 27: PG 94,1268A, B.

<sup>353</sup> CCC. (2003) para.1162.

<sup>354</sup> Viladesau, R. (2000) *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art, and Rhetoric*. p.124.

Furthermore, for Viladesau, art has the ability to represent the message of the gospels in an attractive and persuasive way that could bring about moral change and conversion.

Viladesau's transcendental type of theological aesthetics is based on anthropological verification. As mentioned elsewhere Balthasar's systematic theological aesthetics is 'from above,'<sup>355</sup> which is aimed primarily at the ecclesial community. This starkly differentiates from Viladesau's foundational theological aesthetics which is 'from below,' and is aimed at the academy.

Notwithstanding that, Viladesau argues that his approach to theological aesthetics is not in opposition to Balthasar's theological aesthetics, but rather 'it should provide the latter with a transcendental anthropological warrant that permits a wider conversation *ad extra* (Viladesau, 1999, p.38).' Balthasar affirms Viladesau's statement to some degree. However, Balthasar states that both cosmological and anthropological methods are always secondary inasmuch as in *Love Alone* (1992) he argues,

*It will be a theological aesthetics in the dual sense of a study of perception, and a study of the objective self-expression of divine glory; it will try to demonstrate that this theological approach, far from being a dispensable theological by-road, is in fact the one possible approach to the heart of theology – the cosmic world-historical approach, and the path of anthropological verification, being secondary, complementary to it.*<sup>356</sup>

What Balthasar means by this is that theological aesthetics, that is verification for the existence of God, can be approached and understood in three different ways. Firstly, it can be approached from the cosmological method (the study of the physical universe). Secondly, it can be understood from the anthropological method (the study of humankind), and thirdly it can be revealed from perception in faith of '*the objective self-expression of divine glory*,' understood as a free gift of love. This makes Balthasar's theological aesthetics firmly Christo-centric. That is, faith in the revelation that Jesus Christ is the Incarnate

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<sup>355</sup> 'Christology from above' refers to God's actions in the Incarnation, and the ontological result of that action (the hypostatic union), whereas the 'below' in 'Christology from below' refers to the gradual process by which the apostolic understanding of that action developed.' Krasevac, L. E. (April:1987) *Christology from Above and Christology from Below*. The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review. The Catholic University of America Press. Vol. 51, Number2. Pp. 299-306. p. 299.

<sup>356</sup> Balthasar. (1992) *Love Alone*. London: Sheen & Ward Ltd. p.8-9.

Word of God, seen as a free gift of divine love. It is this that Balthasar states is starting point to his theological aesthetics.<sup>357</sup>

Like Balthasar, Viladesau explains that there are different ways in which the term theological aesthetics can be understood. He states that,

*In its wide sense, theological aesthetics includes 'aesthetic theology' – that is, the use by theology of the language, methods, and contents of the aesthetic realm. The art of making theological discourse affecting and beautiful (theopoesis) is appropriate to all branches and kinds of theology. The application of aesthetic theory (e.g., literary analysis) to theological contents is most pertinent to those 'functional specialties' that Lonergan names research, interpretation, history and communication. The remaining specialties -dialectics, foundations, doctrines, and systematics – are the principal field of theological aesthetics in its narrower sense: the use of properly theological starting points, categories, and methods to formulate an account of (1) perception, (2) beauty and (3) the arts. Such accounts may be formulated from the point of view of what Tracy calls 'systematic' theology (as in Balthasar...).*<sup>358</sup>

Alongside foundational 'from below' and systematic 'from above' approaches to theological aesthetics, it can be approached from a practical theologies, which are directed towards society and can be approached from both below and from above.

Whereas von Balthasar argued that beauty (aesthetics) had been much neglected by Western theology in favour of the other two transcendentals, the good and the true, Viladesau argues that Western theology has been largely been preoccupied with studying the verbal and written word, and that the arts (aesthetics) have been much neglected source of revelation. However, Viladesau acknowledges that things are starting to change.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Balthasar in *Love Alone* (1992) lays out the three different methods of verification to discovering God's message to humankind as the cosmological method, the anthropological method, and the third way of love. See pp. 1-50.

<sup>358</sup> Viladesau. (1999) *Theological Aesthetics. God in Imagination, Beauty, and the Arts*. USA: Oxford Press. p. 38.

<sup>359</sup> For instance, there are a number of newly emergent online resources that focus on the relationship between the arts and Scripture. For example, *Visual Commentary on the Scriptures* (VCS) is an ecumenical online resource created by Professor Ben Quash that brings three academic disciplines into dialogue, namely theology, art history and biblical scholarship, which provides theological commentary on arts. Alongside this, Patrick van der Vorst has created [www.Christian.Art](http://www.Christian.Art), which is a Catholic online newsletter that offers a short reflection the Scriptural reading of the day, which is accompanied by a piece of artwork.



Viladesau's position runs along the same lines of Paul Tillich who argued that the contemporary situation is also applicable to the past. As Viladesau writes,

*There are significant parallels between the historical paradigms of art, philosophy, and theology that are enlightening for the study of each of these fields. The art of any particular period is significant for determining the context of its theology: the life-situations and the existential questions in response to which it was formulated. If one essential part of historical hermeneutics is entering into the 'common sense' of an era - what people believed, felt, took for granted in their lives - then the historical theologian must look not only to explicitly theological texts, but also to works of art, both secular and religious, that embody and partially express the context of the times.*<sup>360</sup>

However, Viladesau does not provide a detailed methodology on how this research might be conducted. By contrast, methodologies for Biblical Scripture have a long and established history within the exegesis tradition, which comprise a set of twenty principles that are subdivided into six categories and three disciplines.<sup>361</sup> They provide guidance for biblical exegetes who wish to embark upon a critical inquiry of the Scriptures. Although the principles and guidelines are specifically designed with the Scriptures in mind, they are useful for the theological interpretation of non-textual mediums such as the visual arts. However, on their own they are insufficient for the task of theologically interpreting the visual arts.<sup>362</sup> This is because deriving meaning from viewing and reading Scripture utilises distinct aspects of our sensory perception. Consequently, commentary on visual theology necessarily needs to consider the theological aesthetic perception of the viewer.

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<sup>360</sup> Viladesau. (2000) p.127.

<sup>361</sup> Twenty principles of Catholic interpretation of Scripture.

'A. The Foundational Principle, The Word of God in Human Language; B. "In Human Language": Catholic Exegesis and Human Knowledge, 2. Catholic Exegesis and Science, 3. Catholic Exegesis and History, 4. The Use of Philological and Literary Analysis, 5. The Contribution of Philosophical Hermeneutics; C. "The Word of God": Catholic Exegesis and Christian Faith, 6. A Hermeneutic of Faith, 7. The Role of the Community of Faith, 8. Interpretation in Light of the Biblical Tradition, the Unity of Scripture, and the Canon, 9. Interpretation of the Old Testament in Light of the Paschal Mystery, 10. Interpretation in Light of the Living Tradition of the Church, 11. The Aim of Interpretation: To Explain Scripture's Religious Message; D. The Meaning of Inspired Scripture, 12. The Literal Sense, 13. The Spiritual Sense, Typology, 14. The Fuller Sense; E. "In Human Language": Methods and Approaches, 15. The Use of the Historical-Critical Method, 16. A Plurality of Methods and Approaches; F. Interpretation in Practice, 17. The Task of the Exegete and the Relationship of Exegesis to Other Theological Disciplines, 18. Actualisation, 19. Inculturation, 20. The Use of the Bible in the Church.' Quotation cited in Williamson, P. S. (2003) *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture*. Catholic Biblical Quarterly. 65 (3) p.332.

<sup>362</sup> Cf. Reddaway, C. (2013) pp.16-20.

In order to understand how textual hermeneutics might be applied to images, and yet is not in itself sufficient for the theological interpretation of art, it is important to look at what an image represents, namely the significance of the ‘theological content’ and what effect, if any, it has on the believer and its ‘functional status.’ Since both are inevitably interwoven and intrinsically linked, in constructing a framework for the theological interpretation of images it is necessary to take both positions into account. As the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document *Interpretation of Bible in the Life of the Church* (1994) stresses,

*Proper knowledge of the biblical text is only accessible to the one who has a lived affinity with what the text is about. The question for every interpreter is: what hermeneutical theory makes possible a correct understanding of the profound reality of which Scripture speaks and an expression of it that has meaning for people today?*

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In the next section of this chapter, I will explore different ways of interpreting an image, namely visual rhetoric, the cultural historical method of ‘seeing things their way’ and its counterpart in art history the ‘period eye,’ and what I call *the theological aesthetic thread* with its hierarchal ways of seeing; and the *site of its beholding; the moment the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith.*

#### 4.4.3. Ways of Seeing: Making Sense of Texts, Images & Ideas

Making sense of texts and images and the ideas that they portray has been an age-old pursuit. Moreover, new advances in interpretation of both text and image are continually being made and as such it is important to look at these methods. Visual rhetoric, which is an adaptation of classical rhetoric,<sup>364</sup> is just

<sup>363</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission (6th January:1994) *Interpretation of Bible in the Life of the Church*. Available at: [https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp-FullText.htm](https://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm). (Accessed: 8 September 2020).

<sup>364</sup> Classical rhetoric is defined as ‘The faculty of observing [discovering] in any given case the available [appropriate] means of persuasion.’ Aristotle. p.160; medieval rhetoric is defined as, ‘There are two things upon which every treatment of the Scriptures depends: the means of discovering what the thought may be, and the means of expressing what the thought is.’ Augustine. p.386; Renaissance rhetoric is defined as, ‘Elegance depends partly on the use of words established in suitable authors, partly on their right application, partly on their right combination in phrases...style is to think as clothes are to the body. Just as dress and outward appearance can enhance or disfigure the beauty and dignity of the body, so words can enhance or disfigure thought.’ Erasmus. pp.507-508; Enlightenment rhetoric is defined as, ‘What is eloquence, in effect, but wisdom, ornately and copiously delivered in words appropriate to the common opinion of mankind.’ Vico. p.726, and Modern and Contemporary rhetoric is defined as, ‘in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off the powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality...discourse is the power

one of the methods which art historians utilise as a starting point to talk about, decipher and make meaning from the subject matter within any given image. Visual rhetoric uses a sixfold criteria which function as a guide to effectively communicate the meaning of the image to the reader or audience.

*Arrangement – the organisation of visual elements so that readers can see their structure.*

*Emphasis – making certain parts more prominent than others by changing their size, shape and colour.*

*Clarity – helps the reader to decode the message, to understand it quickly and completely.*

*Conciseness – generating designs that are appropriately succinct to a particular situation.*

*Tone – tone reveals the designer's attitude towards the subject matter.*

*Ethos – earning the trust of the person receiving the message*<sup>365</sup>

From an art historical approach, visual rhetoric is useful as a means of effectively communicating the meaning of an image, but somewhat limited from a Catholic perspective. This is because this method does not probe, with any real profundity, the theological aspects depicted within the image. In order to gain a greater understanding not only of the past but also the way we understand ourselves in our times it is important to look at all the aspects within the image. The theological aspects within a historical religious image are of importance from a Catholic perspective because of the presupposition that the believer is open to the beauty of the message of Christ depicted within the work of art as a means of sanctification and spiritual transformation. That is, the believer allows (is open to) the beauty of Christ, seen within the work of art, to transform the way they see, understand, and speak about the world in which they live in relation to their faith.

#### **4.4.4. Texts & Contexts**

Understanding texts, images and ideas of the past are ordinarily separate research disciplines within cultural historical studies, religious historical

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which is to be seized.' Foucault. p.1155. Quotations and page numbers cited in Bizzell, Patricia and Bruce Herzberg (Editors.) (2001) *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. 2nd Ed. Boston: Bedford St Martins.

<sup>365</sup> Vollmer, Matthias (2020) *Fifth Lecture: Heavenly feelings*. Courtauld Institute of Art.

studies, and the art world, respectively. Rarely do they plough the same furrow. The intellectual historian Quentin Skinner sought to address this by arguing that historical scholars ought to address the precise intellectual and political contexts alongside the texts that they are studying in order to ‘*see things their way.*’ Skinner argues that,

*[We] need to make it one of our principal tasks to situate the texts we study within such intellectual contexts as to enable us to make sense of what their authors were doing in writing them. My aspiration is not of course to enter into the thought-processes of long-dead thinkers; it is simply to use the ordinary techniques of historical enquiry to grasp their concepts, to follow their distinctions, to appreciate their beliefs and, so far as possible, to see things their way.*<sup>366</sup>

Although Skinner’s methodology of ‘seeing things their way’ has proven to be highly successful in reviving the history of political thought it lacks biblical references. As Coffey, Chapman & Gregory in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (2009) acknowledge, Skinner research ‘often overlooks the biblical citations and religious presuppositions in early modern texts.’<sup>367</sup> This oversight or omission of biblical and theological references is typical of both art history and cultural historical approaches. As Coffey, Chapman and Gregory stated,

*Even in the twenty-first century, the history of religious thought can still be marginalised. A recent guide to the discipline of intellectual history has essays on its relationship to the history of art, political thought, science, social and cultural history, and feminism, but none specifically devoted to religion.*<sup>368</sup>

Coffey, Chapman, and Gregory acknowledge that,

*One consequence of its influence is that intellectual historians have traditionally assigned a relatively low priority to the history of theology and religious ideas.*<sup>369</sup>

As such they attempted to correct Skinner’s oversights and create a more integrated approach to ‘seeing things their way’ by exploring the historical cultural notions of perception alongside that of religious ideas.

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<sup>366</sup> Skinner, Q. (2002) *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 1, *Regarding Method*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.3. Quotation cited in Chapman, A., Coffey, J., & Gregory B. S. (eds.) (2009) *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame. p.2.

<sup>367</sup> Chapman, A., Coffey, J., & Gregory B.S., (eds.) (2009) *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame. p.3.

<sup>368</sup> Chapman, A., Coffey, J., & Gregory B.S. (eds.) (2009) p.1.

<sup>369</sup> Chapman, A., Coffey, J., & Gregory B.S. (eds.) (2009) p.1.

*If historians of political thought, for example, can explore the biblical and theological dimensions of political argument, they will produce more rounded expositions of their key texts. Only when religion is reinserted into our accounts will we be able to deliver a richer and more complete intellectual history.*<sup>370</sup>

In short, ‘seeing things their way’ is a contextualist approach to intellectual history which places emphasis upon the context in which an action, utterance, or expression take place.<sup>371</sup> Although it is ordinarily used in relation to understand historical texts it could feasibly be applied to images to a certain extent.

Moreover, in relation to a cultural historical approach, Gregory in *Can We ‘See Things Their Way’? Should We Try* (2009)<sup>372</sup> makes the point that the letters of Jacob de Roore (also known as Jacob de Keersmaecker) are useful in gaining knowledge of historical beliefs because,

*The issue here is not whether certain passages or phrases his letters are obscure, but whether his letters are of any use at all as evidence for understanding his ideas, as a man who lived and died in the Low Countries more than four hundred years ago.*<sup>373</sup>

Furthermore, he states that, of course his letters cannot be apprehended in isolation from other historical events of the time, and yet we can start to understand his religious ideas to some extent.<sup>374</sup> Moreover, as Gregory states, Roore used biblical references to back up his text, which means he used a recognised authority to underpin his ideas. For Gregory, this means that it cannot be seriously challenged from a position of radical epistemological scepticism. That is, Roore’s letters provide us with an insight into the way in

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<sup>370</sup> Chapman, A., Coffey, J., & Gregory B.S. (eds.) (2009) p.5.

<sup>371</sup> C.f. Chapman, A., Coffey, J., & Gregory B.S. (eds.) (2009) pp.15-17.

<sup>372</sup> Brad S. Gregory in *Can We ‘See Things Their Way’? Should We Try?* (2009) states that, ‘I take ‘seeing things their way’ to be more or less synonymous with understanding religious people on their own terms, or with depicting them in a manner in which they would have recognised themselves... Such a stance is less a method per se than it is an approach or even an attitude, one in which, in Skinner’s phrase, we ‘approach the past with a willingness to listen.’ Such an understanding of religious people on their own terms, past or present, should not be confused with the adoption, approval, or endorsement of the views that we seek to understand. If it is possible to see things as the members of a religious tradition see them, this does not imply that we thereby appropriate or condone their beliefs or ideas. Otherwise, seeing things their way would lead to ineluctably either to conversion to or advocacy of the positions that one has grasped, which is certainly not the case. Nor does such approach imply anything, one way or another, about the truth or falsity of the views that one seeks to understand.’ p.25.

What this statement implies is that ‘seeing things their way’ is an approach that is able to pursue objectively the ideas and practices of religious people in the past on their own terms. However, on its own it falls short as a theological aesthetic methodology for the interpretation of images.

<sup>373</sup> Gregory. (2009) p.29.

<sup>374</sup> C.f. Gregory. (2009) pp.29-30.

which he saw things. Similarly, if we apply the cultural historical method of ‘seeing things their way’ to historical Christian images, which utilised biblical references, narratives and or traditions, then we can dare to say that we can gain some knowledge from the image of how the artist and his/her commissioners saw things. However, as Gregory suggests, the text, and in our case the image, itself cannot be understood in isolation from other historical truths, ideas, and beliefs of the time. To that, I would add that it is of theological importance to assert what it means for the viewer today. That is, how the text/image relates to modern-day held beliefs.

The art historical counterpart to ‘seeing things their way,’ namely the ‘period eye,’ was devised by Michael Baxandall in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Second ed. 1988). In a similar fashion to Gregory, Baxandall remarked that in the main the cultural conditions in which the Renaissance person would have created, viewed, and understood the arts were strongly affected by the social, political, and religious norms of the day. Nevertheless, he argued that it is visual perception that plays a vital role in the way we interpret the arts. He claimed that visual perception is far from being uniform inasmuch as it differs from one person to another. He argued that, although the brain processes visual information in the same way, how we interpret, understand, and experience a work of art is heavily influenced by our education, our culture, and our faith background (Balthasar, 1982, Baxandall, 1988, Clark, 2005). That is, how much we comprehend depends on what we bring to the picture, which he claims is achieved with innate skills that are developed out of our experiences.

Baxandall argued that an educated person in the fifteenth century was expected to know how to discuss the finer points in a work of art. For instance, as Pier Paolo Vergerio exclaimed in *On Noble Behaviour* (1404),

*The beauty and grace of objects, both natural ones and those made by man’s art, are things it is proper for men of distinction to be able to discuss with each other and appreciate.*<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Baxandall. (Second ed. 1988) p.34.

For Baxandall, the patronising classes, which consisted of professional members of confraternities, princes and their courtiers, and senior members of religious orders had a distinct advantage over the peasants and the poor when it came to honing their perceptual skills. The educated Renaissance person was 'on their mettle.' By way of comparison Baxandall argued that peasants and the poor had relatively little knowledge of the fine arts.

Baxandall makes two points in relation to the visual perceptual skills in the Renaissance. *Firstly*, Cultural awareness - in relation to knowledge of space and architecture, and *secondly*, Biblical/Christian awareness - in relation to knowledge of the story. What he meant by this is that someone from a non-European cultural background would not so easily identify with the architecture and space found within a Western work of art. Similarly, someone from a different faith background might struggle to interpret the biblical story depicted in the picture. Notwithstanding that,

*The painter was a professional visualiser of the holy stories. What we now easily forget is that each of his pious public was liable to be an amateur in the same line, practiced in spiritual exercises that demanded a high level of visualisation of, at least, the central episodes of the lives of Christ and Mary.* <sup>376</sup>

What this means is that the artist would have been aware of the viewing public's knowledge of Scripture and spiritual practices. In *Zardino de Oration - the Garden of Prayer* (1454) the practice of contemplative imagination teaches that they ought to imagine the passion taking place in a city in which they knew well. This helps to explain why paintings from around this period often position the Nativity or the Passion of Christ within the local cityscape of the painter or patron. Private spiritual exercises in contemplative imagination of such a scene was made public by the skill of the artist.

Baxandall tells us that preachers' homilies played a vital role in developing the perception skills of the faithful. He says that 'the preacher and the painter were *repetiteur* to each other.'<sup>377</sup> That is, they functioned as a kind of duet of word and image to explain the great mysteries of the faith to the largely illiterate

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<sup>376</sup> Baxandall. (Second ed. 1988) p.45.

<sup>377</sup> Baxandall. (Second ed. 1988) p.49.

faithful. What this implies is that the written word, the spoken word, and the painted word were intrinsically interwoven in the practices of the faithful.

Alongside ‘seeing things their way’ and the ‘period eye,’ there is a need to consider the theological hermeneutical reading of Scripture so as to gain a greater insight of the theological message of the text and how it might, in turn, be usefully applied to sacred images. According to Dempsey Rosales Acosta in *From John of Apamea to Mark’s Gospel: Two Dialogues with Thomasios: A Hermeneutical Reading of Horaó, Blepó and Theóreo* (2014) the exegete needs to look beyond the literal meaning of the text. He writes that,

*The vertical or hierarchal image of scriptural strata demands extending the meaning beyond the literal interpretation according to the intention of the human and divine author of the Scripture.*<sup>378</sup>

Acosta makes clear that there are a number of levels of meaning within the text, namely the literal and the spiritual.<sup>379</sup> The trifold hierarchal structure of ‘ways of seeing’ the text, *blepó*, *theóreo* and *horaó* is derived from the notion of spiritual exegesis, which is connected to spiritual perception. It is this that allows the exegete to see (*blepó*), that is, move beyond the literal meaning of the text to attain higher levels of comprehension. Spiritual perception employs the spiritual senses to contemplate, gaze upon (*theóreo*) and experience the text spiritually and intellectually through the graced eyes of faith. That is to say, after the literal study of the text, the hierarchal structure of ways of seeing enables the reader to perceive and behold through the ‘mind’s eye’<sup>380</sup> of faith what the author intended, namely spiritual transcendence (*horaó*). What this implies is that there is a form of optical language embedded within Scripture that enables a connection between being, vision and cognition that leads to a spiritual encounter with the sacred. As Avanesov maintains in *On Visual Theology* (2019),

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<sup>378</sup> Acosta, D. R. (2014) *From John of Apamea to Mark’s Gospel: Two Dialogues with Thomasios: A Hermeneutical Reading of Horaó, Blepó and Theóreo*. p.82.

<sup>379</sup> The two semantic ways of understanding Scripture, the literal and the spiritual, originate from two schools of thought in antiquity, namely: ‘the School of Antioch which developed the historical approach of the text based upon the validity of the critical literal meaning, and the School of Alexandria, which focused predominantly on the allegorical reading of the Scripture.’ Acosta. (2014) p.82. It was Gregory of Nyssa who successfully struck a balance between the two schools of thought through integrating a higher level of theological reflection to Scripture. That is, he incorporated God’s mysteries, the profession of faith, with the pastoral experience of faith alongside the methodological exegesis of Scripture. Cf. Acosta. (2014) pp. 82-85.

<sup>380</sup> Other ways of seeing in a spiritual sense is mentioned by Jesus in the NT through the ‘eyes of the heart,’ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew. 5:8).



*The Old Testament asserts the manifestation, the visible as the decisive sign of an actual being, but also as the key source of knowledge, as its defining element.*<sup>381</sup> Moreover, "to see" in the language of the Old Testament is a way of saying, "to see". Furthermore, "to see" in the language of Scripture often explicitly means "to know."<sup>382</sup>

For Balthasar, striking the right balance between the two semantic ways of understanding Scripture, the literal and the spiritual, are theologically intrinsically connected. The dual aspects of the interpretation of Scripture means in effect that the literal critical historical meaning is complemented by the pastoral experience of the living faith. That is, for von Balthasar, in order to 'unveil' the true meaning of the Scriptures the starting point to all theological aesthetic inquiry necessarily begins with 'seeing the beauty of the form,' namely the incarnate Christ.

For Balthasar, seeing the beauty of the form can only be apprehended through the graced eyes of faith, which is always received as gift. Similarly, Avanesov argues that, in the spiritual sense 'the tuning of the optics' is a *precondition* of visual religious communication' (Avanesov:2019, 35). That is, the beholder of the form necessarily needs to be in a state of grace to take full advantage of spiritual significance of the image and all that it imparts. As St John of Damascus states, sin dulls the eyes of heart.

If we apply the notion of spiritual perception 'ways of seeing,' which is intrinsically connected to spiritual exegesis of *the site of image* (visual content) then we arrive at the *site of beholding, the beauty of the form through the graced eyes of faith*. This begs the question, what are the necessary theological principles that underpin a Catholic understanding of the visual arts? The trifold criteria, which this thesis proposes, as a framework for theologically interpreting Christian art, is as follows: -

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<sup>381</sup> Cf. Aristotle: Met. 980 a 21-27; cf. Avanesov. (2019) pp.385-386. In a very similar vein, in the ninth century, Patriarch Photius expressed his 17th Homily, delivered on Holy Saturday, 29 March 867, on the occasion of the consecration of the image of God. After denouncing iconoclasts and offering traditional arguments for their veneration of icons, Photius concluded his speech by making a non-trivial comparison between vision and hearing: "Vision has no less, if not more power, for it is this, through the effusion and outflow of optical rays [τῶν ὀπτικῶν ἀκτίνων] as if groping and embracing the visible object, that sends the image [εἶδος] of what is seen to the mind, enabling it to be transferred from there to memory for the steady accumulation of knowledge" [Vasilik 1995, 252]. Cited in Avanesov. (2019) p.20.

<sup>382</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.20.

1. **The *theological aesthetic thread*:** with its project of seeking the beauty of the incarnate God in all things, as the starting point of all theological aesthetic interpretation of Christian art. This will be approached with an exegetical hierarchical project of ‘ways of seeing,’ namely *blepó* (to see something *physically* - *literally* with spiritual results of perception); *theóreó* (to look at, gaze to contemplate, experience *intellectually*), and *horaó* (to perceive/discern metaphorically through the mind’s eye/eyes of the heart, so as to *spiritually transcend*), viz., visual/optical language that connects being and cognition through vision.

2. **The site of *image*:** visual content analysis, theologically interpreting the amount of theological capital found within the image, namely Scriptural, doctrinal, and devotional aspects (taking into account the practices of the faithful).

3. **The site of *its beholding*:** *the moment when the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith.* The act of beholding the beauty of the form perceived through the graced eyes of faith, which Balthasar argues leads to ‘rapture’ which transports the beholder beyond themselves to an ‘Eros-love’ of God. Alongside this I follow Reddaway’s lead and draw upon cultural history’s concept of ‘seeing things their way’ and its equivalent in art history, the ‘period eye.’

The ‘*theological aesthetic thread*’ with its project of ‘*seeking the beauty of God in all things*,’ ensures an overarching continuity and connectivity throughout the above-mentioned sites. *The site of its beholding* is of immense importance because rather than merely ‘viewing’ an image, it focuses on the significance of ‘beholding’ an image, that is, the act of holding dear the beauty of form through the graced eyes of faith. This thesis argues that this theological framework, *the site of its beholding; a Catholic approach to visual theology*, provides the necessary structure, which aides and reveals how sacred images express the theological capital within the image for the sanctification of the faithful and others open to a Catholic ethos. That is, how sacred images are seen, understood, and experienced by the believer today with particular

reference to the formation of students and staff within a Catholic educational setting (and possibly elsewhere).

#### 4.5. A Case Study on the Annunciation in Early Italian Renaissance Art

There are many kinds of symbolism in art, political, social, religious, allegorical, and mystical to name but a few. Down through the ages religious symbolism, gestures, and personifications of the saints with their identifying ‘attributes’ have played a major role in art as a means of giving expression to the divine and religious life of the faithful. Artists used (and still use today) religious symbolic imagery to depict various types of theological doctrines, devotions, parables and absolute truths to create a visual language to unravel the mysteries of the divine.

*Since the start of the Christian era, the calendar has been one of the most fertile of all sources of theological controversy. The calendar was never merely a system of calibrating the year, capable of being perfected, for there was no single agreed natural standard against which it could be measured out. Rather, there were several reference standards: solar (the year), lunar (the month), and terrestrial (the day). Onto the framework created from these incommensurable natural quantities was laid a cycle of feasts and festivals which were human in origin, part civil and part religious. In the end, the choice of a calendar-and even the question of who had the authority to alter it was a religious and cultural matter. In the Europe of the reformation and counter-reformation, calendar reform was bound to be controversial, and there was no purely scientific solution.<sup>383</sup>*

One of the feasts that was of profound importance in early and medieval Church was the solemnity of the Annunciation, which falls on the 25th of March. From 567AD until 1582AD it officially marked the beginning of the New Year<sup>384</sup> for the Catholic Church.<sup>385</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to recount the historical development of the global calendar, for our purposes it is of interest to note the significance of which the feast of

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<sup>383</sup> Poole, Robert. (1998) *Time's Alteration: Calendar Reform in Early Modern England*. London: Routledge. p.27.

<sup>384</sup> Cf. Stapleford, Richard. (2014) *Botticelli and the Golden Section in the Lehman Annunciation*. *Artibus et historiae* an art anthology. Issue 69. pp.35-52. p.37.

<sup>385</sup> In 567AD the Council of Tours abolished 1st January as the start of year as they considered it to be founded on pagan beliefs. They decreed that New Year's Day would officially fall on March 25th, the feast of the Annunciation. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII reformed the calendar, in doing so, he placed New Year's Day back to January 1st. However, in Florence (and elsewhere) despite the official adoption of the Gregorian calendar in public life the Florentine citizens continued to gather in the *piazza Santissima Annunziata* to celebrate the New Year on the 25th of March until the Grand Duke Francesco I of Lorraine imposed the Gregorian standard on the 1st of January in 1749. In the year 2000 the city of Florence re-commenced its official observance of the New Year on 25th March.

Annunciation held for both the Church and the Florentine artists of the Renaissance period.<sup>386</sup> The theme Annunciation was chosen as the case study of this thesis because Mary's response to the Angelic colloquy is believed to be a model of faith that all Christians are called to emanate. Thus, it is an ideal case study topic for pedagogical faith-based formation.

In the case study that follows this thesis explores some of the most famous Florentine artists from the quattrocento and quincinetto period to depict the Annunciation in pictorial form. Namely, Fra Angelico OP (1395-1455), Fra Carnevale OP (1420-1425–1484), Filippo Lippi (1406-1469), and Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510). The purpose of which is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the theological aesthetic framework, *the site of its beholding: a Catholic approach to visual theology*, which provides the necessary structure to aide and reveal how historical sacred images express the theological capital within the image.

Depicts of the Annunciation stemming from the Early Italian Renaissance period were chosen for this study, in particular, for a number of reasons. Firstly, much of the art found in National museums today, tend hold large of collections of Christian art emanating from this epoch. Therefore it is much more likely that the reader will be familiar with them and have ready access to them. Alongside that, as Lucy Chiswell, a curatorial assistant in the Royal Academy Exhibitions department, points out.

*They may seem like random objects, but symbols and icons play an important role in telling the story. Saints are most commonly identified by their attributes in Renaissance painting. Often these are symbols of their martyrdom, ... in Giovanni Cariani's St. Agatha, who holds her severed breasts on a platter. Saint Peter, however, is commonly shown in his role as custodian of the gates of Heaven, represented by the keys given to him by Christ...The study of classical prototypes was central to artistic training during the Renaissance, and ancient Greek and Roman motifs were often quoted in paintings.*<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> For a detailed account of changes to the global calendar see Poole, Robert (1998) *Time's Alteration: Calendar Reform in Early Modern England*. London: Routledge.

<sup>387</sup> Chiswell, L. (1 April 2016) *How to read a Renaissance painting*. Available at: RA <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/how-to-read-a-renaissance-painting>. (Accessed: 7 December 2022).

This common understanding of signs and symbols enabled the artist and the viewer to express and interpret the image on the denotive, the connotative, and spiritual levels.<sup>388</sup>

#### 4.5.1. The Five Laudable Conditions of the Virgin Mary

At first glance, representations of the Annunciation in Early Italian Renaissance art seem to be almost identical in nature.<sup>389</sup> But take a closer look and you will discover that they were not just variations on a theme, but rather they depict the five successive spiritual and mental conditions attributed to the Virgin Mary as described at the start of St Luke's gospel (Luke 1:26-38).

According to Michael Baxandall in *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (1972), artists and preachers in the 1500s worked hand-in-hand, a kind of duet of word and image to explain the great mysteries of the faith to the largely illiterate faithful. The written word, the spoken word and the painted word were intrinsically interwoven.

One of the most famous preachers during the Renaissance era was Fra Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce. Fra Roberto's preaching on the Annunciation in *Sermones de Laudibus Santorum* (Naples: 1489) distinguishes three principle mysteries: firstly, the Angelic Mission; secondly, the Angelic Salutation; and thirdly, the Angelic Colloquy.<sup>390</sup> The third mystery, the Angelic Colloquy, he further subdivided into five laudable conditions of the Blessed Virgin, namely:

1. Disquiet (*Conturbatio*)
2. Reflection (*Cogitatio*)
3. Inquiry (*Interrogatio*)
4. Submission (*Humiliatio*)
5. Merit (*Meritatio*)

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<sup>388</sup> That said, the framework could equally be applied to contemporary art, which the newer art institutions tend to foster. Henry Dreyfuss's 1984 book *Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols* may be familiar to some artists. Thus, giving a sense of uniformity to analysing signs as symbols. Notwithstanding that, contemporary representations of the Annunciation tend to lack uniformity in relation to the meaning of signs and symbols common to the Renaissance period. Consequently, to make a comprehensive standard by which meaning could be gained could be somewhat constrained.

<sup>389</sup> Sections 4.4.1. to 4.4.6. are a developed version of Morrison, C. R.A. (25 March 2021) *Painting the Soul*. Published by Adamah Media. Available at: <https://adamah.media/painting-the-soul/>. (Accessed: 5 March 2021).

<sup>390</sup> The Angelic Colloquy is a term, which refers to the dialogue/conversation that took place between God and Mary through the Archangel Gabriel.

Whereas Fra Roberto distinguishes five laudable states occurring during the Angelic Colloquy the art historian Sarah Drummond in her book *Divine Conception: The Art of the Annunciation* (2018) attributes just three inner states to the Virgin Mary, namely her perturbation, her questioning, and her submission.<sup>391</sup> That is, Drummond omits the stages of reflection and merit referred to by Fra Roberto. From a Christian perspective, theological reflection is vital to understanding and discerning a religious experience. That is, reflection is vital in the process of theology inquiry. As Avanesov states,

*In religious tradition, this content of faith is characterised as knowledge that has a transcendent source and thus an extreme existential value, which does not, however, cancel out the ability to reflect on this knowledge. Because this reflexivity is done from the position of the same faith and in the horizon of the tradition that is grounded in this faith, theology itself (i.e., theological reflexivity) is also a subject of theology; in other words, theology is a reflexivity that is also addressed to itself - insofar as theology is part of the content of religious experience.*<sup>392</sup>

What this means is that theology cannot be done without due recourse to rational reflection on a religious experience, namely faith seeking understanding. In relation to the arts as Dr Rebekah Lamb astutely states in *Michael O'Brien's Theological Aesthetics* (2021) that,

*...paintings and novels are imbued with the sense that art is meant to express, and mysteriously participate in, the divine plan of salvation as revealed in scripture.*<sup>393</sup>

What this seems to imply is that a certain amount of theological reflection is required in order to unravel and participate in the sacred mysteries imbued within the painting.

Notwithstanding that, seven centuries on Fra Roberto's precise fivefold psychological dissection of the Annunciation still makes sense today. That is, the Virgin Mary's response to God's proposal acts as a model of faith for both historical and contemporary believers alike. As Mariologist Ronald Novotny in

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<sup>391</sup> Cf. Drummond, (2018) p.143. Drummond mentions Fra Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce preaching on the Annunciation, yet she attributes just three inner states rather than the five alluded to by Fra Roberto. Hence, Drummond focuses on three rather than five laudation states in *The Virgin's Response*. Chapter twelve. pp.143-158.

<sup>392</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.14.

<sup>393</sup> Lamb, Rebekah. (2021) *Michael O'Brien's Theological Aesthetics*. Religions 12: 451. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060451>. (Accessed: 21 April 2022).

*Mary, Fulfilment of Person in the Annunciation--A Study of the Dialogic Principle of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Proposed Re-Reading of the Annunciation (as a Dialogic Event)* (1999) states,

*1) the human being is understood only through the dialogic event, since dialogue furnishes the necessary elements for attaining theological personhood; 2) since a person achieves its fulfilment through the dialogic principle, Mary should be a model for all, 3) the dialogue between Mary and God is the exemplary human relation.*<sup>394</sup>

Novotny states that, ordinarily the Annunciation is understood in terms of a birth announcement or a call narrative. By arguing that the narrative of the Annunciation ought to be reread through the ‘dialogical principle’ as a dialogical event, through which the believer achieves theological personhood, Mary acts as a figure and model of faith.<sup>395</sup> Predating the concept of the dialogical principle by some five hundred years, Fra Roberto’s focus on mystery of the Angelic Colloquy could be considered as a prototype of the dialogical principle. That is to say, the mystery of the Angelic Colloquy and the dialogical principle are interchangeable inasmuch as it is through a conversation with God that Mary gains theological personhood and becomes a model of faith for all.

Fra Roberto’s detailed fivefold dissection of the Angelic Colloquy influenced and inspired artists in the early Renaissance period to depict the five successive laudable states of the Virgin Mary.<sup>396</sup> That is, Fra Roberto’s intense focus on the five precise successive moments of the Annunciation provided the material that artists needed to create their works of art. Wordless representations of the Annunciation enabled the beholder to visualise the scene and gave the viewer a glimpse of divine, upon which they could contemplate and ultimately imitate. As Drummond states,

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<sup>394</sup> Novotny, Ronald. (1999) *Mary, Fulfilment of Person in the Annunciation--A Study of the Dialogic Principle of Martin Buber and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Proposed Re-Reading of the Annunciation (as a Dialogic Event)*. p188.

<sup>395</sup> *Lumen Gentium*. (1964) para.63.

<sup>396</sup> Sarah Drummond in *Divine Conception: The Art of the Annunciation* (2018) argues that it was not the homilies and writings of the Early Church Fathers and preachers, which provided rich sources of inspiration to artists but rather vice versa. However, the general consensus is that it was the Scriptures, the writings of the Saints, the Early Church Fathers, and preachers that gave inspiration to the artist. The Golden Legend and the writings of St Bridget, alongside Holy Scripture, were among the most commonly used sources of inspiration. Notwithstanding that, as mentioned earlier Baxandall states, the preacher and the artist worked hand-in-hand to explain the hidden mysteries of the Divine Word.

*We cannot always be absolutely certain whether our own interpretation of a work of art is what the artist intended, but sometimes a very precise moment of the Virgin's response is unambiguously evoked: her feelings and words are translated - transformed - into an image which allows the viewer to dwell on one aspect of the drama and on Mary's role in the Incarnation.*<sup>397</sup>

From a theological point of view, focusing on one moment within the Angelic Colloquy through *the site of its beholding: the moment when the viewer aesthetically encounters the image in the light of faith*, the viewer is open to a state of transcendence, which is ultimately transformative. This holds as true today as it did then.

#### 4.5.2. Disquiet

According to Baxandall, Sandro Botticelli's representation of the *Annunciazione di Cestello*, c.1489-90<sup>398</sup> [FIG. 9] captures the first of the five laudable conditions of the Virgin Mary, namely the moment of disquiet. In Botticelli's depiction of the Annunciation, we see the exact moment of the Gabriel's opening words to Mary, which is signified in the painting by the slightly parted lips of the archangel, he says,

*Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.  
Mary was greatly troubled at his words ...” (Luke 1:28-29).*

The Virgin's response to the angel's salutation is portrayed in the painting by her posture and hand gestures, which seem to suggest that she is holding the angel Gabriel at bay. She appears somewhat aghast. Despite the angel's greeting of peace, despite his assurance that the Lord is with her, and despite his message that she is greatly blessed by the Lord, Mary is '*greatly troubled at his words.*' Could it be that she is not quite convinced by the Angelic Salutation? However, according to Fra Roberto,

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<sup>397</sup> Drummond, S. (2018) *Divine Conception: The Art of the Annunciation*. p.143.

<sup>398</sup> Description: Title: *The Annunciazione di Cestello* (The Cestello Annunciation) c.1489-90

Artist: Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) commissioned by the Florentine moneychanger Benedetto di ser Francesco Guardi for the family chapel in the Church of *Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi* in the Monastery of Cestello, in borgo Pinti, Florence.

Medium: Egg tempera on a wooden panel

Genre: Religious art

Movement: Italian Renaissance

Located: The *Uffizi* Museum, Florence (since 1872). It was fully restored in 1986.



*This disquiet, as Nicholas of Lyra writes, came not from incredulity but from wonder ... She in her humility was astonished and amazed.*<sup>399</sup>

Fra Roberto's account may have been written as a corrective to a famous manuscript, *Meditationes vitae Christi* (MVC), which was written in or around the 1300 century by a (unknown)<sup>400</sup> Franciscan Monk for the Poor Clare nuns as a means meditation. According to the MVC's descriptive account of the Annunciation, the Virgin's response at this precise moment was one of honest and virtuous shame.

*Since humble persons are unable to hear praise of themselves without shame and agitation, she was perturbed with an honest and virtuous shame. She began to fear that it was not true, not that she did not believe the angel spoke truthfully, but that like all humble people she did not consider her own virtues but memorise her defects.*<sup>401</sup>

However, on the level of spiritual emotion rather than stressing a state of 'virtuous shame' and referring to 'her defects',<sup>402</sup> Fra Roberto argued that at this moment within the Angelic colloquy the Virgin is experiencing the emotion of awe and reverence - fear of the Lord, which Christians believe to be the foundation of all wisdom. It is this state of being that Fra Roberto says is laudable and praiseworthy. Here, Botticelli is inviting the viewer to emulate and mirror Mary's response of disquiet, her piety, her wonder, her reverence, her fear of the Lord. For Christians, by modelling their responses on that of the Blessed Virgin they too will grow in holiness.

Looking more closely at Botticelli's depiction of the Annunciation we see a large backdrop floor-to-ceiling window, through which we see a beautiful allegorical cityscape. The orthogonal lines of the tiles draw the eyes of the viewer into the alluring scene in the far distance, a technique known as

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<sup>399</sup> Fra Roberto (1489) *Sermones de Laudibus Santorum*. Cited in Baxandall. (1972) Appendix.

<sup>400</sup> There has been a long debate in relation to both author and date of this pseudo-Bonaventuran text. However, what can be known is that it was written by a Franciscan Monk for the Poor Clare nuns. See *The Italian Manuscripts of the Meditationes Vitae Christi* by David Falvey for a full and detailed account in relation to both author and date of the MVC manuscript.

<sup>401</sup> Cited in Drummond. (2018) p.153.

<sup>402</sup> The phrase uttered by the angel 'Hail, Mary full of grace,' expresses a characteristic quality of Mary. This implies Mary's purity and thus exemption from any defects. That is, the Virgin did not have any defects on which to dwell. There are countless references to Mary's purity throughout the ages. However, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was not made official by the Catholic Church until December 1854 by Pope Pius IX. *Ineffabilis Deus*.

Brunelleschi's perspective.<sup>403</sup> Following the river we see a beautiful walled city on top of a mountain, which symbolises the place where the heavenly and the earthly realms of the cosmos meet. The mystical landscape is possibly an imaginative metaphorical reference to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8), which according to Dante was situated on earth at the top of Mt. Purgatory. Here Botticelli seems to portray the classic concept of the Catholic imagination,<sup>404</sup> which has the ability to hold opposites in conjunction, both/and the double Yes of Balthasar.<sup>405</sup> As Greeley stated,

*Metaphors – statements that one reality is like another reality – are the fundamental tools of human knowledge. We understand better and explain more adequately one reality to ourselves by comparing it to another reality which we already know.*<sup>406</sup>

Botticelli depicts Mary as the new Eve,<sup>407</sup> with the gateway to the heavenly Kingdom openly in sight. The tall, elegant tree dominating the background is representative of the tree of life, which epitomises immortality and fertility that connects all forms of creation. In this depiction of the Annunciation the immanence of God presence is all too apparent. This leaves the viewer in no doubt that Mary's response is life-giving and will affect the entire history of creation. As Thomas Aquinas states,

*In order to show that there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature. Wherefore in the Annunciation the Virgin's consent was besought in lieu of that of the entire human nature.*<sup>408</sup>

Similarly, von Balthasar wrote,

*Mary's personal-physical experience of the Child who is her God and Redeemer is wholly open to Christianity; from the beginning*

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<sup>403</sup> 'Linear perspective, a system of creating an illusion of depth on a flat surface. All parallel lines (orthogonal) in a painting or drawing using this system converge in a single vanishing point on the composition's horizon line.' Zt Tosha (2022) Available at: <https://zttosha.com/perspective-theory-filippo-brunelleschi/>. (Accessed: 6 February 2022).

<sup>404</sup> See Tracy, David. (1981) *The Analogical Imagination and Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York: Crossroads., and Greeley, A. M. (2000) *The Catholic Imagination*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

<sup>405</sup> See Balthasar, Hans Urs von. (2004) *Epilogue*. Translated by Oaks, E.T. SJ. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

<sup>406</sup> Greeley, Andrew M. (2000). *The Catholic Imagination*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press. p.6.

<sup>407</sup> CCC. (2003) para.494. The concepts of Mariology, Christology, and Ecclesiology are all closely interlocked. 'As the new Eve she brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father, showing an undefiled faith, not in the word of the serpent, but in that of God's messenger. The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren, namely the faithful, in whose birth and education she cooperates with maternal love...' *Lumen Gentium* (1964) Chapter 8. para.63.

<sup>408</sup> Question 30. *The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin*. Aquinas, T. (1947) *Summa Theologica*. Translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm>. (Accessed: 20 January 2020).

*and ever more so, she [is] a growing experience for the other, for everyone...*<sup>409</sup>

However, such depictions of the moment of disquiet were not popular amongst the vast majority of Renaissance artists. The most popular depictions of the Annunciation in early Renaissance art were the moment of submission, which was closely followed by the moments of inquiry and reflection. Fewer paintings remain, or ever existed, of the moments of disquiet and merit. The musings of Leonardo da Vinci in *Treatise on Painting* may have strongly contributed to this,

*...Some days ago, I saw the picture of an angel who, in making the Annunciation, seemed to be trying to chase Mary out of her room, with movements showing the sort of attack one might make on some hated enemy; Mary, as if desperate, seemed to be trying to throw herself out of the window. Do not fall into errors like these.*<sup>410</sup>

#### 4.5.3. Reflection

Fra Roberto informs us that the second laudable condition of the Virgin is one of reflection. Returning to the Gospel narrative, we see the exact moment that the artist Fra Carnevale is attempting to capture in his depiction of *The Annunciation*, c. 1445-50<sup>411</sup> [FIG. 10].

*She wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God.*<sup>412</sup>  
*Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus... (Luke 1:30-32).*

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<sup>409</sup> Balthasar. (1982) GL1. p. 328.

<sup>410</sup> Leonardo da Vinci. (1956) ed. McMahon, A.P. *Treatise on Painting*. Princeton. NJ: Princeton University Press. Cited in Baxandall. (1988) p.49.

<sup>411</sup> Description:

Title: *The Annunciation* c. 1445-50

Artist: Fra Carnevale (1420-1425–1484) who has since been identified as Bartolomeo di Giovanni Corradini. Fra Carnevale's identity as Corradini was first proposed by Adolfo Venturi ("Nelle Pinacoteche minori d'Italia," *Archivio Storico dell'Arte* 6 [1893]: 416-418). He is also known as the Master of the Barberini Panels. See also: Alessandro Conti, "Un libro antico della sagrestia di Sant'Ambrogio," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 3d ser., 6, part 1 (1976): 105-109; Christiansen 1979, 198-201; Fert Sangiorgi, "Fra Carnevale e le tavole di Santa Maria della Bella di Urbino," *Notizie di Palazzo Albani* 18, no. 2 (1989): pp.15-21.

Medium: *The Annunciation* is painted in Egg tempera on a wooden panel.

Genre: Religious art

Movement: Italian Renaissance

Location: The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

<sup>412</sup> Interestingly Fra Roberto in his account of the Annunciation adds at this point of the text, 'not only for yourself but for the whole human race,' which indicates the magnitude of the proposal.

In Fra Carnevale's representation of the Annunciation we see that the Virgin has moved from a state of disquiet to one of reflection. She has been calmed and reassured by the Angelic Colloquy, '*Do not be afraid, Mary.*' This is reflected in Virgin's posture and hand gestures, her left is placed upon her womb, while her right hand now rests upon her heart, signifying a state of reflection.

The vase of flowers, which is placed in between Mary and the archangel, symbolises purity and signifies to the viewer that she is a virgin. Gabriel is on one knee, holding a stem of lilies in his hands, which signifies to the viewer that Mary's virginity will remain intact. The Holy Spirit, represented in the form of dove, is seen in the distance descending from on high. It is issuing golden rays of light in her direction in anticipation of her *fiat*, her yes to God. Yet for now, at this precise moment, the artist captures Mary in a state of reflection as she ponders the proposal to 'behold' and thus conceive the Word of God. As St Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, 'the whole world awaits Mary's reply.'<sup>413</sup>

#### 4.5.4. Inquiry

In a painting of *The Annunciation* by Filippo Lippi c.1437-39 <sup>414</sup> [FIG. 11], the Angel Gabriel is now in an upright stance, gathering up his cloak as if he has just risen from kneeling. If we look closely, we see that the Virgin's mood has moved from one of reflection to one of inquiry. This is reflected in the position of her left hand. It is held aloft, which signifies inquiry, almost the posture of a student asking a question in a lecture! For Christians, Mary is seen as the ideal model of a person of good faith because she is not afraid to ask questions. As the sacred text tells us,

*Mary inquired of the angel, 'I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?' The angel replies 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and*

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<sup>413</sup> St. Bernard Homily. (1966) *Office of Readings 20th December, fourth week of Advent. Homily. 4, 8-9: Opera omnia, Edit. Cisterc.* 4. pp.53-54.

<sup>414</sup> Description:

Title: *The Annunciation* c.1437-39

Artist: Filippo Lippi (1406 -1469)

Medium: Egg tempera on a wooden panel

Genre: Religious art

Movement: Italian Renaissance

Location: Frick Madison, the temporary new home of The Frick Collection at 945 Madison Avenue, New York.

*God's power will rest upon you. For this reason, the holy child will be called the Son of God' (Luke 1:34-35).*

It is this exact moment within the Angelic Colloquy that the artist, Filippo Lippi, has captured. Mary's condition is laudable, that is praiseworthy, because it is good to have a faith that inquires. The motto 'faith seeking understanding'<sup>415</sup> is considered as one of the classical definitions of theology. This is based upon the Christian belief that the God revealed in Jesus Christ prompts a questioning search for deeper understanding on the part of the believer. As St. Augustine, who saw faith as an incentive to inquiry, famously wrote:

*For understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore, do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe so that you may understand.*<sup>416</sup>

The fruits of an inquiring contemplative reflection on visual representations of Scripture leads the beholder into an ever deeper relational understanding in faith. Here the artist is inviting the viewer to engage in a dialogue/prayer with the divine, through the graced eyes of faith. In doing so, 'the Holy Spirit will come on you.'

One cannot fail to notice the imposing central column, which seems to divide the painting into two separate spaces. Lasse Hodne in *On You He Will Spread His Shadow. Iconography and biblical typology in two Annunciations by Filippo Lippi* (March: 2018) argues that the pillar is so dominant within the painting that it is surely symbolically significant in meaning. She states that the pillar both symbolises Mary as the pillar of virginity<sup>417</sup> and at the same time represents the divine presence of God, who in Exodus 13: 21 appears as pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to give them light. As Hodne writes,

*Our Lady is a pillar because it is in her that the divine work is revealed, and it is precisely in the moment of her virginity that the divine work is revealed. At the Annunciation that God reveals Himself as God incarnate...the pillar of cloud was God's chosen*

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<sup>415</sup> St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) coined the phrase 'faith seeking understanding' in his book *Proslogium*.

<sup>416</sup> St Augustine of Hippo. *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (XXIX, 6). Available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701029.htm>. (Accessed: 21 April 2022).

<sup>417</sup> The honorific title Mary as the perpetual 'pillar of virginity' can be found in early Byzantine liturgical hymns, and also in the homilies of St John Chrysostom.

*form when He, in the Old Testament, revealed Himself to the people of Israel to lead them out of Egypt...The pillar, therefore, is the manifestation of the invisible God...*<sup>418</sup>

Denis McNamara in *Built Form of Theology: The Natural Sympathies of Catholicism and Classicism* (Fall/Winter:2006) states that in church architecture columns are representative of the human form. He explains that,

*A classical column has a capital, from the Latin word capita, meaning head. Many also have pedestals, from the Latin pede, or foot, which also gives us the words pedestrian and pedal. Classical columns are conventionalised forms directly modelled on the human body. A very old convention places twelve columns on church interiors. Since the column is an icon of the human form, a “pillar” of the Church, twelve columns form a visible sign of the Twelve Apostles, the primary pillars upon which the Church was founded.*<sup>419</sup>

Allegorically the column, in this depiction of the Annunciation, represents Mary as the pillar of virginity, theologically it is a sign of perpetual purity which upholds the Church, and symbolises the presence of God.

#### 4.5.5. Submission

In Fra Angelico's depiction of *The Annunciation* c. 1440-41<sup>420</sup> [FIG. 12] we see that Mary's posture has moved from the state of inquiry to one of submission. Mary is seen in a kneeling position (sometimes sitting), her arms crossed,<sup>421</sup> her head slightly bowed, which signifies humble acceptance of God's proposal to behold and conceive. She holds her prayer book close to her heart. Gabriel's folded arms mirrors the Virgin's to illustrate that he too is a

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<sup>418</sup> Hodne, L. (2018) “*Su te stenderà la sua ombra. Iconografia e tipologia biblica in due Annunciazioni di Filippo Lippi*,” *On you he will spread his shadow. Iconography and biblical typology in two Annunciations by Filippo Lippi*. *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia*. 28 (14 N.S.). Doi: 10.5617/acta.5835. pp.111–124.

<sup>419</sup> McNamara, Denis. (Fall/Winter: 2006) *Built Form of Theology: The Natural Sympathies of Catholicism and Classicism*. *Sacred Architecture Journal*. Volume 12. p.23.

<sup>420</sup> Description:

Title: *The Annunciation with St Peter Martyr* c.1440-1  
Artist: Fra Angelico (1395 - 1455) named Guido di Pietro at birth  
Medium: fresco painted in water colour on plaster  
Genre: Religious art  
Movement: Italian Renaissance  
Location: Cell 3 in the Museum of San Marco, Florence

<sup>421</sup> Up until the twelfth century Mary was depicted with a palms-out gesture to signify her acceptance of the Lord's proposal [FIG. 13]. However, this gesture started to be used to expressed refusal (as it does today), as seen in *The Sarcophagus of Saints Sergius and Bacchusas, a relief dated c.1179*. In the early Renaissance period, in order to make clear that Mary accented to God's proposal this gesture was replaced by folded or crossed arms, as when receiving a blessing at Mass. For more details on the significance of gestures in images of the Annunciation. See *The Iconography of the Virgin Mary*. Available at: <https://www.christianiconography.info/annunciation.html>

humble servant of God. However, he remains standing to signify that he one who stands in the presence of God (Luke 1:19).

Fra Angelico's representation of the Annunciation has captured the exact moment of Mary's response,

*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word (Luke 1:38).*

This is truly the pivotal moment in the history of salvation and for the Church. For Balthasar, Mary's *Fiat* is of profound importance.

*It is the infinite disponibility of her attitude of faith ("Be it done unto me according to thy word") that makes her the ideal (moral) and real (physical) womb of the Church. Her own person, in its faith, love, and hope, has become so supple in the hand of the Creator that he can extend her beyond the limits of a private consciousness to a Church consciousness, to what the older theology since Origen and Ambrose is accustomed to call anima ecclesiastica.<sup>422</sup>*

Nichols argues that,

*It can hardly be coincidence that, in Balthasar's presentation of the story of the Theotokos, what is emphasised is Mary's undivided - single-minded and single-hearted - assent to the unique mission of her Son. At the Annunciation she gave her consent to the Incarnation of the Logos in her womb; on Calvary she assented to the Sacrifice her Son offered for the sins of the world; and with Christ's rising in glory this fiat or act of saying Yes is transformed into unending jubilation. In Balthasarian Mariology, the theme of consent is like the thread of Ariadne which enabled the Attic hero Theseus to find his way out of the Labyrinth - in our case out of the tortuous ways of speculation onto the broad sunlit uplands not of Crete, as in the Greek legend, but of divine truth.<sup>423</sup>*

Mary's humble faith has enabled her to submit herself completely to the will of God and His plan of Divine Redemption. That is, to be the bearer of and the mother of the Incarnate God, the Word made flesh. Mary's consent, *her Fiat*, to God's proposal to behold and thus conceive the Word of God will have profound transformative consequences for all believers.<sup>424</sup> Moreover, Balthasar argues that,

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<sup>422</sup> Balthasar. (1991) *Explorations in Theology: II: Spouse of the Word*. San Francisco: St Ignatius Press. p.166.

<sup>423</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (May 2014) *Marian Co-redemption: A Balthasarian Perspective*. New Blackfriars. Vol. 95, No. 1057, pp. 249-262. pp.252-253.

<sup>424</sup> 'For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.' CCC. (2003) para.456.

*It could equally be said that, in her, the Church speaks her Fiat to God for the whole human race.*<sup>425</sup>

Mary's *Fiat* is made in complete freedom. As Balthasar explains that,

*In comparison with all other human beings (even within the Church), Mary's freedom is unique...The figure of Mary exhibits an utterly exuberant form of creaturely freedom (and for this reason, it is utterly simple); as such she is the prototype who fulfills everything said in... the relationship between finite and infinite freedom.*<sup>426</sup>

Mary in her humility is able to respond without restraint because she understands the magnitude between absolute infinite freedom and creaturely freedom. It is Mary's 'Yes' that enables the whole of humankind to say 'Yes.'

*Prior to an individual's encounter with the love of God at a particular time in history...there has to be another, more fundamental and archetypal encounter which belongs to the conditions of possibility of the appearance of divine love to man. There has to be an encounter, in which the unilateral movement of God's love toward man is understood as such and that means also appropriately received and answered...it can be only the living response of love from a human spirit, as it is accomplished in man through God's loving grace: the response of the "Bride," who in grace calls out, "Come!" (Rev 22:17) and "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), who "carries within the seed of God" and therefore "does not sin" (I Jn 3:9), but "kept all of these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19, 51).*<sup>427</sup>

Mary introduces her *Fiat*, which quite simply means yes, or more literally, 'be it done,' with the word 'behold.' Mary's mirrored usage of the word 'behold,' signifies that she has appropriated the message and reciprocates it. This suggests a hierarchy of beholding, namely the beholding of God and the beholding of humankind. What Julian of Norwich describes in *Revelations of Divine Love* as the 'two deeming's.'

*For in the Beholding of God we fall not, and in the beholding of self we stand not; and both these be sooth as to my sight. But the Beholding of our Lord God is the highest soothness.*<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Balthasar. (1991) p.173.

<sup>426</sup> Balthasar. TD III. p.299.

<sup>427</sup> Balthasar. () *Love Alone*. p.77.

<sup>428</sup> Norwich, Julian. (2015) Chapter 72. p.131.



Julian's 'two deeming's,' which allude to a hierarchy of beholding, in a sense, reflect Mary's humility and also acknowledges her blessed state, '*for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed*' (Luke 1:48). Beholding the self, in the light of faith, is a moment of humility and obedience that leads to transcendence, which enables the beholder to be en-Christened. The significance of Mary's submission, her humble obedience, is that it inaugurates,

*The fullness of time' the time of the fulfilment of God's promises and preparations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the 'whole fullness of deity' would dwell 'bodily'...and the new plan of salvation is established.*<sup>429</sup>

As St. Irenaeus wrote,

*Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.*<sup>430</sup>

Thus, the Virgin Mary plays a significant role in the salvation of humankind.

That is, for Balthasar, Mary's consent leads not only to the birth of the Saviour but also to her taking a part in his active ministry as co-redemptorist. As Nichols states,

*For Balthasar, our Lady's pre-redemptive role should be sought not only in her contribution to the Lord's infancy (though pre-eminently there) but also, and in continuity with this, via her place in the public ministry of Jesus.*<sup>431</sup>

For Balthasar, Mary's role in the salvation of humankind is dependent on her *Fiat*, her free consent to God's will.

*There are, to his mind, three considerations which point up the importance of Mary's free consent to the Incarnation. First, in taking flesh in a human mother's womb God must not violate his creature, for this would transgress the most basic Creator-creature relationship. So in the Annunciation he turns to Mary, appealing to her will, waiting (though not for long!) for her reply. Secondly, this particular Mother had to be capable of introducing her Child as man into the fullness of Israel's religion, which was the already existing divine revelation to mankind and so would form the indispensable presupposition and background for Jesus's mission. Thirdly, the Incarnation of the Word requires what Balthasar calls 'a flesh that welcomes him perfectly.'*<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> CCC. (2003) para. 484-489.

<sup>430</sup> St. Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. Book III, Chapter 3. Available at: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103303.htm>. (Accessed: 17 April 2020).

<sup>431</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (2014) p. 254.

<sup>432</sup> Nichols, A. OP. (2014) p. 254.

For Balthasar, Mary's perfect consent is threefold, it is virginal, maternal and nuptial. Virginal in the sense that she represents the virginal daughter of Zion. Maternal in the sense that she is the Mother of God. Nuptial in the sense of her relation to the whole of humanity, and indeed the entire cosmos.<sup>433</sup>

#### 4.5.6. Merit

Fra Roberto tells us that the last of the five laudable conditions of the Blessed Virgin is Merit. Returning to the Angelic Colloquy we see the exact moment that Fra Angelico is attempting to capture in his version of the *Virgin Annunciate* c. 1450-55<sup>434</sup> [FIG. 14]. It is contained in the very last sentence of the Gospel narrative, which reads,

*And the angel left her (Luke 1: 39).*

Depictions in art of the Virgin on her own belong to the type called Annunciate rather than Annunciation. Like the Annunciation Fra Angelico's Annunciate portrays Mary with her head bowed in submission, her arms remain crossed, but now she is alone. She clasps a book of prayer in her left hand, her index finger holds the pages of the book ajar, pointing to the word of God, most probably the oracle of Isaiah from the Old Testament.

*Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).*

In the painting we see that the Virgin's stomach is slightly swollen, she is with child. Mary believed the message of the angel. In doing so, Mary is fulfilling the prophecy and living according to God's will. Thus, her state is praiseworthy, laudable, meritorious and life giving.

However, the full magnitude of what Mary's consent would entail for her but for all humankind was not, as Balthasar states, fully anticipated by Mary.

*Just as Jesus little anticipated the fate that lay in store for him but let it be revealed to him from day to day by his Father, so too would his mother have anticipated little of what was to come: part of her*

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<sup>433</sup> Cf. Nichols, A. OP. (2014) p. 255.

<sup>434</sup> Description:

Title: The Annunciation c. 1450-55

Artist: Fra Angelico (1395-1455)

Medium: painted in Egg tempera and gold leaf on a wood panel.

Genre: Religious art

Movement: Italian Renaissance

Location: It is situated in Institute of Arts, Detroit.

*faith (the fulfilment of the faith of Abraham) was always to accept God's dispositions.*<sup>435</sup>

It is Mary's humble trust in God that allows her to freely consent to his will.

#### **4.6. Mary as a Model of Faith**

Mary as exemplar<sup>436</sup> of the faith, which is known as one of the Mario-ecclesial relationship models, is of fundamental importance. The question of Mary's role and status within the Catholic Church and in the modern era has been both a source of instruction and of tension.<sup>437</sup> The II Vatican Council sort to clarify its teachings on Mary's position within the Church as the archetype model of the Christian faith. Pope Paul VI stated that,

*Following Mary's example, the faithful will also be able to fulfil their God-given role in this life.*<sup>438</sup>

According to Lucy Gardner in (2004) *Balthasar and the Figure of Mary*, in Oakes, Edward T and Moss, David, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*. Cambridge, University Press,

*Despite its centrality to his work... the Marian theme of Balthasar's theology can be difficult to follow.*<sup>439</sup>

Notwithstanding that, Balthasar's Marian theology has much to offer. According to Balthasar, it is Mary's humble response, her behavioural example, to God's proposal that provides the instruction and structure for the individual beholder to follow. As Balthasar states,

*Mary is able, precisely in a spirit of complete humility, to point to herself because she is thereby pointing to nothing other than what*

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<sup>435</sup> Cited in Nichols, A. OP. (2014) p. 256.

<sup>436</sup> With regard to the schematic position of Mary in relation to the Church, there are two contentious titles, namely Mary as *Mediatrice* and Mary as *Mater Ecclesiae* that some argue may lead to an excessive veneration of Mary. This debate is largely seen as either maximising or minimising of Mary's role in relation to the Church. Traditionally there have been two movements within the Church with regard to Mary as a type of the Church, namely Ecumenists and Mariologists. The latter movement see the pre-eminence of Mary, that is, she prefigures the Church – and use the *genetrix model* - Mariologists. While those who see Mary as part of the Church – tend to use the *exemplar model* – Ecumenists.

<sup>437</sup> 'The question of whether Mary is a part of the Church, or above and apart from it,' (Willis, S. 2013, p.176), is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a detailed historical account of Catholic Mario-ecclesiology see Sean Willis (2013) *In what sense is Mary a type of the Church? Using two models to illuminate some developments in twentieth century Roman Catholic Mario-ecclesiology*.

<sup>438</sup> Paul VI. (13 May:1967) *Signum Magnum. Apostolic Exhortation of his Holiness Pope Paul VI.* para.27. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19670513\\_signum-magnum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19670513_signum-magnum.html). (Accessed: 21 April 2022).

<sup>439</sup> Gardner, Lucy. (2004) *Balthasar and the Figure of Mary*, in Oakes, Edward T and Moss, David, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs Von Balthasar*. Cambridge, University Press. pp.64- 78: 65.

*God's almighty grace is capable of and at the same time what we should strive after in order to become proper vessels for this grace, in order to play the real role of the Church correctly in its mission of salvation for the world.*<sup>440</sup>

Mary's response can be clearly seen in five successive stages:

Disquiet - fear of the Lord, seen as wonder and awe

Reflection – on what God is asking the believer to be/do - discernment

Inquiry – how can this be? Since such and such ...

Submission – humble consent to God's instruction

Merit – doing God's will is laudable, praiseworthy, and meritorious

For example, the first stage in the journey of faith is depicted by Mary's initial reaction to the angel's message, which is one of disquiet. This is the moment when the believer/beholder first perceives the call to follow the Christ. That is, there is an awareness of the presence of God and a certain feeling of disquietness about being chosen, which generates a spiritual response of the fear of the Lord, seen as wonder and awe. The second stage in the journey of faith is one of reflection on what God is asking the believer to be/do. The believer contemplates God's request, their calling, in the light of faith. This is a process of discernment, of listening to God's voice and following his guidance in relation to the spiritual direction of our lives. This is done through prayer, meditating on the Scriptures, and partaking of the sacraments. The third stage is one of inquiry on the part of the believer. The beholder ponders how this can be? Since and such... For example, I feel that I have been called to be/do..., yet certain obstacles are foreseen. The fourth stage is one of submission, after a time of reflection and inquiry, the believer trusts that the Lord will provide and humbly consents to God's instruction. The fifth and final stage of Mary's model of faith is marked by merit. Obedience to God's will is reflected in the subsequent thoughts and actions of the believer. Living according to God's will is not only laudable but fulfilling. This brings with it a deep-felt sense of peace. As St Augustine wrote,

*Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Balthasar. (1988) *Mary for Today*. p. 43.

<sup>441</sup> Augustine of Hippo. (2001) *The Confessions*, Translated by Philip Burton. Introduction by Robin Lane Fox. London: Everyman Publishers PLC. Lib 1,1-2,2,5,5: CSEL 33, pp.1-5.

The five successive laudable conditions of the Blessed Virgin are now complete. Mary's response to the Angelic Colloquy is considered to be 'a model of faith'<sup>442</sup> that all Christians are called to follow. As von Balthasar wrote in *Love Alone: the Way of Revelation* (1992),

*It is certainly true that God's revelation implants the answer of faith in the creature addressed in love - in such a way that it really is man who answers with his whole nature, with all his natural ability to love. But he can only do so through grace, i.e., because he was granted the power to make an adequately loving response to the love of God. He can only answer under the 'protective mantle' of the fiat spoken archetypally for him and all men by the bride and mother, Maria-ecclesia.*<sup>443</sup>

Depictions of Annunciation viewed through the lens of *the site of its beholding* provides a theological aesthetic structure that enables the beholder to contemplate (*theóreó*)<sup>444</sup> the narrative of image beyond the literal interpretation of Scripture (*blepó*)<sup>445</sup> and transport them into the realms of spiritual encounter (*horaó*) to perceive/discern metaphorically through the mind's eye/eyes of the heart, so as to *spiritually transcend*. As Balthasar states,

*Only that which has form can snatch one up into a state of rapture. Only through form can the lighting-bolt of eternal beauty flash. There is a moment in which the bursting light of spirit as it makes its appearance completely drenches external form in its rays. From the manner and measure in which this happens we know that we are in the presence of 'sensual' or 'spiritual' beauty, in the presence of graceful charm or of interior grandeur. But without form, in any event, a person will not be captivated and transported. To be transported, moreover, belongs to the very origin of Christianity.*<sup>446</sup>

Phillips astutely states that in relation to the evangelic power of a beautiful work of art, the beholder is,

*One 'snatched up by the beauty of Christ' – is not likely to break-up the experience and select that which is personally appealing, without undermining the impact of the whole. By von Balthasar's analysis, one cannot be impacted by the beauty of the Sistine Chapel if one delineates only the use of colour as beautiful, and not the composition, or ... claim the visual qualities of the artwork are beautiful but the metaphysical and spiritual depth are*

<sup>442</sup> *Lumen gentium*. (1964) para.63.

<sup>443</sup> Balthasar. (1969) *Love Alone*. trans. and ed. Alexander Dru. New York: Herder and Herder. pp. 64-65.1

<sup>444</sup> To look at, gaze to contemplate, experience *intellectually*.

<sup>445</sup> To see something *physically* - *literally* with spiritual results of perception.

<sup>446</sup> Balthasar. (1982) *GL I*. pp.32-33.

*somewhat suspect. The evangelising power of beautiful art is to impart in an instant – a ‘lightning flash of eternal beauty’ – what would take untold years of reading and listening to discern.*<sup>447</sup>

Here, the Word of God made manifest in visual form, as represented in the visual arts, acts as a source of grace which leads to a spiritual encounter with the divine. It is the instant in which the ‘lightning-bolt of eternal beauty’ strikes the beholder that signifies the authenticity of a spiritual encounter. This implies that frameworks for interpreting Christian works of art which overlook the metaphysical and spiritual depth of the image are insufficient from a Catholic sacramental perspective. That is, methodologies which give overriding weight to the sensual and underplay the significance of the spiritual theological capital within a work of art impoverishes Christian thought.

In this case study on the Annunciation various Florentine artists have attempted to capture the five key moments within the Angelic Colloquy, which depict Mary’s response to God’s call. Seen through the theological aesthetic framework of *the site of its beholding; the moment when the viewer encounters the image through the eyes of faith*, the Virgin Mary function as a model of faith, which provides the beholder with a theological structure on which to reflect upon and apply to their own spiritual journey. Ultimately beholding the beauty of the form leads to an intimate encounter with the divine, which leads to the transformation of the beholder, which is seen in the sacramental praxis of the beholder. As Balthasar states,

*An apparent enthusiasm for the beautiful is mere idle talk when divorced from the sense of a divine summons to change one’s life.*<sup>448</sup>

Balthasar’s sacramental worldview approach to the beautiful brings the beholder into a life changing relationship with the divine.

One of the goals of theological enquiry is to ascertain how this text/image is relevant for the believer today. From a sacramental perspective, contemplating the Annunciation, as depicted in this case study, the contemporary

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<sup>447</sup> Phillips, J. (2018) *Mary, Star of Evangelisation: Tiling the Soil and Sowing the Seed*. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press. p.89.

<sup>448</sup> Balthasar. (1989) *Revelation and the Beautiful in Explorations in Theology, Vol. 1: The Word Made Flesh*. pp 95-126. p.107. Cited in Nichols. (2011) p.8.

believer/holder is invited to mirror and emulate the Virgin's five laudable states as a response to God's call, and apply it to their own life. That is, Mary's model of faith is seen as a way of seeking and growing in holiness in terms of knowledge of God, conversion, and praxis.

Notwithstanding that, how, if at all, do visual expressions of faith actually impinge upon the faithful today? In order to explore, analyse, and evaluate the effectiveness of utilising the visual arts as potential 'theological and spiritual aesthetic resources' for forming and increasing the faith, values, and praxis of the faithful and others in Catholic education, there is a need to include a practitioner's research element within the thesis. That is, fieldwork research is a necessary and key component within theological investigation as without it there is a danger that the literature search could lack relevance.

## Chapter 5 A Methodology for Research

In the last chapter it was established that a dialogue between theo-aesthetics in the form of the newly emergent field of visual theology may prove fruitful as a framework for increasing spiritual capital (faith and values) in the faithful and others in contemporary Catholic education. Alongside this, the literature search brought to light that in order to expand the stock of knowledge in relation to the use of visual theology and how it impacts upon the faithful within an educational setting. It is important to conduct a fieldwork research element within the thesis. This will necessarily involve research into the current practices of professional teachers, practitioners, and others responsible for Catholic education.

The aim of this research is to establish to what extent the role beauty plays in and how widely the visual arts are used in contemporary Catholic Religious Education for the purpose of increasing spiritual capital in students. The perspectives, experiences and practices of teachers, practitioners and policymakers will be explored through online questionnaires (quantitative) and semi-structured interviews (qualitative). The purpose of the fieldwork research is to theologically interpret, evaluate and analyse the outcomes resulting from the quantitative and qualitative research with the further intention of bringing them into dialogue with the salient points emerging from the literature review.

The methodological research model that will be adopted in this study will draw upon Professor John Lydon's version of: *A Dialogue between the Literature and Qualitative/Quantitative Research* (DLQQ).<sup>449</sup> Lydon's DLQQ research model builds upon the work of Ivor Goodson's *Developing Narrative Theory: life histories and personal representation* (2012) approach which sits within the qualitative paradigm. The life-histories approach will be explored in greater detail in section 5.3.3. of this chapter.

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<sup>449</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.219.



### 5.1. Research Strategy: Mixed Methods Approach: Leading to DLQQ

A DLQQ research model enables the researcher to utilise and incorporate the researcher's findings from their literature review to form the basis of the surveys and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Creating a dialogue between the salient points emerging from the literature search and the findings from the qualitative and quantitative research elements is important, as it ascertains insights from several different fields of inquiry. Lydon claims that,

*The conclusions emerging from the extensive analysis and reflection upon literature will be of equal value to the findings emerging from the interviews.*<sup>450</sup>

What this means for this study is that while the findings from the fieldwork research is potentially a significant element of this thesis, the literature search is of equal importance for critical theological reflection on the use of the visual arts in Catholic education. Consequently, the mixed method approach may potentially enable a fuller understanding of the use of the visual arts in Catholic education in both the historical and contemporary applications of practitioners.

The DLQQ method functions by creating a dialogue between the literature search and the findings emerging from the qualitative/quantitative research instruments. There are several variations of the DLQQ method. The key to Lydon's version is the emphases on 'reappraisal'. Lydon states that,

*The word reappraisal provides the bridge between the literature-based research and the in-depth interviews which constitute the principal aspect of the research element of ...study since the key element ...in terms of its contribution to educational research will focus on the interaction between the exploration of the literature and the analysis of the perceptions of current practitioners.*<sup>451</sup>

With this method the findings resulting from the fieldwork research allow a reappraisal of the literature search in the light of the outcomes emerging from the scientific research. The findings from the literature review will then be analysed and theologically reflected upon so that a new understanding may be

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<sup>450</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.26.

<sup>451</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.30.

ascertained. Consequently, the DLQQ method enables further strategies to be developed which may widen and enhance opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement of the visual arts within Catholic education with the aim of maintaining, developing, and ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum. Before outlining in more detail, the research instruments to be adopted in this element of the thesis, it is first necessary to define the concept of research and explore the characteristics of the two-principle research paradigm.

### 5.1.1. Research – A Definition

The Cambridge dictionary defines the term ‘research’ as:

*A detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding.*<sup>452</sup>

As this study, in part, focuses upon the formative impact of use of the visual arts in a Catholic educational setting it is appropriate to utilise and explore a more nuanced understanding of the term ‘research.’ Lawrence Stenhouse’s classic definition of research is seen as ‘a disposition to examine one’s own practice critically and systematically.’<sup>453</sup> Whereas Richard Pring, who adopts and builds upon Stenhouse’s stance on research says that research is, ‘any systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge...’<sup>454</sup> Pring’s definition of research is primarily concerned with the distinctiveness of educational research. Pring argues that,

*I want to draw a distinction between research which is firmly embedded with the social sciences and which may be relevant to education, and research which arises from distinctively educational concerns.... The distinction may sometimes be blurred ...but it can only be relevant if it relates to the ‘practice of education.’*<sup>455</sup>

Reflecting both Stenhouse’s and Pring’s understanding of the definition and value of educational research the OECD *Centre for Educational Research and Innovation* (CERI) states that,

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<sup>452</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. (2020) Cambridge University Press.

<sup>453</sup> Stenhouse, Lawrence. (1970) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heinemann.

<sup>454</sup> Cited in Lydon. (2011) p.25.

<sup>455</sup> Pring. (2004) p.9.

*Knowing whether – and how much – educational practices are changing at the system level helps to target policy and school interventions that improve educational outcomes.*<sup>456</sup>

Moreover, Lydon argues that,

*A critical retrieval of literature is not difficult to accept within this definition of research if it brings together the significant research that already exists, thus setting the scene for an exploration of the extent to which the concepts which emerge from such a literature search resonate with the findings that emerge following interviews with current practitioners.*<sup>457</sup>

The objective of the practitioners' research element within this thesis is to explore in more detail several salient historical and contemporary points which emerged from the literature review. The findings from the fieldwork research will enable further in-depth critical analysis into the current educational practices of the use of visual theology in an educational setting. The outcomes resulting from the research may potentially contribute to the advancement of knowledge by acting as a resource for policy makers, practitioners, and others in Catholic education.

### **5.1.2. Research Questions**

For over a hundred years the use of the Arts in Religious Education has been on the decline. As Albert Edward Bailey in *The Use of Art in Religious Education* (1922) claimed,

*Art is a most admirable instrument for teaching the religious truth. It is an instrument that has been used in the past by the church for the purpose of helping people to arrive at definite beliefs. It is not so used today, but it should be restored to its teaching function.*<sup>458</sup>

One hundred years later the same quest to restore images as a means of teaching Religious Education is being researched. Peta Goldberg in *Towards a Creative Arts Approach to the Teaching of Religious Education: with special reference to the use of film* (2004) states that,

*People learnt to be religious by participating in ritual with its music, movement, and visual aspects, that is, they learnt to be*

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<sup>456</sup> OECD. (2019) *Centre for Educational Research and Innovation: Directorate for Education and Skill*. p.5.

<sup>457</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.25.

<sup>458</sup> Bailey, Albert, Edward. (1922) *The Use of Art in Religious Education*, Cincinnati: Abingdon Press. p.81.

*religious by doing religion. The invention of movable type led to availability of cheaper printed texts and the gradual acquiring of mass literacy began to shift the cultures of the time towards a reliance on the printed word. Christianity followed the trend and came to depend more and more on the printed word as the source for instruction. Consequently, primary informing images were no longer on the walls of churches, but in printed texts.*<sup>459</sup>

The aim of the fieldwork research in this study is to establish how widely the visual arts are used in contemporary Catholic education for increasing spiritual capital (faith and values) in students and staff. Are the arts still an underused resource or have the arts reclaimed their function as a means of teaching and transmitting faith today? What progress, if any, has been made in recent years? Alongside this, another crucial factor is to what extent has a scientific assessment driven pedagogy determined or undermined the use of the arts in Catholic education today? The focus of the questions that will be used throughout the fieldwork element of the study are as follows: -

- To what extent, if any, do the visual arts function as ‘theological aesthetic resources’ for increasing spiritual capital (faith and values) in the faithful and (others) in contemporary Catholic education?
- To what extent, if any, do the visual arts enable interdisciplinary collaboration between departmental activities for a broad and balanced curriculum?
- To what extent, if any, are common strategies and resources on the use of the arts being utilised in Catholic education?
- To what extent is visual theology a subject in its own right?

These questions and other salient points arising from the literature search will be utilised to research, understand, and reflect upon the theological dimensions of the ‘users’ experience’ of visual arts in Catholic education today.<sup>460</sup>

## **5.2. Research – Two Principal Paradigms**

Debates on how we understand, justify and measure knowledge go back as far as ancient Western philosophy. For example, Socrates and Plato (universal

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<sup>459</sup> Goldberg, Peta. (2004) *Towards a Creative Arts Approach to the Teaching of Religious Education: with special reference to the use of film*. British Journal of Religious Education. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>460</sup> For the full list of the semi-structured interviews questions see section 5.4.1. of the thesis.

truths - quantitative research) vs the Sophists, Protagoras, and Gorgias (multiple or relative truths — qualitative research) vs Aristotle's the 'golden mean' (the principle of balances — two paradigm method). It is from these antiquarian debates that the three major ways of measuring knowledge for social research purposes have developed today.<sup>461</sup>

In order to achieve a greater understanding, from an insider's perspective (the users experience), of the use of visual arts in Catholic education this study will require a two principal paradigm research methodology. According to Kuhn,

*The term paradigm refers to a research culture with a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research. A paradigm is a 'worldview' or set of assumptions about how things work.*<sup>462</sup>

In 1959 D. T. Campbell & D. W. Fiske in *Convergent and Discriminant Validation by the Multitrait-Multimethod Matrix* were the first to explicitly establish how to employ multiple research methods for scientific research purposes.<sup>463</sup> Since Campbell and Fiske first demonstrated the advantages of a mixed method approach, also known as the two principal paradigm method, for validation purposes there have been a plethora of definitions from the world of research as to what this means. R. Burke Jonson, Lisa Turner, and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie in their paper *Towards a Definition of Mixed Methods Research* (2007) list nineteen comprehensive definitions. As a provisional definition for the mixed methods approach this study will adopt John Creswell's explanation which is one of the nineteen mentioned above:

*Mixed methods are understood as, 'a research design (or methodology) in which the researcher collects, analyses, and mixes (integrates or connects) both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry.'*<sup>464</sup>

Since the mixed methods approach consists of two research methods, namely, qualitative, and quantitative, an outline of the characteristics of both will follow.

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<sup>461</sup> Cf. Jonson, R. Burke., Turner, Lisa., and Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. (April: 2007) *Towards a Definition of Mixed Methods Research*. P.113 in *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* Volume 1 Number 2. Sage Publications. pp.112-133.

<sup>462</sup> Kuhn, Thomas, S. (1977) *Objectivity, Value judgment, and Theory Choice in The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change*. University of Chicago Press. pp.320-39.

<sup>463</sup> Cf. Jonson, R. Burke., Turner, Lisa., and Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. (April: 2007) p.113.

<sup>464</sup> Jonson, R. Burke., Turner, Lisa., and Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. (April: 2007) p.113.

### 5.2.1. The Qualitative Paradigm - Educational Research

Qualitative research is primarily an interpretative, naturalistic perspective which focuses upon the meaning of opinions, ideas, and attitudes of the ‘lived reality’ of participants taking part in the study. Lydon states that in relation to educational research the advantages of the qualitative paradigm are that,

*An interpretative perspective recognises that the world of the educational researcher, while not in binary opposition to, is different from that of the natural science researcher. Rather than focusing exclusively on verifiable data, an interpretive perspective is grounded in the experience of the practitioners.*<sup>465</sup>

A general supposition of qualitative research is that ‘lived reality’ is socially constructed which gives primacy to the subject matter. It further assumes that patterns of behaviour are changeable. This means that the variables are complex and interwoven and therefore difficult to measure. Hence, reality in the real world is not consistent. Consequently, the predominant focus of the qualitative element of the two principal paradigm is to gain insights through the ‘insider’s view.’

Qualitative research is defined by Denzin and Lincoln as follows: -

*Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.*<sup>466</sup>

Qualitative research involves fieldwork on the part of the researcher which firmly roots the research in context, in this instance, an enquiry into the practitioners’ experience of the usage of the visual arts in Catholic schools.

### 5.2.2. Philosophical Perspectives in relation to Theological Critical Reflection

Balthasar, in his essay *On the Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time* (Spring:1993), argued that there are notable limitations to phenomenology in relation to theological discourse. He stated that an ever-increasing secularisation had dethroned the Church from its undisputed position as the crowning of worldly domains, which in turn made it appear subordinate to

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<sup>465</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.36.

<sup>466</sup> Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1998) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage. p. 3.

worldly structures. That the, seemingly, ever increasing dichotomy between the Church and the world, Christianity and culture, philosophy and theology are the ‘two spheres’ in which we live and experience God.<sup>467</sup>

Balthasar’s argument recognises that there is a need for the Church to engage in phenomenology, nevertheless, he states that, a subordinate position of faith to reason can never be accepted by the Church.<sup>468</sup> As Balthasar explains,

*One need is faith’s self-understanding which can make use in its own way of the results, the methods, and the concepts of philosophy in this activity, which is not philosophical but the theoretical, in order to attain its own ends. And since the light of faith is a supernatural light, it is superior to the light of reason and does not owe to reason any ultimate reckoning for the use it makes of philosophical thought.*<sup>469</sup>

Balthasar’s stance is a primarily a Christocentric approach which resonates with the sacramental perspective that envisages Jesus Christ as the measure of all measures. Furthermore, Balthasar argues that the primary goal of philosophy is to contemplate Being in relation to this world, in order to contemplate the absolute Being as *principium et finis* (Denzinger 1785). Whereas the process is reversed in theology inasmuch as it begins with the revelation of the incarnate Word of God (*Logos*) in order to draw meaning from Christ in relation to both the Church (faithful) and the world. Thus, he reasons that it is in this light that Catholic philosophy comes in to being. What this means is that for the Christian thinker, decisions made in relation to the ‘two spheres’ (reason and faith) necessarily include and are based upon the revelation of God’s Word incarnate. Balthasar argues that,

*Philosophy literally means the love of wisdom: Thus, it contains an ethical element and thereby an element of decision, because it is not possible for the human person to turn with ultimacy to the total object, the Absolute, without decision.*<sup>470</sup>

Therefore, from a Christian perspective, as decisions and choices are made vis-a-vis ‘the total object, the Absolute’ decision-making cannot be made without

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<sup>467</sup> For Snow’s argument on the ‘Two Cultures’ see footnote 176 of this thesis.

<sup>468</sup> Cf. Balthasar. (1993) pp.148-150.

<sup>469</sup> Balthasar. (1993) p.150.

<sup>470</sup> Balthasar. (1993) p.151.

reference to God. That is, for Balthasar, reason is necessarily illuminated by faith.

*A reason that is deprived of this light by sin and weakened and obscured in itself - will necessarily overlook or will recognise only in a disfigured form.*<sup>471</sup>

Balthasar warns that any Christian thinker who separates the two spheres (reason and faith) will end up secularising theology. Hence, he argues that philosophy must always remain at the service of theological inquiry. Nevertheless, Balthasar is not disputing the interconnectivity of the two spheres.

Notwithstanding that, Dale Andrews writings on *Qualitative Research or Theological Methods* (2011) states that,

*The research question, data collection tools, process of analysis, and in particular then the theory building, or employment of new theory all hold incredible capacity of theological development and interdisciplinary impact directly.*<sup>472</sup>

Therefore, it is not a case of either philosophical phenomenal or theological reflective methods, rather the question that needs to be asked is - 'how can we faithfully use qualitative research to collect authentic data for theological reflection?'<sup>473</sup> Critical theological reflection otherwise known as Practical Theology is defined by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat in *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (second ed. 2016) as follows: -

*Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the world, with a view of ensuring and enabling faithful participation of God's redemptive practices, in, to and for the world.*<sup>474</sup>

Practical theology like that of phenomenology starts from human experiences. However, it focuses on them in particular situations and contexts with the desire to critically reflect upon them from a theological perspective to enable improved performance, participation, and practice in the lives of the faithful. This necessarily includes an element of hermeneutical suspicion. That is,

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<sup>471</sup> Balthasar. (1993) p.151.

<sup>472</sup> Andrews, Dale. (2011) *Qualitative Research or Theological Methods*. Association of Practical Theology. Available at: <https://practicaltheology.org/tag/dale-andrews/>. (Accessed: 18 March 2021).

<sup>473</sup> Swinton & Mowat. (2016) *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. p.12.

<sup>474</sup> Swinton & Mowat. (2016) p.7.



Practical Theology asks, ‘what appears to be going on with the situation and what is actually going on?’<sup>475</sup> The hermeneutics of suspicion necessarily needs to be balanced out by the hermeneutics of generosity inasmuch as the God of mercy is mindful of our sinful condition (Rom. 7:15-20). That is, the *scientia* of phenomena, phenomenology, is understood in terms of the *sapientia* of critical theological interpretation, hermeneutics. This is called the phenomenology of hermeneutics.

As mentioned elsewhere the aim of this study is to ascertain to what extent, if any, do the visual arts function as ‘theological aesthetic resources’ for increasing spiritual capital (faith and values) in the faithful and (others) in contemporary Catholic education. Therefore, the primary concern for this study, and for all practical theological research, is the collecting of authentic data for critical theological reflection (*sapientia* and *scientia*) so that faith can be performed better (Jn. 1:13:35).

Swinton and Mowat argue that practical theological enquiry has four key elements:

1. *It is a critical discipline.*
2. *It is theological reflection.*
3. *Practical Theology is not simply concerned with the practices of the Church and the experiences of Christians it is also embraces the practices of the world.*
4. *The task of Practical Theology is to ensure and enable faithful practices.*<sup>476</sup>

In order to perform its task Practical Theology (*sapientia*) needs to engage with qualitative research (*scientia*) methods. According to McLeod (2001: p.3) there are three types of knowledge that the researcher can obtain through qualitative research:

1. *Knowledge of the other*
2. *Knowledge of phenomena*
3. *Reflective knowing*<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> Swinton & Mowat. (2016) p.11.

<sup>476</sup> Cf. Swinton & Mowat. (2016) pp.7-10.

<sup>477</sup> Quotation cited in Swinton & Mowat. (2016) p.32.

All of which are essential elements for practical theological research. Thus, by utilising the knowledge obtained from the qualitative research and applying the four key elements from the theological methods of critical reflection, the complexities of an interdisciplinary mixed methods approach are overcome.

In the next section I turn to the life-histories approach which has played a key role in qualitative research as an analytical framework for social research.

### **5.2.3. Life Histories Approach - A qualitative analytical framework**

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter a key aspect of the fieldwork research will involve in-depth interviews so that an interpretive perspective may be applied to the research questions in relation to the use of visual theology in contemporary Catholic education. The analytical framework that will be adopted in the interview process will be the 'life-history' method.

Ivor Goodson in his book *Learning, Curriculum and Politics* (2005) outlined both the history and development of the life-history approach. He states that the life-history method was first used in an anthropological study of Native Americans in the 1920s. Further extensive empirical studies were conducted using the life-history method in the 1930s with the Chicago School of sociologists in a project entitled *The Polish Peasant in Europe and in America* by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki. The contribution that Thomas and Znaniecki made developed the life-history method as a distinct and legitimate area of empirical social inquiry. This established the universality of the method within qualitative fieldwork research.

Life-history as a research method provides both an interpretive and investigative framework that is particularly relevant for the study of participant's experiences, attitudes, values, beliefs and impressions and the social historical context in which they live. The advances of the life-history method are that it,

*...Allows the researcher to explore a person's micro-historical (individual) experiences within a macro-historical (history of the time) framework. Life-history information challenges the*

*researcher to understand an individual's current attitudes and behaviours and how they may have been influenced by initial decisions made at another time and in another place.*<sup>478</sup>

However, although the life-history method provides the researcher with an interpretive perspective structure, as a mode of verifying data, the method fell out of favour. This is because it was thought that it lacked the objectivity of quantitative methodologies. The positivist approach of the quantitative method was deemed to give better scientific results. As Pring states,

*To research personal and social behaviour, the positivist spirit has seemed to offer a greater chance of progress. Indeed, criticism of educational research by those who want clear results on which they might base policy or practice would seem to share this positivist spirit.*<sup>479</sup>

Notwithstanding that, in the 1970s, through the research of Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson and others, the life-history theory was revived and rapidly regained support. This is because the subjective nature of the life-history method, which was once deemed a weakness, has now become its greatest strength. Goodson argued that the advantages of the life-history theory is that it draws meaning and understanding from the narratives of the lived experiences of the interviewees. As Petra Munro states,

*The current focus on acknowledging the subjective, multiple, and partial nature of human experience has resulted in a revival of life history methodology. What were previous criticisms of life history, its lack of representativeness and its subjective nature are now its greatest strength.*<sup>480</sup>

As Pring argues that to fully understand people's behaviour it 'requires understanding the interpretations which they give of what they are doing.' (Pring, 2004, p.98) Goodson claims that it is by researching the role that stories play in our life that we discover how effective they are in meaning making. That is, Goodson is interested in 'how... 'life-stories' are implicated in identity, agency, and learning.'<sup>481</sup> Goodson calls this the 'narrative capital' of the participant.

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<sup>478</sup> *Life History Approach*. Available at: <https://atlasti.com/life-history-research/>. (Accessed: 21 May 2021).

<sup>479</sup> Pring. (2004) p.91.

<sup>480</sup> Munro, P., (*Subject to Fiction: Women Teachers' Life History Narratives and the Cultural Politics of Resistance*, Buckingham, Open University Press. P.8. Quotation cited in Lydon. (2011) p.44.

<sup>481</sup> Goodson, I. (2013) *Developing Narrative Theory: life histories and personal representation*. Oxon: Routledge. p.3.

What Goodson's analysis revealed is that the personal life history of the teacher is meshed into their professional life. Furthermore, he claimed that there is no dichotomy between their public and private life. What this means is that their personal life is of as equal importance as their professional life. Consequently, the life-history approach is holistic as it considers the daily and professional lives of the participants.

However, as Lydon points out there are 'challenges of the life-history method, particularly in the context of relationship between the researcher and the interviewee.' (Lydon: 2011, p.44) Inasmuch as the researcher needs to be sensitive to what is being said. It is also a challenge to know what to highlight and omit from the information gathered from the interviews. This calls for empathy on the part of the researcher to ensure that the life story of the participant is accurately portrayed so that the true meaning of the conversation is captured.

#### **5.4. Qualitative Research Instrument - Semi-structured Interviews**

In the qualitative paradigm the primary research instrument for gathering data is the researcher. This involves fieldwork on the part of the researcher which takes place in the form of face-to-face interviews, in this case, semi-structured interviews of practitioners and policymakers in an educational context. The role of the researcher, as interviewer, requires personal involvement, impartiality, and empathic understanding to interpret the opinions, beliefs, and impressions of the participants given from their lived experiences (life-history theory).

Michael Patton in *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (2015) argues that,

*Psychometricians try to measure it.*

*Experimentalists try to control it.*

*Interviewers ask questions about it.*

*Observers watch it.*

*Participant-observers do it.*

*Statisticians count it.*

*Evaluators value it.*

*Qualitative researchers find meaning in it.*<sup>482</sup>

Patton explains that ‘it’ refers to the subject matter being studied. For Patton, the qualitative researcher ought to be particularly interested in the fruit produced by qualitative inquiry, namely, ‘finding meaning’ from the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants and situations which are being studied. By its very nature finding the meaning in how things work is at the core of all qualitative inquiry and analysis.

Patton argues that the second stage in qualitative inquiry is to evaluate the process of meaning making. That is, to make judgments about what is meaningful by attaching value to objects and the things that we believe and do. Seemingly running contra to this is the concept of Nihilism. That is, to find meaning in meaninglessness. The British Philosopher Aldous Huxley in the 1920s and 30s argued that humanity is liberated from the constraints of conservatism (religious, political, governmental leadership) by advocating that the world has no meaning at all.<sup>483</sup>

Patton argues that the purpose of qualitative research is to inquire how people and groups construct meaning. Qualitative inquiry attempts to make sense out of the world in which we live and things that make it meaningful. A way of doing this is through interpreting qualitative data. Patton states that there are three kinds of qualitative data:

- In-depth open-ended interviews
- Documents
- Observations and fieldwork

Interpreting qualitative data necessarily involves gleaning meaning from a triangulation of information in order to discover, analysis and evaluate how things work in a particular context. According to the Catholic Education

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<sup>482</sup> Patton, M. Q. (2015) *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. p.1.

<sup>483</sup> Cf. Patton. (2015) p.5.

Service (CES) the ethos of the Catholic school is to maintain and build up an atmosphere where Christ is placed at the centre.

*A Catholic school's 'ethos' may be understood to be the outward signs and experiences of the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church in the totality of daily life in a Catholic school.* <sup>484</sup>

In light of the CES statement and other salient points brought to light by the literature review, this thesis seeks to establish to what extent, if any, do the visual arts contribute to the school's ethos of placing Christ at the centre of their daily life. To what extent do the visual arts maintain and build up the spiritual capital of the faithful and others in Catholic education? This will be achieved, in part, through the research instrument of semi-structured interviews. Lydon argues that the advantage of the semi-structured interview method is that,

*While the main questions are decided in advance, the order of the questions is flexible and it is possible to add probes in order to deepen the response to the question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained.* <sup>485</sup>

Thus, the semi-structured interviews, based on the qualitative life-history method, afford the opportunity to elicit 'thick descriptions'<sup>486</sup> of reality and put them into context. This enables the researcher to explore in greater depth issues arising from the literature search.

This part of the research will involve fieldwork in the form of interviewing a select number of policymakers and practitioners in Catholic education, from headteachers to newly qualified teachers. By evaluating, analysing, and theologically interpreting the responses given, the meanings arising from the interviews will provide a greater understanding of the use of the visual arts in an educational context. This will enable a reappraisal of the situation in light of the literature search for new strategies to be developed.

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<sup>484</sup> CES quotation is taken from Stock, M. (2012) *Christ at the Centre*. p.18. para. A6.

<sup>485</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.51.

<sup>486</sup> 'Thick description' refers to the detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context.' Holloway (1997) *Basic Concepts for Qualitative Research*. London: Blackwell Science. p.52. Also see Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. p.52.

Borrowing from Lydon's structure of the DLQQ mixed method approach the semi-structured interviews will consist of three stages which are based upon the analytical framework of the life-history approach:

Stage 1: The Personal and Religious Background of the Practitioner

Stage 2: The Professional Practice of the Practitioner

Stage 3: The Attitudes and Feeling of the Practitioner

#### **5.4.1. Stage 1: The Personal and Religious Background of the Practitioner**

The first section of the interview is concerned with gathering information about the personal and religious background of the practitioner.

- a. Were you born into the Catholic faith?
- b. Do you feel that religious symbolism was deeply embedded in your school environment?
- c. Did the visual arts play a role in your faith formation?

#### **5.4.2. Stage 2: The Professional Practice of the Practitioner**

The second section of the interview is concerned with the professional practice of the practitioner.

- a. In your experience does the visual arts enable or facilitate an encounter with Christ?
- b. Do you use the visual arts as theological aesthetic resources to transmit the message of Christ? If so, to what extent?
- c. Have you ever used the visual arts in an interdisciplinary way? I.e., employed the visual arts as a means for cross-curricular activities with other colleagues/departments?

#### **5.4.3. Stage 3: The Attitudes and Feeling of the Practitioner**

The final and most in-depth section of the semi-structured interview is concerned with identifying the extent of a participant's attitudes and feelings towards the visual arts within a Catholic educational setting.

- a. Have you come across the term 'visual theology'? If yes, how do you understand the concept?

- b. Do you think that certain level of visual literacy is required before the visual arts can be an effective means of communicating the message of Christ in an educational setting?
- c. With regard to the New Evangelisation, have you come across the term 'The Way of Beauty'? If yes, how do you understand it?
- d. Do you think that the visual arts are an underused theological aesthetic resource for transmitting the faith in a Catholic educational context?
- e. Do you think that the visual arts help to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration in an educational setting?
- f. Do you think that a common strategy on the use of the visual arts in a Catholic educational setting would aid better cross-curricular activity with regard to transmitting the message of the Gospels?

As mentioned elsewhere the questions listed above will enable the attitudes and feelings of the interviewees to be analysed and theologically interpreted in light of the literature review from a life-history perspective.

## **5.5. The Quantitative Paradigm**

As established in the previous section, the qualitative element of the two-principle paradigm is fundamentally an interpretivist perspective which seeks to gain knowledge from drawing meaning from the life-history of the participants whereas quantitative element echoes a positivist approach of reality which focuses upon drawing knowledge from the collection of factual scientific data.

The philosopher Auguste Comte (1798 - 1857) is credited with being both the father of modern social science and the founder of Positivism.<sup>487</sup> Comte argued that positivism is the only way to discover the truth. That is, only factual information based upon scientific observation (the senses) is trustworthy for gaining knowledge and understanding of the reality in which we live. Comte writes that,

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<sup>487</sup> It is not the aim of this thesis to give a full account of the history of modern social science or the theory of positivism philosophical inquiry, rather it aims to provide a brief explanation of how positivism is an importance element within quantitative research.



*From the study of the development of human intelligence, in all directions, and through all times, the discovery arises of a great fundamental law, [which is that] each branch of our knowledge passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the theological, or fictitious; the metaphysical, or abstract; and the scientific, or positive.*<sup>488</sup>

Comte maintained that the search for objective truth and knowledge could only be discovered through systematic inquiry and the scientific method and that it must follow a monothetic (i.e., relating to universal laws) and an empirical approach. He argued that scientific research must free itself from the restraints and uncertainties of time, place, history, and culture.<sup>489</sup> Comte defined positivism as: -

*A philosophical system deeply rooted in science and mathematics. It's based on the view that whatever exists can be verified through experiments, observation, and mathematical/logical proof. Everything else is nonexistent. In addition, positivists usually believe that scientific progress will eradicate, or at least sharply reduce, the problems facing mankind.*<sup>490</sup>

### **5.5.1. The Collection of Scientific Data**

The collection of scientific data, in this case, obtained from online surveys provides a certain amount of objectivity and validity to the research as it collects knowledge through mathematical and statistical proofs. This enables the researcher to analyse statements of opinions, gathered from the surveys, and turn them into numerical form.

Quantitative research relies on the analysis of objective scientific measurable data. Thus, in order to turn statements of opinions into statistics to evaluate and analysis the use of visual theology in Catholic education this thesis will utilise the Rensis Likert 4-point scale method. Likert, who was an American Social Psychologist, developed his 4-point scale theory in his Ph.D. thesis *A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes* (1932). Likert designed his scale to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of practitioners & policymakers from five major 'attitude areas,' namely, 'international relations, race relations,

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<sup>488</sup> Quotation cited in Scharff, R. (1991) *Comte, Philosophy, and the Question of Its History*. Philosophical Topics. 19 (2). pp.177-204.

<sup>489</sup> Cf. Dharamsi & Scott. (2009) *Quantitative and Qualitative research: Received and Interpretivist views of science*. pp.1-3.

<sup>490</sup> Cited in Dharamsi & Scott. (2009) p.1.

economic conflict, political conflict, and religion.<sup>491</sup> Likert's scale operates by identifying to what extent the participant agrees with prearranged statements using a sliding scale of 1-4.

|                      |          |       |                   |
|----------------------|----------|-------|-------------------|
| Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
| (1)                  | (2)      | (3)   | (4)               |

The Likert method is versatile as it can be used in either 4, 5 or 7-point scale. This thesis will employ Likert's 4-point scale.

One of the advantages of Likert's quantitative scale is that it is particularly suitable for gathering data as the method is universally accepted as valid means for reliable scientific research. Inasmuch as the set statements rely upon either a sliding scale or yes or no answers both of which are quantifiable and objective. This method is easy to use as the data can be collected with the help of research instruments such as online surveys, e-mail, sent by post and in person.

### 5.5.2. Quantitative Research Instrument: Jisc Online Surveys

Drawing on Lydon's adoption of a mixed methods approach, DLQQ, the secondary data collecting method that will be utilised in this thesis is the Jisc Online Survey.<sup>492</sup> Jisc is an online survey tool which has been designed for academic research in education and public sector organisations. Lydon argues that the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) service is effective because it provides a fully integrated package that is easy to use. He lists the most noteworthy features of BOS as:

*The software is quick and easy to learn. It requires no technical knowledge to set up or maintain. It gives instant feedback on survey results and can cross-tabulate answers*<sup>493</sup>

The Jisc online survey, which this thesis will utilise is an updated version of the BOS survey, inasmuch as it is compliant with GDPR regulations.

<sup>491</sup> Likert, R. (1932-33) *A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes*. Editor R.S. Woodworth. Archives of Psychology. Volume 22 No.140. pp.5-55. p.10.

<sup>492</sup> The Jisc is formerly known as the Bristol Online Survey.

<sup>493</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.46.

Another advantage of the Jisc online survey is that it not only preserves anonymity of the participants but also has the potential to preserve the anonymity of the researcher. That is, the researcher does not come into contact with the respondents of the online survey as the link is sent, in this case, to the deputy head who then disseminates it to all staff. As already mentioned, the researcher of this thesis is a member of a religious order, as such there was a risk that this may have an influence on the participants responses to the questionnaire. With the anonymity of the researcher maintained the participants are able to answer the survey freely. Thus, the online survey reduces any potential bias, in, or influence over the responses of the intended participants.

Practitioners who participate in the Jisc online survey will be asked to indicate whether they agree with the following points of the questionnaire on a scale of 1-4 as mentioned elsewhere.

### **5.5.3. Survey questionnaire**

To identify the extent of practitioners attitudes and feelings towards the visual arts in Catholic education the questionnaire will be comprise of three sections. Each section will reflect the most significant aspects of the inquiry in relation to the use of religious symbolism and the practice of visual theology in Catholic education :

Section 1. The School Environment

Section 2. The Role of Visual Arts in the Classroom

Section 3. Understanding the Purpose of the Arts in Schools

In each of the following three sections the participants will be asked to indicate to what extent they agree/disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1-4, namely strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

### **5.5.4. Section 1. The School Environment**

This section of the survey was designed to ascertain how much religious symbolism there is within the school, how deeply embedded the visual arts are as a means of transmitting the faith, and to what extent, if any, it helps to create

an atmosphere where the message of Christ is placed at the centre of the school's ethos.

- a. I feel that visual religious symbolism is deeply embedded within this school.
- b. I feel that the religious symbolism found around the school helps to nurture and sustain a Catholic ethos.
- c. I believe that the pupils are able to recognise and describe the theological significance of the religious imagery found within this school.
- d. I feel that the presence of a priest/a lay chaplain and practicing Catholics are an important element in maintaining and developing a Catholic ethos within the school.

#### **5.5.5. Section 2. The Role of Visual Arts in the Classroom**

This section of the questionnaire is concerned with exploring the teacher's experience with regard to the use of visual arts within the classroom. The following statements will help to establish and analyse current practices to see to what extent, if any, the use of visual arts help to communicate and facilitate spiritual capital (faith and values) in pupils.

- a. I think that the visual arts aid spiritual development in pupils.
- b. I often use the visual arts to explain biblical, doctrinal, and theological concepts to my pupils in my lessons.
- c. In this school the visual arts are widely used as theological aesthetic resources for transmitting the Christian message.
- d. I feel that in this school the visual arts play a vital role in cross-curricular collaboration activities with the express purpose of maintaining and developing faith, values, and virtues.
- f. I feel that the visual arts are useful aids for creating a broad and balanced curriculum.
- g. I think that some level of visual literacy is required before the arts can be an effective means of communicating the message of Christ in the classroom.
- h. I feel that the visual arts are an underused resource for transmitting the faith.

- i. I feel that the visual arts point beyond themselves and inspire pupils to learn and to acquire knowledge, understanding and skills in all aspects of education.
- j. I believe that field trips to art galleries and museums are instrumental in helping the pupils to link their faith and values to the culture which surrounds them.
- k. I think that the visual arts aid the conceptual development of pupils.
- l. In this school the visual arts are used as a core resource within the agreed syllabus.

### **5.5.6. Section 3. Understanding the Purpose of the Arts in Schools**

The closing section of the questionnaire was designed to explore how practitioners understand the purpose and function of the arts within their school. To discover whether a common strategy on the visual arts exists and to what extent this aids interdisciplinary activities.

- a. In this school the visual arts are used as a vehicle for cross-curricula collaboration.
- b. In this school there is an interdisciplinary strategy in place which aims at employing the visual arts as ‘theological aesthetic resources’ for transmitting and developing faith and values in pupils.
- c. Which of the following three statements best describes your understanding of role of the visual arts in Catholic education?<sup>494</sup>
  - c. 1. Art is primarily instrumental in function - ‘Art is at the service’ of spiritual development, enhancing worship and shaping religious life. The Arts are instrumental in realising a certain goal; moral, social, political, and spiritual.
  - c. 2. Art as a means of revealing a reality pointing beyond itself - ‘The spiritual experience’: The focus is primarily placed on the subject matter rather than the artwork itself. The arts do not necessarily preclude

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<sup>494</sup> Cf. The following three statements are quoted in Wilson, Y. (1987) p.129-30.

instrumental interests; but neither do they imply it. The revelatory power of the arts: 'Art reveals that which is deepest; that which points to the metaphysical or ontological structures of meaning and reality.

c. 3. Art is an object to be enjoyed for itself <sup>495</sup> — 'The Aesthetic experience' - Art itself gives pleasure and taste which relates to the beauty of creation. The arts further the deliberate cultivation and enjoyment of aesthetic experience.

The mixed method approach is especially conducive to this study as it will enable the fieldwork data collected from both the semi-structured interviews and the online surveys to be interpreted and analysed in light of the literature search. Bringing the two paradigms method into dialogue with the salient points raised in the literature review, namely, the DLQQ method will then enable a reappraised of the literature search forming a triangulation of data. Thus, the DLQQ provides a method that is allows triangular dialogue which enables further analysis of the lived experiences and perception of the participants by comparing and understanding how and why the context matters alongside identify unanticipated consequences.

## **5.6. Issues of Objectivity in Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

The qualitative paradigm is ordinarily perceived as a subjective interpretive, naturalistic perspective which is based upon drawing meaning from the attitudes, opinions, and ideas of the life-history of participants. Whereas the quantitative aspect focuses on the positivist viewpoint which stresses the objective scientific factual collection of data. Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Jackson, P. R. *Management and Business Research* (2008) diagram (see table below) compare the two-principle method side by side in simple detail. They distinguish between the basic notions, responsibilities of the researcher, the most suitable research methods, and the sampling procedures of each methodology.

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<sup>495</sup> This approach to the arts represents formalistic theories which are characteristic of the last 50 to 100 years (art for art's sake).

|                                | Positivist Paradigm<br>(Quantitative)   | Phenomenology<br>Paradigm<br>(Qualitative)   |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Basic notions                  | The world is perceived as external and objective.<br>Independency of the observer<br>Value-free approach to science   | The world is perceived to be socially constructed and subjective.<br>Observer is considered a part of the object of observation.<br>Human interests drive science.         |
| Responsibilities of researcher | Focusing on facts<br>Causalities and fundamental laws are searched<br><br>Phenomenon are reduced to the simplest elements<br><br>Hypotheses formulation and testing them      | To be focusing on meanings<br>Aiming to understand the meaning of events<br><br>Exploring the totality of each individual case. Ideas are developed by induction from data |
| Most suitable research methods | To be focusing on meanings<br>Aiming to understand the meaning of events.<br>Exploring the totality of each individual case<br><br>Ideas are developed by induction from data | Using several methods in order to different aspects of phenomena   |
| Sampling                       | Samples must be large   | Small samples are analysed in a greater depth or over longer periods of time   |

Some scholars believe that because qualitative research relies upon drawing meaning from, in this case, the responses of the interviewees, it lacks certain objectivity. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to say that the qualitative element is purely subjective, and that the quantitative element of the two-principle paradigm is purely objective. Richard Pring convincingly claims that,

*My argument is that the opposition (not the distinction) between quantitative and qualitative research is mistaken. The 'naïve realism' attributed to those who espouse the more quantitative methodology is not justified. How we conceive the world could be different from social group to social group. Such 'social*

*constructions' are constantly reconstructed as new experiences forcing us to reshape how we understand things. Hence, the need for that interpretive and hermeneutic tradition in which we seek to understand the world from the perspective of the participants, or to understand a set of ideas from the evolving tradition of which they are a part.*<sup>496</sup>

Pring's argument follows along similar lines to that of Balthasar (as mentioned elsewhere) who argued that the lived experience of the Christian thinker is based on objective reality of Jesus Christ who lived and breathed on this earth. Each generation learns to experience this reality in new ways. A phenomenology of hermeneutics set within the context of a life histories approach allows the researcher to critically and theologically interpret both elements of the two-principle paradigm from an objective and subjective viewpoint. Lydon, commenting on Pring in *Educational Conclusion: A Philosophical Perspective* in (Oxford Review of Education 2002) states that,

*Pring... explores the various facets of the educative process, implying that research must go beyond the narrow confines of quantitative outcomes which, in essence, constitutes contextual reductionism. Paying particular attention to the importance of the relationship between teacher and learner...*<sup>497</sup>

This statement highlights the importance of qualitative research which complements quantitative research and vice versa.

In the next chapter the thesis utilises the DLQQ method to conduct a fieldwork research project which comprises of semi-structured interviews and an online survey.

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<sup>496</sup> Pring, R. (2000) *Philosophy of Educational Research*. London: Continuum. p.55.

<sup>497</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.41.



## **Chapter 6 Classification of Research**

The literature review established that it could prove fruitful to the thesis as a whole, to carry out fieldwork research into the use of the visual arts in a Catholic educational setting. The purpose of this was to ascertain the interpretive perspectives, ideas and lived reality of the professional practitioners taking part in the study. As noted in chapter five, the fieldwork research consists of two elements, namely in-depth semi-structured interviews (qualitative) and an online questionnaire survey (quantitative). The qualitative component of the fieldwork research, the semi-structured interviews, consist of three stages: stage one - the personal and religious background of the practitioner; stage two - the professional practice of the practitioner, and stage three - the attitudes and the feeling of the practitioner. Whereas the quantitative part of the research is composed of a set of twenty questions.

Firstly, this chapter explores, analyses, and evaluates the qualitative element of the fieldwork research in relation to the outcomes arising from the literature review. It then investigates the data emanating from the quantitative component of the research, which will act as a comparator to the semi-structured interviews, thereby affording a degree of triangulation. This will enable a reappraisal of the issues that emerged from the literature review to take place, from which recommendations will be posited.

### **6.1. Classification Status Model**

In total ten participants were selected to take part in the semi-structured interviews, six females, three males, and a transgender male. The participants came from an array of Christian denominations, namely Roman Catholic, converts to Roman Catholicism, Church of England, and the Salvation Army. All of the participants work in a Catholic educational setting. This sample of teachers reflect somewhat the Catholic Educational Service's (CES) official figures taken in 2021, which state that only 51% of teachers in Catholic schools are Roman Catholic.

In order to establish a range across age, responsibility and experience the status of the practitioners were classified into three categories.<sup>498</sup>

| <b>Status of Practitioner</b>                                   | Category 1<br>4 Teachers<br>Age: 25-35 | Category 2<br>3 Teachers<br>Age: 36-45 | Category 3<br>3 Teachers<br>Age: 46-56 |
|---|--|--|--|
| RE Teachers   | 1 Transgender Male<br>1 Female         | 1 Female                               | 1 Male                                 |
|   |  |  |  |
| Middle<br>Managers/Teachers<br>(Head of Religious<br>Education) | 1 Female                               | 1 Female                               | 1 Male                                 |
|   |  |  |  |
| Senior<br>Managers/Leaders<br>(Head of Year Sixth<br>Form)      | 1 Female                               | 1 Female                               | 1 Male                                 |

## **6.2. Interviews & Responses**

### **6.2.1. Personal and Religious Background of the Teacher**

The first stage in the process of the semi-structured interviews was concerned with gathering information about the personal and religious background of the practitioner. According to the life history approach the personal and religious family background of the teacher is deemed important as it sheds light upon the living reality of the practitioner. As mentioned in chapter five of this thesis, the purpose of stage one of the semi-structured interview process was to ‘make meaning’ from where they are ‘coming from.’ That is, how has their own childhood formation influenced and impacted upon their understanding of role of the visual arts in conveying the Catholic faith in a Catholic educational setting.

In relation to faith formation, the first stage<sup>499</sup> of the semi-structured interviews brought to light a major dichotomy in relation to the practitioners’ faith

<sup>498</sup> Cf. Lydon. (2019) p.327.

<sup>499</sup> To reiterate, stage one of the semi-structured interview consisted of the following questions:  
a. Were you born into the Catholic faith?

background and the pupils that they teach. That is, nine out of ten of the responses given expressed a concern about the religious literacy of the pupils they teach. A teacher from category three said that:

*I was born in Scotland in 1965 and went to a Catholic primary school, and I also went to a private school for a year, because I had won a bursary. We moved to England by the time I went to secondary school, and we went to Mass every Sunday. I wouldn't say that that is the norm for students today. It's the reverse in fact. So, there is an enormous difference in faith formation today compared to fifty years ago, it's massive.*

Speaking along similar lines, another teacher from category three, stated that:

*I was born in Derry into a largely Catholic community. The Catholicism that I was brought up in was vastly different from today, in the sense that in the 1970s in Derry the idea of community and faith was very, very strong. So, in a sense you learnt Catholicism from a very early age. What I would call 'pre-articulate knowledge,' inasmuch as you learnt to bless yourself before you knew what it meant. Whereas as today there is not the same bedrock of Catholicism in the home. This is a grand statement, but I think that it can lack depth in some ways. I just don't think that they (the pupils that I teach)<sup>500</sup> have the same depth of what I call 'pre-articulate knowledge' as I had growing up.*

A teacher from category two said that:

*When I was brought up, we sat together for our meals on a Sunday, and we went to Mass as a family. It was part of everyday life for the whole of my childhood and teenage years, and still is when I stay at home. I myself am a mother, and I do that with my children. But I know speaking to the children whom I teach it is different, parents have to work different shifts. They are not all Catholics in our school as the intake is different compared to when I went to school. Often when I talk about sitting down and sharing a family meal, they (the pupils that I teach)<sup>501</sup> say that they have never experienced it.*

Another teacher from category two, who is not from a Catholic background, stated that:

- 
- a.1. Prompt question - In your experience would you say that the level of faith formation you received as a child is the same, better, or worse than the pupils that you teach?
  - b. Do you feel that religious symbolism was deeply embedded in your school environment?
  - c. Did the visual Arts play a role in your faith formation?

<sup>500</sup> My italics.

<sup>501</sup> My italics.

*No, I am not a Catholic, I am from a fifth generation Salvation Army background, and as such I had a really solid knowledge of scripture. Many of our students are not from a Catholic background, and only a few of my students actually go to Church. As such they tend not to know scripture unless they have been taught it. The main difference between my background and the children that I teach is that they tend not to come from a faith background. So, the lack of knowledge of scripture is not a so much a school issue, but rather a home background situation.*

Another participant from category three said that:

*Yes, I was baptised and raised as a Catholic. I consider myself lucky in away, because I was born at the tail end of traditional Catholicism, which gave me a solid grounding the in faith. I was born in 1964. So, in the 70s I went to a Catholic school.*

*I think that levels of the content of the faith have been, I don't want to say watered down, but I don't think that they are getting the richness that we had, being brought up without the richness of the language that we had. They are not getting the same benefits that we had. I just think that when you encounter young people today you find that religious literacy isn't there.*

*I had Irish Catholic teachers, and I also had the benefit of Benedictine teachers. Nowadays they assign a chaplain to the school. They don't have Monk headmasters, so that strong ethos that we had, they are not going to get now.*

The responses given in stage one of the semi-structured interview process strongly affirmed the findings which arose from the literature review, namely that today fewer children in Catholic education are growing up in a strong faith-filled family unit. According to the vast majority of the transcripts, the home and faith background situation of the pupils appear to be significantly different to that of the teachers. The so called 'traditional Catholic' faith background, which the teachers experienced when growing up seems to be something that is becoming increasingly rare among the pupils that they teach. Overall, it was considered that the religious literacy of the pupils is either low or 'just isn't there,' inasmuch as it was strongly felt that there is significant lack of 'pre-articulated knowledge' of the Catholic faith amongst the pupils that they teach. Across all three of the categories the practitioners believed that this phenomenon was primarily due to the absence of a strong faith family background, and a supportive Catholic community.

Alongside that, the transcripts highlighted the absence of religious educators within today's Catholic educational system. This also confirmed the literature reviews findings, namely the 'mass exodus' of Religious Orders from Catholic Education. This seems to imply that the diminishment of Religious within the educational system has contributed to the lowering levels of religious literacy amongst pupils. Par consequence, the lack of spiritual capital available to the pupils extends beyond the home situation into the school environment. That is to say, it is not just a home background situation. As Lydon rightly pointed out, the major challenge today is to nurture and sustain a 'critical mass' baptised and practicing Catholics in key educational postings.<sup>502</sup>

In addition to that, a phenomenon that may become increasingly commonplace in the future was revealed by a newly qualified RE teacher from category one. He said that his faith and family background is similar to the majority of the pupils whom he teaches. His response is as follows:

*No, I was not born into the Catholic faith. My parents are not religious at all. However, they are both actually baptised. My mother became baptised as an adult so that she could become a godmother, but they are not religious at all. But they did send us to a Catholic school, I have a twin sister, so I always say us. So, they sent us to two Catholic schools, primary and secondary. The primary was the local school, and our cousin had been there before us, he was not religious at all either, but they knew that it was a good school. Then you automatically get put on the list for the secondary school.*

*However, back then (twelve years ago)<sup>503</sup> it was not automatic that you would be eligible to go the sixth form, because most places were reserved for Catholics. So, in order to qualify I became baptised into the Catholic faith at 16.*

*I work in the same school that I went to, and the pupils that I teach generally tend to come from a similar background as me, because the demographic in this school is that 65 percent of the children are not Catholic. That is, there are fewer children who are Catholic than there are children of other faiths in this school. That is, there are many more pupils that are Muslims or of no faith than there are Catholics.*

The new schooling reality, which this and the other statements reflect, reveals the growing faith diversity, multiculturalism and the non-churched pupil

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<sup>502</sup> Cf. Lydon. (2011) p.15.

<sup>503</sup> My emphasis.

demographics found within Catholic schools today. Alongside that, it demonstrates that RE teachers are emerging from within this environment. If this phenomenon becomes normative then this could mean that teachers and pupils will be able to relate more readily to each other on faith background level, which in effect would close the current faith dichotomy which exists between the teachers and the pupils in categories two and three. However, this could be problematic inasmuch as it raises the question as to whether the new schooling reality is sufficient to maintain a 'critical mass' of baptised and practicing Catholics and thereby a solid Catholic ethos in the long term.

The second question, in stage one of the semi-structured interviews, was concerned with ascertaining whether religious symbolism featured within the teacher's own school environment, and how, if at all, it had influenced them. A teacher from category one said that:

*No, it wasn't. I went to a C of E school. That is why I have always chosen to work in Catholic schools. I don't think that the C of E do it that well.*

In contrast to the last statement another teacher from category one stated that:

*Yep, there was a crucifix in every single classroom, which had the expectation that it should be there. I do remember one teacher who refused to put it up. But it was not up to the teachers and someone else put it up. So yes, there were crucifixes in every classroom. There were other little bits and bobs around - so we've got, I don't suppose you would call it a carpet, it's a wall hanging of the Last Supper, and there are couple murals on the wall, one of Mary holding Jesus, and it has the quote from St Paul Letter to the Corinthians on Love.*

*Today not a lot has changed since I was at school here. Although I notice it more now that I'm RE teacher and versed in theological training. Oh, what is new is that there is now a picture of the Pope in every classroom too.*

Another teacher from category one said that:

*Yes, I went to a school run by Religious Sisters,<sup>504</sup> and there were statues, paintings, and crucifixes as well religious image in the grounds of the building you would have statues to Our Lady. And you would use things like prompts either for personal reflection or they were used by teachers in form time as lessons. It was so*

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<sup>504</sup> The name of the Religious Order has been omitted to preserve anonymity.

*present, but because it was so present it seemed completely normal. However, when I compare that to the schools that I have worked in I think oh some have it and some don't.*

*I moved schools just before the pandemic, and it is run by a Religious Order and so it has lots of religious symbolism throughout. Yet, the school I was in before that was not run by a Religious Order and so there was very little religious artwork, and we would have to try and find some to put into the school. So perhaps I can just say that of all the schools that I have worked in those run by Religious Orders tend to have artwork throughout the fabric of the school, and those school that have not been run by a Religious Order tend not to have much at all.*

A teacher from category two said that:

*No, I did not go to a faith school. I went to a state secondary school. So, no there was no religious symbolism in my school, no not at all.*

Another teacher from category two explained at length that:

*I went to fairly well-established Catholic school and so there were lot. Prior to that a convent school had recently closed and so although my school was built in the 1970s it received a lot of stuff from there, and so there was a lot. And so, I grew up with all of that.*

*But I'm thinking now of the schools which I have worked in. One was a fairly new school; it is actually very expensive and time-consuming to get all of those signs and symbols. The archdiocese of Birmingham is particularly strong on this, and it has been a line in the criteria to assess the signs and symbols in schools. In my previous school I was responsible for this, and I was operating on a shoestring. I had to try to create and replicate images which was very difficult to do.*

*In the school that I'm in now there are some very old, well-established images of Mary for example, and we would like to bring in some modern images. And again, this is very expensive, and it has to be right. And I haven't found what is quite right for this community just yet.*

*It's really quite hard actually, because the schools that I have worked have either been really old, so they have all the signs and symbols already in place or it's been a new school which has very few signs and symbols and I've struggled to get all the things necessary, so I've had to improvise due to lack of funds.*

*These things are really important because you want a Catholic school and home to look and feel different. So, people can see instantly.*

Another teacher from category two stated that:

*Yes, there was. I went to the school that I now teach in. It was founded by a Religious Order, and their values have always been here and permeate throughout the school. So, I cannot say that has changed, it's just getting richer and richer.*

A teacher from category three said that:

*I think from what I can recall it was there. I wouldn't say it was explicit. You didn't know it was any different, it was just there. I wouldn't say that it was pointed out either. It was just the common theme all the time.*

Another teacher from category three said that:

*Yes, there was. I attended a Catholic primary school and there were crucifixes in the classroom, and the big Christian festivals. Then I went to a big grammar school, which was run by religious priests, so you had symbolism everywhere, especially the priest, which represented that kind of ministry, a symbolism that was very strong.*

Eight out of the ten respondents said that religious symbolism was deeply embedded within their school environment in their formative years. From these statements a number of points emerged. Firstly, it becomes clear from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews that religious symbolism in the form of the visual arts, when present, was seen as normative, and somewhat expected. Nevertheless, for some, it was only in retrospect coupled with the gaining of experience, and theological training that its significance was appreciated. Whereas for others, religious symbolism clearly had an impact on their faith formation in their formative years, inasmuch as it was used as prompts for personal reflection and was utilised by religious teachers as pedagogical resources.

Secondly, it is clear from the responses given that religious artefacts are expensive to buy, and difficult to source. This brought to light that, some, schools lacked the sufficient funds necessary to purchase both modern and historical works of art. This in effect means that teachers have to improvise, be creative and resourceful in sourcing religious signs, symbols, and icons, which



the teachers found to be both difficult and time-consuming. This implies that newer schools tend to struggle to provide the religious signs and symbols that are in keeping with the criteria set by any given diocese.

Finally, it seems evident from the statements given that Religious Orders have made an enormous contribution to the visual, symbolic, and cultural heritage found within Catholic schools. Interestingly, in terms of religious symbolism, the presence of priests, religious sisters, and teachers had a strong impact on the participants with regard to faith formation.

The last question in stage one of the semi-structured interviews was devised to ascertain whether the visual arts played a role in the faith formation of the practitioner as a child. A teacher from category one said that:

*I wouldn't have noticed at the time, so I don't think so. What I noticed more were the people in the school, the teachers, and the sense of community. I was aware of the symbols generally, but I wouldn't have known what a lot of them meant at the time apart from the crucifix. I say probably not.*

*For me it was more about being fully immersed in the community. The time that I was at school was the Year of Mercy, and we had to think about who the people of mercy were for you, and I thought that it was the people that taught me.*

One participant from category two stated that:

*No, not really, all I can think of is that is because of the Salvation Army military background. However, there are a lot of symbols to do with that, we have a flag, and we have colours that actually represent the Trinity on our flag. The colours are yellow, red, and blue. Red stands for the blood of Jesus, blue for the holiness of God, and yellow for the Holy Spirit, and those colours are everywhere. There is also a crest that has symbolism, a crown that the victor would wear at the end of life, and it has a cross in it. These are the things that come to mind.*

*Yet, I can't actually think of a religious picture and certainly not a statue of any kind. A Salvation Army building is very plain, it will have an empty cross that is it. It was very plain. We don't venerate saints. And my parents never really went to art galleries. So, I was wondering where my interest in art came from. I think it was me, just my own interest which developed over time.*

Another teacher from category two stated that:

*Yes, certainly as a teenager I would collect any religious postcards and pictures, and when I went to university I would have them all around my desk and walls. And even now I them up and round and have quite an eclectic collection, yes, I do like to surround myself with them. This tended happen more as I left the family and had my own space. But I think that this was just the family that I grew up in. But as I was starting to own my faith, making my own choices, and decisions then it became more important to me.*

*As I started to travel, when I went to Rome for the first time, I went to Buckfast Abbey with that amazing stain glass window that they have. So, the more I travelled the more the interest grew, and I wanted them and brought things back and surround myself with them.*

Another teacher from category two stated that:

*Yes, I did part of my degree in Art, but I got sick and ended up taking more and more RE, but I loved teaching Art, so I incorporated it into my teaching. So yes, art has always been there.*

Another teacher from category three said that:

*Yes, again I think that it cohered with my experience of faith formation growing up. It was a visual tactile experience. For instance, the image of the Sacred Heart picture was in the home and was always there with the family names written on it and signed by the local priest. So that I suppose that was a great presence in the home, which has now almost completely disappeared. But I wouldn't have been aware of it at a conscious level. It was there as a fabric of the household which you now realise is largely absent from most Catholic homes, which you now realise its importance. It was almost just part of the decor of the house. The Holy water font was next to the Sacred Heart image, that kind of thing. But I lived with my grandmother for ten years who lived on her own. My parents lived in the same terrace street. So, I stayed with my grandmother at night. So, my grandmother's house was littered with pictures of Pope John Paul 23rd, and crucifixes. In my room there was a huge somber dark picture of the crucifixion, which was always there and has stayed with me as a definite presence.*

Another practitioner from category three stated that:

*I like to answer a straightforward yes... I think that through the Cathedrals, through the statues, through beautiful churches, that's the art that I'm really talking about, rather than art galleries. Although, I must say we did go to art galleries, and as I went through the art galleries, I could recognise the images in the paintings. I wasn't so good on the Greek myths, but I could see that it was Mary and Joseph, or that it was a painting of St. Sebastian, the obvious ones.*

*But how deep it took me into the faith I don't know. How much it explained the faith to me I don't know, but I think it gave me a sort of visceral, deep down, sense of the faith. And of course, we are going to come to the word beauty. I'm sure that it planted something of beauty in me. So, I think the answer is probably yes, but I can't say for sure. In a way it did play a role in my faith formation.*

*However, I would say that it is the person contact more often with regard to faith formation, the teachers and monks that had an impact on my faith formation. And yet the Arts are a doorway, a little talking point that helped with that too.*

What emerged from the responses given to the last question in the first stage of the semi-structured interviews was that personal contact with teaching Religious, lay teachers who practiced the faith, and a sense of a faith community were hugely influential in the personal faith formation of the participants. As Lydon argues, teachers who embody the notion of modelling Jesus' style of ministry are memorable and influential.<sup>505</sup>

Notwithstanding that, most of the participants believed that, over the course of time, the visual arts played an increasingly significant role in their own faith formation and has influenced the way that they teach. On the whole, it seems that the visual arts cohered with their faith formation and played a complimentary role to that of the people of faith that taught them and their families who nurtured them.

### **6.2.2. The Professional Practice of the Practitioner**

The second stage<sup>506</sup> of the interview process was concerned with the professional practice of the practitioner. Question one of stage two asked whether the visual arts enable or facilitate an encounter with Christ? Although the responses differed in varying degrees, ten out of the ten respondents said yes to the visual arts enabling or facilitating an encounter with Christ. For example, a teacher from category one explained that:

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<sup>505</sup> Cf. Lydon, J. (2011) p.28.

<sup>506</sup> To reiterate, stage two of the semi-structured interviews consisted of three questions, namely:

1. In your experience do the visual arts enable or facilitate an encounter with Christ?
2. Do you use the visual arts as 'theological aesthetic resources' to transmit the message of Christ? If so to what extent?
3. Have you ever used the visual arts in an interdisciplinary way? I.e., employed the visual arts as a means for cross-curricular activities with other colleagues/departments?

*As a teacher I can say yes...I think that they do enable, but I don't think they do so purely on their own. And I think it needs someone with some expertise about the image...You do need somebody to put it into context or explain the theological meaning. So, I think that the teacher or person who is there contributes to that.*

*I think very often it helps to have visuals around because it often sticks in the kids' memory. So, the story and visual of that story helps the children to understand what you are saying and perhaps sparks their interest a little bit more.*

Another teacher from category one said that:

*I think so. I think that kids can engage with and appreciate things more when there is there is a visual understanding. For example, The Brick Testament is a project created by Elbe Spurling. This project uses Lego to depict every story in the bible. I really do think that it helps the kids to understand and visualise the scene much better.*

A teacher from category two stated that:

*Yes, if I'm just thinking of me then I have had numerous experiences and examples in my life. In various places in the world where you look at something and then which just captivates you. For instance, you can be standing in a gallery, and it makes you feel that you are in a sacred place.*

*Whether or not that has actually happened in my classroom, and whether my students would say that they have had an encounter with Christ, I wouldn't say that that is where they are at. However, I do recognise, but I would actually say it to the students, you can feel that we have entered a different level when using art, that it has open up the topic, and you see that the students have been emotionally moved, and I do see that as a sign that Christ is present.*

Another teacher from category two said that:

*I think for some people absolutely. Just thinking back to when I took a group of students to the Chapel of the English College in Rome. I have a whole selection of photos with teenagers just staring up at ceilings, and the silence of the moment. They knew that there was something special, and no one said anything. Even the way the lights were shining on all the wonderful images, and not saying a word. So that was one of my first experiences of just how powerful visual art can be for somebody.*

Another teacher from category three said that:

*I would say without a doubt, absolutely. I go back to one of the answers I said before which was about religious literacy, which has virtually disappeared. I think that gives us a good opportunity*

*to explore the Arts. Because I suppose they haven't been exposed to it before, so it's brand-new to them. So, when I have used it in lessons...students take more notice of it now because it's different to them. When I was at school it was what you expected to see...whereas now I think it's a bigger hook, there is far more opportunity for it to be used more than it is.*

Across all three categories of the status classification model, it was evident from the transcripts, that the visual arts clearly enable and facilitate an encounter with Christ both with regard to the personal experience of the teacher, and in their professional practice. The benefits of the visual arts acting as a means of encountering Christ were twofold; firstly, it greatly assisted the teacher in explaining the message of Gospels, and secondly it helped the pupils to visualise, understand and memorise the word of God in greater detail.

Notwithstanding that, there was a noticeable difference of opinion between category one and category two teachers in relation to the use of the visual arts as a means that enable an encounter with Christ. For example, in category one it was felt that the teacher needed to have expertise in this area in order to explain theological significance of the arts, whereas in category two the teachers spoke of the power of the image to create a moment of silence, awe, and transcendence. That is, the visual arts have the ability to speak for themselves. Notwithstanding that, in category three, it was believed that religious literacy amongst pupils has somewhat diminished, and that in some cases pupils had not been exposed to religious art in any great depth, yet, when encountered the response was profoundly moving, interesting and enriching.

Question two in stage two of the semi-structured interviews asked the participants if they use the visual arts as 'theological aesthetic resources' to transmit the message of Christ? If so, to what extent? An RE teacher from category one said that:

*Yes, but only to a degree as chaplaincy is separate. Faith formation is something that we don't really do in RE because we have a syllabus that we have to get through and we just don't have the time.*

For this respondent, there is a clear distinction between teaching the RE curriculum and pastoral care of the pupil. This particular statement implies that

priority is given to imparting the literal knowledge of the message of Christ over and above the spiritual understanding of the text/image. This raises the question, what is the purpose of Religious Education in Catholic schools? Among other things the Bishops of England and Wales, state that the purpose of Religious Education is as follows:

*To stimulate pupils' imagination and provoke a desire for personal meaning as revealed in the truth of the Catholic faith...The outcome of excellent Religious Education is religiously literate and engaged young people who have the knowledge, understanding and skills – appropriate to their age and capacity – to reflect spiritually, and think ethically and theologically, and who are aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life.*

This statement by the Bishops of England and Wales strongly implies that the RE teacher is responsible for equipping their pupils with knowledge and understanding of doctrines, and their spiritual formation. As Jared Dees author of *The Religion Teacher's Guide to Lesson Planning* (2021) clearly states in the section on *The RE3 Framework: Read, Reflect and Respond*:

*As religious educators, it is our duty to come up with effective ways to lead students into a relationship with God through religion. To do this we have to create meaningful experiences of encounter with Christ...In religious education, we focus on questions about meaning in two ways: 1. What does this teaching mean? And 2. What does this teaching mean to me?*<sup>507</sup>

It is clear that in some cases, 'what does this teaching mean?' has been given an overriding priority to 'what does this teaching mean to me?' within the classroom. The lack of pastoral concern, perhaps due to a misunderstanding of the role of the RE teacher, mingled with time constraints, and the pressure to get through the syllabus could mean that the pastoral duties of tutor may become a thing of the past. However, the senior teacher from category one said that:

*Yes, definitely, not only paintings but videos now that we are teaching online. Before the pandemic we did not use it so much but now we realise the value and power of images.*

And a senior teacher from category two said that:

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<sup>507</sup>Dees, J. (2021) *The Religion Teacher's Guide to Lesson Planning*. p.2. para.5. Available at: <https://www.thereligionteacher.com/guide-to-lesson-planning/>. (Accessed: 11 January 2021).

*Yes, I really delight that now the Catholic RE GCSE actually put that into the specification. It features all the big themes: Creation; Incarnation; Trinity, and Eschatology - the Last Judgement. Art is a great way to learn. With the creation of Adam, I don't say anything. First, I let the student see it, the amazing thing happens when they have seen it in reality. Immediately you have them for the whole lesson because you have them from that experience. But if you let the art speak everyone becomes involved. Everyone can see it so everyone can comment on it...Everyone can teach it, but it does depend on the knowledge, ability, and enthusiasm of the teacher for the Arts.*

A teacher from category three said that:

*I do I love using them...there was the old A Level course that had a section especially on religious art. It's gone now, which is a shame, but that was a fantastic part of the course. I absolutely loved teaching that, it was brilliant. But I use it across all key stages, and any chance that I can get to do that, and beyond in assemblies. But our sixth form is particular in that half of the students do not come from our lower school, but are from non-Catholic schools, and over half our students are from non-Catholic backgrounds.*

*It's good because even with our own students it stops you from assuming a level of knowledge that just isn't there. There is a danger teaching A level to students with mixed levels of GCSE knowledge, that is, it is safe to assume that they don't know a great deal. So, using those pieces of art helps to explain, and that's the beauty of it. And because you are looking for hooks for students that really haven't had any experience of that at all, it makes me go out more to find pieces that will speak. It does really matter if they know about Art or not.*

On the whole, it was clear that the majority of the respondents felt that use the visual arts acted as 'theological aesthetic resources' to transmit the message of Christ within a Catholic educational setting. This was something that was welcomed, and forms part of the 'new'<sup>508</sup> GCSE specifications. However, it was evident that the use of the visual arts acting as theological resources depends somewhat on the ability and enthusiasm of the teacher. Alongside that, regret was expressed that the new A Level course no longer incorporates a section on religious art.

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<sup>508</sup> The current GCSE RE course, which incorporated the arts into the syllabus, was published 12th February (2015) and was last updated on the 6th of July (2016).

The last question in stage two of the semi-structured interviews, asked whether the practitioner had ever used the visual arts in an interdisciplinary way? I.e., employed the visual arts as a means for cross-curricular activities with other colleagues/departments? A teacher from category one said that:

*Once, I have yes, with the Art department in a project to describe Heaven and Hell. They were not allowed to use words, just pictures. They were assessed by us both. She came into my class, and I went into hers. It only happened once, but it really was a nice thing to do. We do not have the time to create something visual, so it happens very rarely.*

Another teacher from category one confirmed the last teacher's point, namely that the visual arts in cross-collaboration context is underused. She stated that:

*Not overtly, because the school is not set up for that. But I do use history and geography to explain symbols like the Kairos Cross. But I don't actually engage with other members of staff from those departments.*

A teacher from category two said that:

*Yes, I have used it in Philosophy classes. There is a lot of untapped potential - time is always an issue because we have to get through the GCSE, and I always want to do more collaboration with the Art department and the English department. The thing about art is that everyone can say something about it from their discipline's point of view.*

*If I go to the National Gallery, I always take someone from another department so that they can give something from their discipline's point of view. But what I would say is that art is underused in this area on the whole.*

However, a teacher from category three said that:

*Yes, categorically, yes, in a previous school I set up a lecture series to promote RS and demonstrate that RS is an interdisciplinary subject, that it is not compartmentalised subject. So, I invited Andrew Graham Dickson, the BBC Art correspondent, to talk about Caravaggio and Christianity. I invited the Art department, the History department, and the RS department and the kids like that. It suddenly opened up that RS is not just some discrete subject independent of history, culture, and art. I think that is really important.*

*It depends on the school, but I think that RS can be the kind of Cinderella subject. So, it's important to work with other*



*departments so that the kids get to know that RS is fundamental to culture whether you believe it or not. It is absolutely fundamental if you are going to understand the history of a country, the culture of a country, or the art of a country. I say this to the pupils if you go into the National Gallery and you don't have some level of religious literacy then you will not understand half of the paintings there, and I think that is important.*

Another teacher from category three said that:

*We use it with other departments. I'm trying to think of an example. One of the big things is that in A Level RE I'm quite keen to work with the History department. They do the Reformation or the Tudors at least. Historians don't know the religious meaning of the Reformation and my students don't know the history, so it puts theology into context. So, there is great need to marry the two...*

*Although we are in a Catholic school both of our Historians are not Catholics or even practicing Christians. So, they have an interesting view on theology of Reformation, which is quite different from the theological view of the RE department. So that makes for an interesting collaboration between us, without a doubt.*

In category one utilising the visual arts as a medium for interdisciplinary and cross-curricular collaboration, on the rare occasions that it took place, seemed to be something that worked well, and was enjoyed by the pupils. In category two the visual arts were used more often, both in an interdisciplinary way and in cross-collaboration with other departments. Yet, due to 'time issues,' and the pressure to get through the GCSE RE syllabus there was a feeling that in both category one and category two that the Arts are an underused resource in this context. Whereas in category three, there was a great sense that the visual arts were utilised more often in an interdisciplinary and cross-collaboration manner, possibly because the teacher was more familiar with their subject matter.

On the whole, from the statements given, respondents from category three seem to realise the importance and value the power of the arts as a medium for interaction between departments to a much greater extent than the participants in category one and two. In short, the use of the visual arts as a means transmitting the faith in interdisciplinary and cross-collaboration activities

seemed to largely depend upon the expertise of the teacher, and the school's vision as to how much cross-curricula activity happens between departments.

### 6.2.3. The Attitudes and Feeling of the Practitioner

Stage three, the final part of the semi-structured interviews, focused on the attitudes and feeling of the practitioner with regard to the use of the visual arts within a Catholic educational setting. This section was the most in-depth part of the interview process and consisted of six questions.<sup>509</sup>

The reaction to the first question in stage three, namely whether the practitioner had come across the term 'visual theology,' from all the practitioners in categories one and two, answered a unanimous 'no.' However, some teachers did elaborate a little. A teacher from category one said that:

*To be honest no, but I could work out what it meant. It is not something that I have ever come across.*

Another teacher from category one said that:

*I feel like I have, in the sense of what we have been talking about like theological interpretation of the cross and so on. But I am not sure if I've heard of it before we started talking about it. Is it really just a buzz word? Is it really just saying visual art in RE?*

This respondent's answer 'is it really just a buzz word?' confirmed the findings from the literature review inasmuch as the term visual theology is largely unknown, and seemingly theologically underdeveloped 'Is it really just saying visual art in RE?' within a Catholic school setting.

However, a teacher from category two stated that:

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<sup>509</sup> To reiterate; the six questions in final part of the semi-structured interviews are as follows:

- a. Have you come across the term 'visual theology'? If yes, how do you understand the concept?
- b. With regard to the New Evangelisation, have you come across the term 'The Way of Beauty'? If yes, how do you understand it?
- c. Do you think that a certain level of visual literacy is required before the visual arts can be an effective means of communicating the message of Christ in a Catholic School setting?
- d. Do you think that the visual arts are an underused theological aesthetic resource for transmitting the faith in a Catholic educational context?
- e. Do you think that the visual arts help to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration in an educational setting?
- f. Do you think that a common strategy on the use of the visual arts in a Catholic educational setting would aid better cross-curricular activity with regard to transmitting the message of the Gospels?

*Well, I haven't used or heard of that term. But I imagine that it is a way into discussing theological themes, to talk about imagination using visual arts.*

There was only one practitioner out of the ten interviewed that said that he has heard of the term visual theology and understood what it meant. The senior practitioner from category three said that:

*Yes, I think I have. I am sure I have, but it's not a term I use...I understand what 'visual theology' means, I never use the term, but I understand it as the truths of faith or an encounter with God communicated through an image.*

*The desert monk Evagrius said that 'A theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian.' Theology isn't something done by the academics in the universities. Properly speaking it done on your knees, it is the heart engaging. So visual theology would be stopping by a painting, and saying, gosh this is speaking to me, it is speaking to more than I could have imagined. It is actually communicating to me something I would not have guessed if I had not stopped for 5mins in front of the painting. Beginning to notice, being drawn in, and going beyond, and that's visual theology, the study of God through the visual arts.*

Although the term visual theology was not used by the practitioners interviewed, this response demonstrates that the newly emergent concept is beginning to filter down into the Catholic educational system. It shows that images have the power to speak to the beholder in a profoundly theological way that moves them beyond the image into the realms of the divine.

Question two, stage three of the semi-structured interviews was concerned with the New Evangelisation pastoral approach, which advocates utilising '*The Way of Beauty*' (*Via pulchritudinis*) as a pathway for evangelisation and dialogue. As the findings from the literature review established, the newly emergent term 'visual theology' is largely found within academic circles, whereas '*The Way of Beauty*' (*via pulchritudinis*), which features in many key Catholic Church documents,<sup>510</sup> acts as an apt pastoral approach to re-propose the Gospel and evangelise modern day culture in a new way.<sup>511</sup> What is more, theologians, and all the Popes since Vatican II, namely, Pope John XXIII, Pope John Paul II,

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<sup>510</sup> See the literature review of thesis for an in-depth analysis of how *The Way of Beauty* is understood by the Catholic Church. Also see Pontifical Council for Culture. (2006) *Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly: The Via Pulchritudinis, Way of Beauty: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*.

<sup>511</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*. (1965).

Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have all used and developed the meaning of *The Way of Beauty* (*via pulchritudinis*).

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) the Holy Father Pope Francis states that: ‘*Every form of catechesis would do well to attend to the ‘Way of Beauty’ (via pulchritudinis) (para.167).*’ However, from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews only one teacher from category one had come across the term *The Way of Beauty*. The senior teacher from category one said that:

*Yes, briefly, I wouldn't say that I'm confident on it, but I have come across it.*

Likewise, in category two there was only one teacher who had heard of the term *The Way of Beauty*. The senior teacher from category two said that:

*Yes, I have. Definitely, I was wondering how I know about that, but not visual theology. Because of Pope Francis I often connect with Vatican News and read little articles from there. Pope Francis's Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) is part of the GCSE specification, and so my knowledge of key Catholic texts has grown since I have been teaching this new GCSE.*

*In the last year it's been such a challenge for me personally. I've talked about my Salvation Army background but in Lockdown in the last year I've really had to reconsider where I am in my own faith perspective. I'm gravitating so much towards the Catholicism, but I'm feeling loyalty to my Salvation Army background. I think that it is because of this focus on beauty, the focus on images to talk about the image of God the ultimate image that is Jesus that I find so appealing, and that it speaks to me on a very deep level. So yes, I have read quite a lot about The Way of Beauty in the last year.*

A teacher from category three said that:

*No, I haven't. But I suppose it's the value of aesthetics not from a subjective view, but from an objective one, which sometimes is overlooked.*

Another teacher from category three stated that:

*Again I haven't. But I was a huge fan of Hans von Balthasar and his idea that the Beauty was one of the neglected transcendentals. So again I think I know what it means without actually coming across that actual phrase.*

Again, the only participant who had come across the term, *The Way of Beauty*, from category three was the senior practitioner. He said that:

*Yes, absolutely, in Vita Consecrata by Pope John Paul II, he talks about the religious life as The Way of Beauty. Moreover, the whole church is called to follow in The Way of Beauty.*

*I believe that The Way of Beauty is so important for the communication of the faith. Pope Benedict XVI also used that, and I think that the Church communicates best when it communicates the beautiful. Into that would feed Hans Urs von Balthasar and his Theological Aesthetics.*

In category three of the status classification model, albeit that only the senior practitioner had come across the term *The Way of Beauty*, they all had a good understanding of what it might mean. They both mentioned the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar's major project of returning Beauty to the main artery of theological thinking through his Theological Aesthetics. Notwithstanding that, it is clear from these statements that *The Way of Beauty* needs to be better understood by those who teach RE, as the senior teacher in category two stated, 'it is part of the GCSE RE specifications.'<sup>512</sup> Therefore, in-service training days, (TD's), on what *The Way of Beauty* is, and how it is important pastoral pathway to communicating the faith would be of benefit to all those who are concerned with delivering RE.

Question three of the final stage of the semi-structured interviews was concerned with whether the teacher believed that a certain level of visual literacy is required before the visual arts can be considered as an effective means of communicating the message of Christ in a Catholic School setting. A teacher from category one stated that:

*I don't think so. I think that it actually enables students to engage with it. I don't think you need any knowledge of visual literacy beforehand.*

The senior teacher from category one explained that:

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<sup>512</sup> Nine out of the ten the participants, who took part in this research, teach GCSE RE. Alongside that, three out of the ten participants also teach A level RE.

*I think there is none required for students, I don't think students need that, but the person delivering does. Because as a head of department I could take a look at a work of art and link that to doctrines. In the climate of RE departments that we have now, where some are fully stocked with Catholics and some with people who have come to faith, or of different Christian denominations, to look at that painting and understand it is a skill, but also requires a lot of understanding of Catholicism and its practices. Because when you are using that in a classroom a child can ask any question. I'm not saying that we always know all the answers, but if you have someone with a strong foundation in Catholic theology and Catholic doctrine you could normally work something out.*

*So I would say that yes you need to have solid understanding of the Catholic doctrines that are linked to that piece of art, but also have the confidence when you are discussing that with students. Because sometimes they can be quite annoyed about what you are talking about, and you need to be able to stick to the theological line, and that can be quite hard.*

A teacher from category two stated that:

*So if you look at the Stations of the Cross they tell a story without you needing to know much. But if you look at other things like the Alpha and Omega symbols then you need to know a bit about it. It is a bit of both.*

*When I use Michelangelo's Creation of Adam they do not need to have any prior knowledge of visual literacy, that is, art history.*

A teacher from category three said that:

*I think, not necessarily. I think if of my own family background, and I think of my grandparents they wouldn't have had a visual literacy, but they understood and knew the faith. And I think of the importance of stained glass windows, known historically as the Bible of the Poor. I don't think they need a visual literacy, what is more important is that they have a religious literacy.*

A teacher from category three stated that:

*In my experience young people are not always familiar with art and artists many would not have heard of the Sienese painter Duccio di Buoninsegna before me mentioning it. So people often don't have a visual literacy, but that's why you try to explain it as you go along. You don't assume that people know the artist, but I would assume that people looking at Vermeer's 'Martha and Mary' would have heard the story of Martha and Mary because most Catholics and Anglicans would have.*

*I am generally speaking to people who are from a faith background. So I take a basic Christian education for granted. So I don't have to explain the very basics. I spend time explaining*

*each element within a painting to draw out the meaning. I am quite aware that before reading up on the painting I would not have know that either. So we learn all time, we spot things all the time. All people want to be taken on a journey to go deeper in that story, so the next time they see that painting they know why that lily is there, and what it represents, or why does that angel have wings? Or does it make any difference? Why is he kneeling? Or why is he standing? Some people would think that all depictions of the Annunciation are the same wouldn't they. They wouldn't think, oh perhaps these are different moments within the Annunciation.<sup>513</sup> I didn't use to think that really. You learn as you go along. Do they need it (visual literacy)? Not very much, they will learn over time, we learn bit by bit.*

All responses given to the third question in the final stage of the semi-structured interview process made clear that there was no need for students to have any prior knowledge of visual literacy (art history) for the arts to be an effective means of transmitting the faith. Moreover, some teachers felt that the religious literacy of the pupils was far more important than visual literacy in relation to understanding faith through the arts.

Notwithstanding that, four teachers said that it would be beneficial for the teacher to have both visual literacy and religious literacy with regard to utilising the arts in a Catholic educational setting. One teacher explained that because nowadays RE teachers tend to come from an array of different faith backgrounds, the person delivering a subject utilising the visual arts ought to have a certain level of visual literacy, a good understanding of Catholic teachings, and its practices. It was deemed that this would safeguard against personal opinion, and any possible misinterpretation of Catholic doctrines and Catholic practices.

This confirmed the findings of the literature review inasmuch Balthasar (1982), Baxandall (1988), and Clark (2005) all stated that visual perception, which is vital to our understanding, depends somewhat on what we bring to the picture, which is achieved with innate skills that are developed out of our experiences. In short, how we interpret, understand, and experience a work of art is heavily influenced by our education, our culture, and our faith background.

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<sup>513</sup> Here the practitioner is speaking about how Early Italian Renaissance artists depicted different moments within the Angelic colloquy of the Annunciation. See *The Five Laudable States of the Virgin Mary* in Chapter 4 of this thesis for a more detailed explanation.

Question four of the final stage of the semi-structured interviews focused on whether or not the practitioner thought that the visual arts were an underused theological aesthetic resource for transmitting the faith in a Catholic educational context. A teacher from category one said that:

*Yeah, I do. I think children are a lot more visual than adults, and I think that sometimes we forget that.*

A teacher from category two said that:

*I think that unless you have a love for it, I think that you would be scared to use it. And I don't think that everyone who looks at a picture of a piece of art can interpret it. I think that if you are working for the Diocese then some training in this area would be amazing. Because, we don't have the good Catholic RE teachers teaching RE to every single year group. I wouldn't say that it would be an effortless way, but if they were trained it would be a fantastic way of helping our children to celebrate our religion.*

Another teacher from category two said that:

*Absolutely, it could be used more. With modern technology this is something that could be used more and more. It simply would not have been possible before, well not on the scale that it could be now.*

A teacher from category three said that:

*Yeah, I think so. I kind of think that it has been underused. And again, from my little knowledge of von Balthasar, he understood that very often the Church's emphasis is on dogma, moral goodness, and truth, and that there hasn't been an appropriate emphasis on beauty as one of the transcendentals. And I think that that feeds down into normal educational practice and theological reflection...But I think that it is something that could pay dividends if it were developed, but that requires money.*

Another teacher from category three stated:

*Absolutely, one hundred percent, if I were being critical then I would say that it is massively underused and poorly used. When you ask students to create a piece of work for something, and my pet irritation is kinder when students think, oh its RE so I'd do a cross. I'm not saying that I expect them to create fantastic works of art. But it is the default image even for students of RE GCSE level. But if they had more exposure to art, you would be able to explore more just a cross in that sense. And I think that a combination of that staff are nervous, and the staff don't really know themselves to be honest. The Continued Professional Development (CPD) for staff comes to mind.*



The responses to question four strongly indicate that within Catholic educational settings the visual arts are an underused theological aesthetic resource for transmitting the faith. The main reason given for this was twofold: firstly, in the past technology was not as advanced as it is today, and secondly, it was reckoned that some teachers were not fully equipped, that is, fully trained in this field. However, as one teacher pointed out, to ratify this situation it requires money. In short, the responses given strongly suggest that a combination of investment in both training and resources is urgently needed in this area.

Question five in the final stage of the semi-structured interviews was concerned with whether the practitioners held that the visual arts help to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration in a Catholic educational setting. A teacher from category one said that:

*Yes, we have use them a couple of times in Catholic Social Teaching, which is supposed to feed through the entirety of the whole school. The truth is that we rarely have the time to do it. However, I do think the visual works better the using literature as an interdisciplinary resource.*

Another teacher from category one simply stated:

*I don't know. I simply have never thought about it.*

While the senior leader from category one stated that:

*I think that it can help with working with the Art department. To see artwork can be a really enriching experience, especially if you have an Art department that is up to date, or one that goes into the abstract. So, it can work, and it can help, and it can be done well. When that happens it's a beautiful thing to behold, to be part of, and have in your school.*

*But as an RE department, you have to be receptive to someone else being involved in faith formation, and leading sessions, which is trusting because that art teaching may not be Catholic, and may have some remarkably interesting ideas with art. But also, that the Art department realises the importance of the work being done...So if you were to work with others, then you would need to have some noticeably clear discussions with those whom you are collaborating with.*

In category two a teacher said that:

*Yes, absolutely without a doubt, in fact this conversation has challenged and inspired me to do more with my colleagues. Of course, everyone has a different angle, and it is about finding those common connections and discussing them.*

The senior teacher from category two stated:

*Yes, probably the best possible educational setting is when there is fusing together to celebrate and glorify God, in that sense, yes. We have done a lot of work in our school on this in relation to section 48 inspection from the bishop. They ask every department, what are they doing to promote the Catholic faith? So that's what came to mind when you asked that question. Where every department takes that seriously and are not just doing it to fill in a form, would happen when you are having some sort of inspection. If it's genuine then I think that is when it is extremely exciting.*

*In my school we have a lovely community of Christians across all the different departments, and we have physics teachers talking about the origins of the universe to Christians who are absolutely committed. And if that were happening with art then the biology department could talk about Michelangelo's Adam to the children. Then I think that it is education at its best. On ground level with the demands of school life it is an ideal that we are all reaching for. It happens every now and then, but I don't think it happens all the time.*

Another teacher from category two said that:

*Yes, 100 percent, I have to be very honest here, I worked in the same school for 16 years and then had a small break and I have now been working for the last three years in that same school. In the past we did have lots of cross-curricular projects. I worked with the Science, and Geography departments, but since the new curriculum<sup>514</sup> was introduced, we haven't done any of that type of thing. I think that it was because it was so new to every department and discipline. Then Covid came along. So, we are hoping to return to interdisciplinary collaboration, but we have not as yet.*

A teacher from category three said that:

*Yes, I did a one off with the Drama department. I took Caravaggio's Emmaus Supper painting and got the kids to dress up in costume and asked them to bring in fruit and a chicken. We asked the Drama department to set up the lights and took a picture of the reenactment of the painting. It was a lot of work, but the kids*

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<sup>514</sup> As mentioned elsewhere, the new curriculum which this teacher is referring to, was published 12th February (2015), and was last updated on the 6th of July (2016).

*really enjoyed it. But that is a one off, it would not be a regular thing.*

On the whole, these statements seem to suggest that utilising the visual arts as a medium to facilitate cross-collaboration with other departments with the express purpose of transmitting the faith was a worthwhile activity inasmuch as the students enjoyed it, and that it was education at its best. However, it was apparent that collaborating with other departments seems to be something that rarely happens. For some, it simply was not on the agenda, while for others it was an ideal to strive for. This is possibly due to time management, and to a certain extent, the Covid crisis.

The final question in of the semi-structured interview ask if the practitioners thought that a common strategy on the use of the visual arts in a Catholic educational setting would aid better cross-curricular activity with regard to transmitting the message of the Gospels? A teacher from category one said that:

*Yeah, I think that at least having some examples of what could be done, that would be useful. Very often when you are teaching, the phrase 'don't reinvent the wheel' gets bandied about. It can be quite time consuming if you have to come up with something from scratch. So, if there were not necessarily strategies, but examples of how this could be worked then would make it easier for staff to do. It would also make it easier to transmit the message of the Gospels, because you have to remember that a lot of people teaching in Catholic Schools, certainly those who teaching outside of the RE department, won't be Catholic. So, for them, if they have to deliver something on the message of the Gospels, they don't know that much about it. And if they see a few examples then they may be able to get a better understanding of themselves.*

A teacher from category two said that:

*Yeah, I think that is beneficial anytime when we make something explicit and signpost people, so yes...People are crying out for clarity, and I don't think that it would be restrictive, because around the matter of faith people are extremely nervous, because unless they are practicing themselves, they won't want to get things wrong. And I think that sometimes having things spelt out, like the terms, then you can play right up to the boundaries. But if you don't know where the boundaries are then you play in that narrow space. But if you know what is good then you can go a bit further.*

A senior teacher from category three said that:

*I think in terms of strategies I suppose suggestions, exemplars or case studies would help; staff are always looking for examples. There is no criticism of staff wanting to use the Arts, but half the time they are thinking I don't know what to do. So, if you give someone some examples then they would take it. So, it's just that initial start that is lacking for some staff.*

*Resources and how they can be used in the classroom; if I go back to that old A Level course that we used to do before it was all changed, that whole section on religious art was probably the best thing that I have seen in terms of visual theology in 20 years of teaching. It was genius, and on the back of that I took students to London to the National Gallery and the Tate Modern and used that as springboard for those students who would never have seen art, or if they did go and see it for themselves, they might not understand the relevance of it, and where it fits in with theology. So, if you gave staff an example of how art is used, and how it can be taken forward I am sure more and more staff would use it. One thing that needs to improve is the level of religious literacy.*

In all three categories, the responses given to the last question in the final stage of the semi-structured interviews, made clear that readily available examples, exemplars, and case studies on the how the arts could better aid the transmission of the Gospel message both on an individual basis, and in an interdisciplinary setting would be desirable, and greatly appreciated. It was also supposed that a common strategy, in the form of appropriate frameworks and models, would help teachers coming from other Christian denominations, faiths, and those of no faith to feel more confident in expressing the Catholic ethos of the school. Moreover, it is clear from the qualitative fieldwork research process that even teachers who are practicing Catholics very often do not have sufficient time to create something from scratch. Therefore, this suggests that readily available aids and teacher training would lend itself to good practice.

### **6.3. Analysis of Quantitative Fieldwork Research**

#### **6.3.1. JISC - The Online Survey**

In this thesis, the main purpose and function of the Jisc online survey is that it acted as a comparator to the findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Whilst the semi-structured interviews benefited from face-to-face in-depth dialogue, which enabled the researcher to posit prompt questions, the

online survey had the advantage of maintaining the anonymity not only of the participants but also that of the researcher. Consequently, the online survey avoided any potential bias, or undue influence that the researcher may have over the interviewed population. In doing so, it provided a greater degree of objectivity.

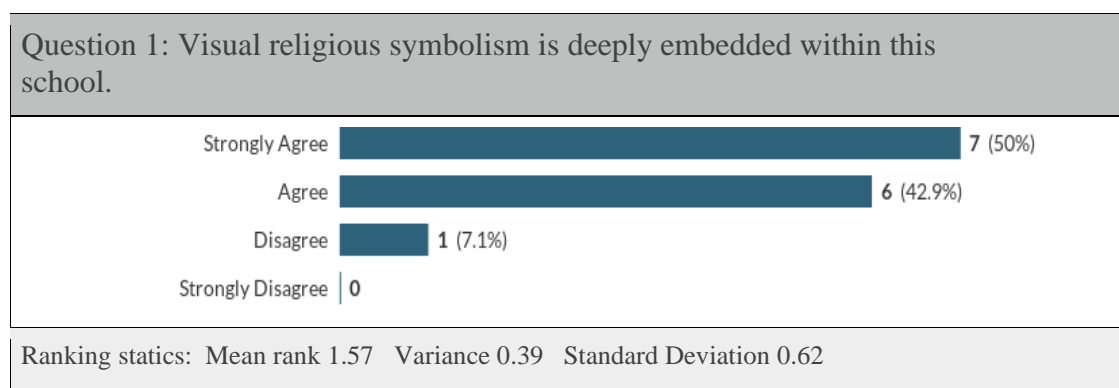
As stated in chapter five the Jisc online survey, the quantitative aspect of the fieldwork research, was devised to ascertain; to what extent the visual arts are used in a Catholic educational setting as a means of increasing spiritual capital amongst the pupil population. The survey focused on the interpretative perspectives of professional teachers in a co-educational Roman Catholic school, which was originally founded by a Religious Order, which is now run by the laity. Out of a possible 101 teacher representatives 14 took part.

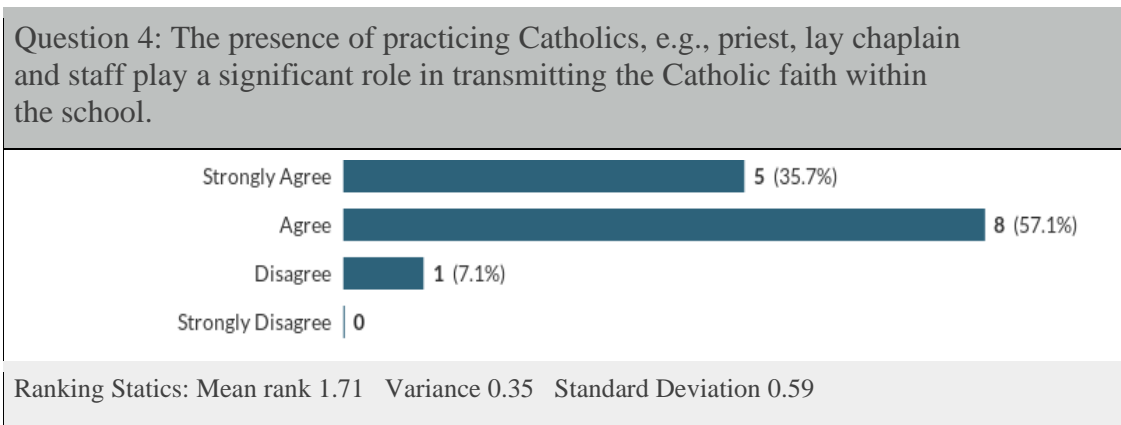
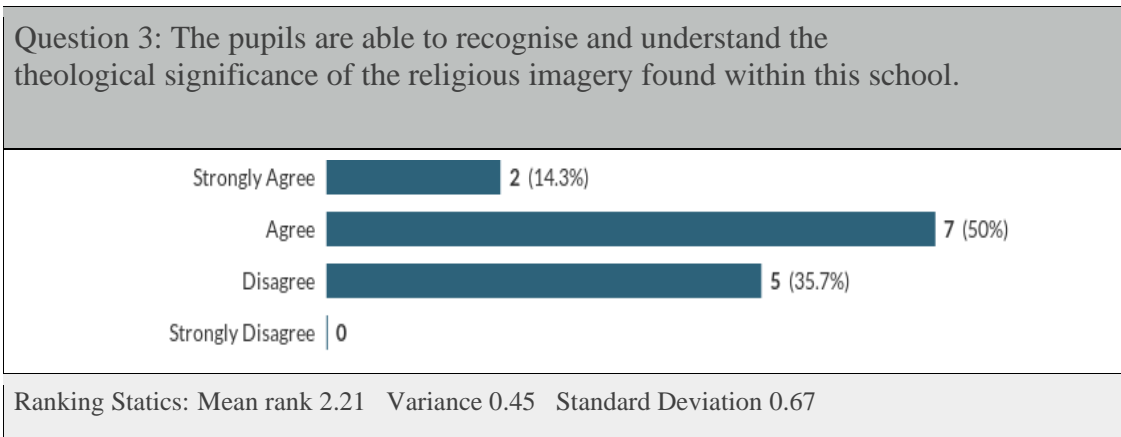
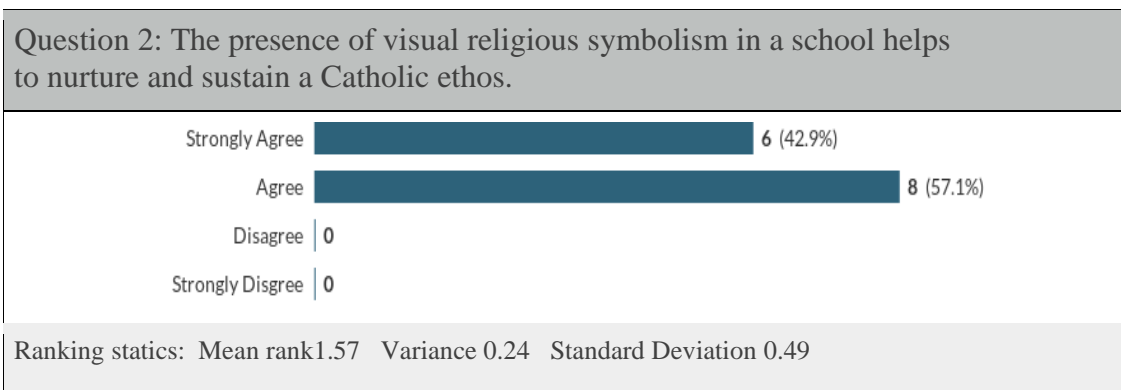
The Jisc online survey, on the use of the visual arts in a Catholic educational setting, consisted of a set of twenty questions, and was divided into three sections:

- The School Environment (4 questions)
- The Role of Visual Arts in the Classroom (11 questions)
- Understanding the Purpose of the Arts in Schools (5 questions)

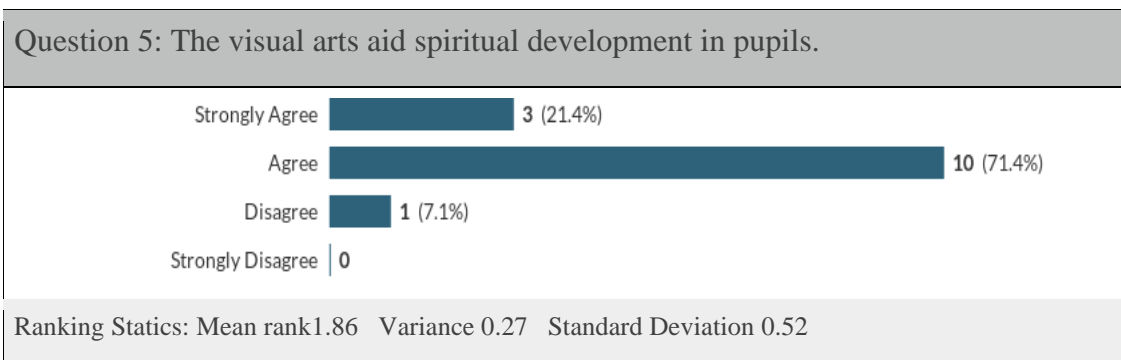
### 6.3.2. Tabulated Results of the JISC Online Survey

#### 6.3.3. JISC Survey - Section One - Questions & Responses 1- 4

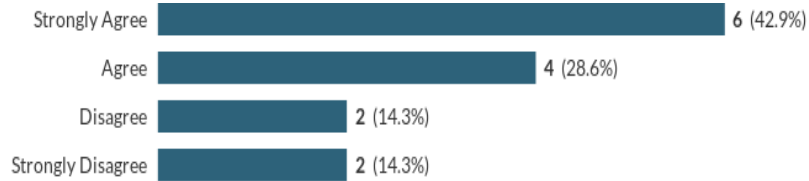




#### 6.3.4. JISC Survey - Section Two - Questions & Responses 5 -16

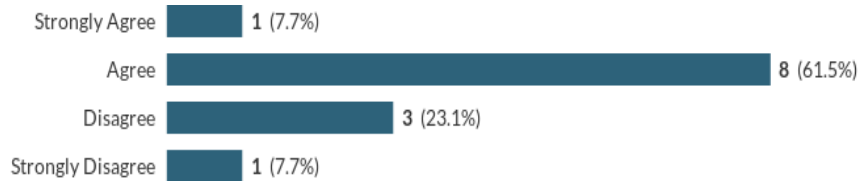


Question 6: I often use the visual arts to explain biblical, doctrinal, and theological concepts to my pupils in my lessons.



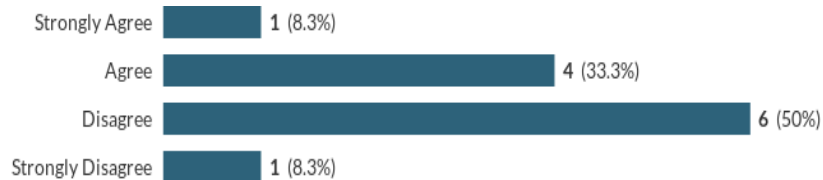
Ranking Statics: Mean rank 2.0 Variance 1.14 Standard Deviation 1.07

Question 7: In this school the visual arts are widely used as theological aesthetic resources for transmitting the Christian message.



Ranking Statics: Mean rank 2.31 Variance 0.52 Standard Deviation 0.72

Question 8: In this school the visual arts play a vital role in cross-curricular collaboration activities. They are used with the express purpose of proclaiming, maintaining, and nurturing the Catholic faith.



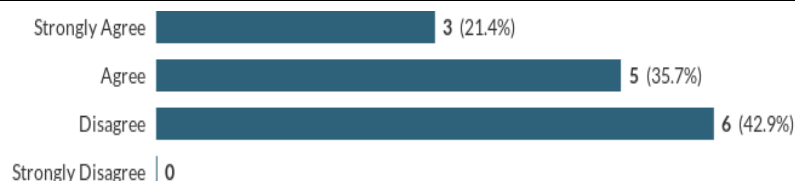
Ranking Statics: Mean rank 2.58 Variance 0.58 Standard Deviation 0.76

Question 9: The visual arts are useful aids for creating a broad and balanced curriculum.



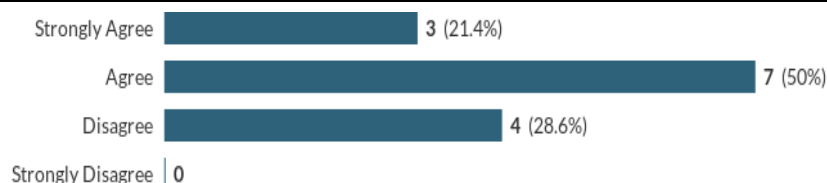
Ranking Statics: Mean rank 1.57 Variance 0.24 Standard Deviation 0.49

Question 10: Some degree of visual literacy is required before the visual arts can be considered to be an effective means of communicating the Catholic faith in the classroom.



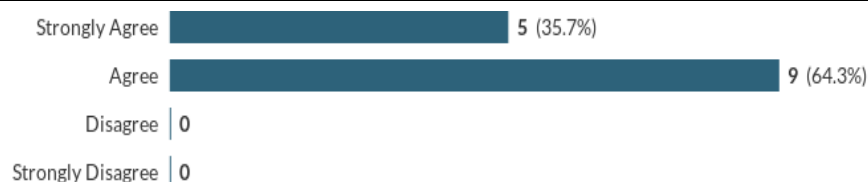
Ranking Statics: Mean rank 2.21 Variance 0.6 Standard Deviation 0.77

Question 11: The visual arts are an underused resource with regard to transmitting the Catholic faith in an educational setting.



Ranking Statics: Mean rank 2.07 Variance 0.49 Standard Deviation 0.7

Question: 12: The visual arts point beyond themselves and inspire pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding and gain life skills in all aspects of education.



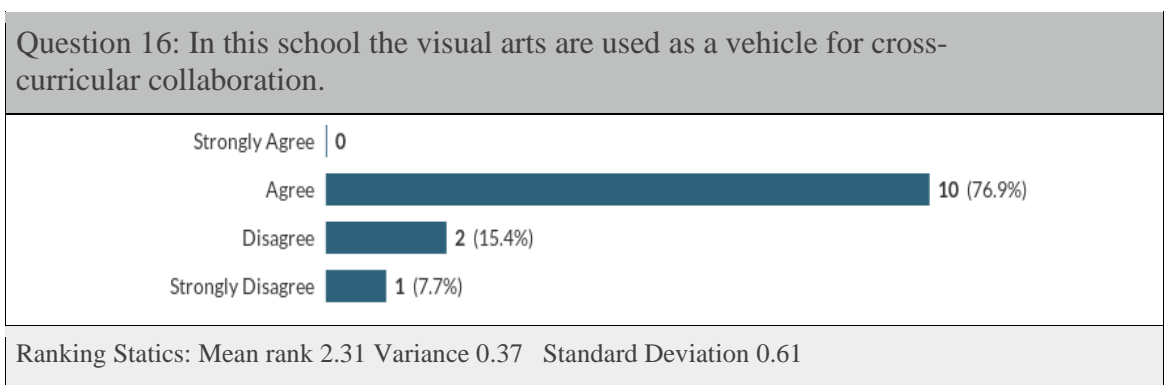
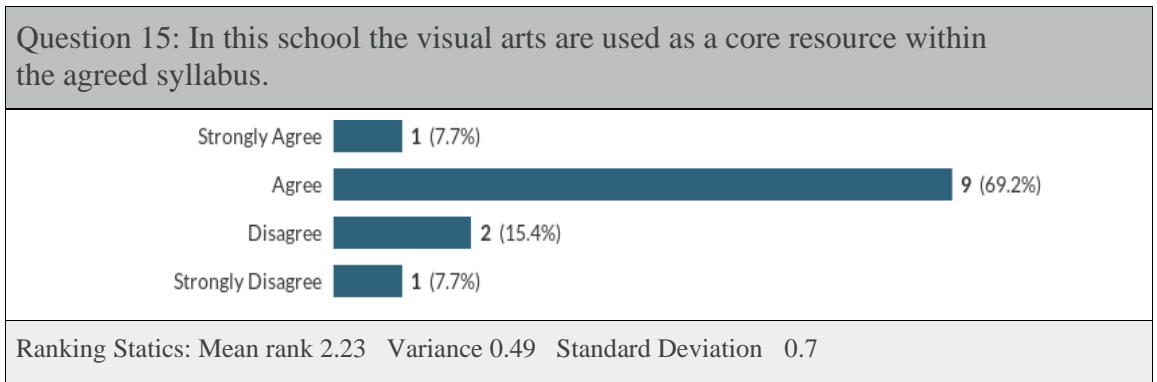
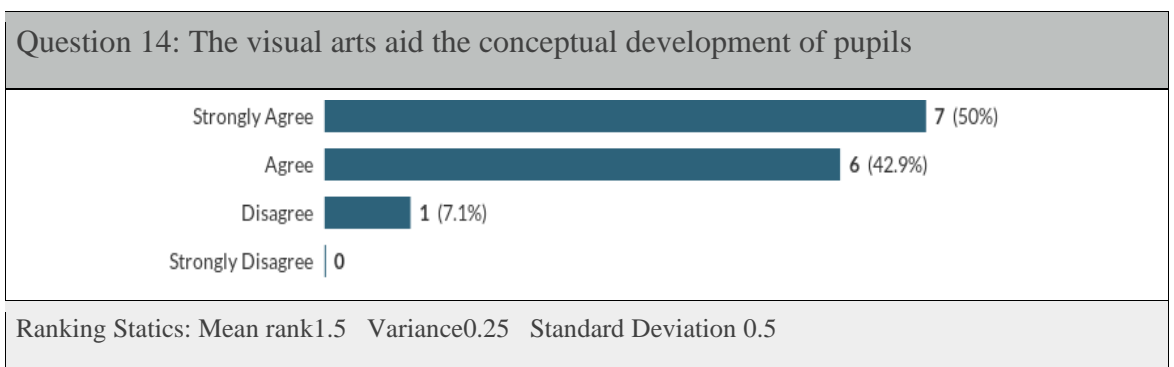
Ranking Statics: Mean rank 1.64 Variance 0.23 Standard Deviation 0.48

Question 13: Fieldtrips to art galleries and museums are instrumental in helping pupils to link their faith and values to the culture which surrounds them.

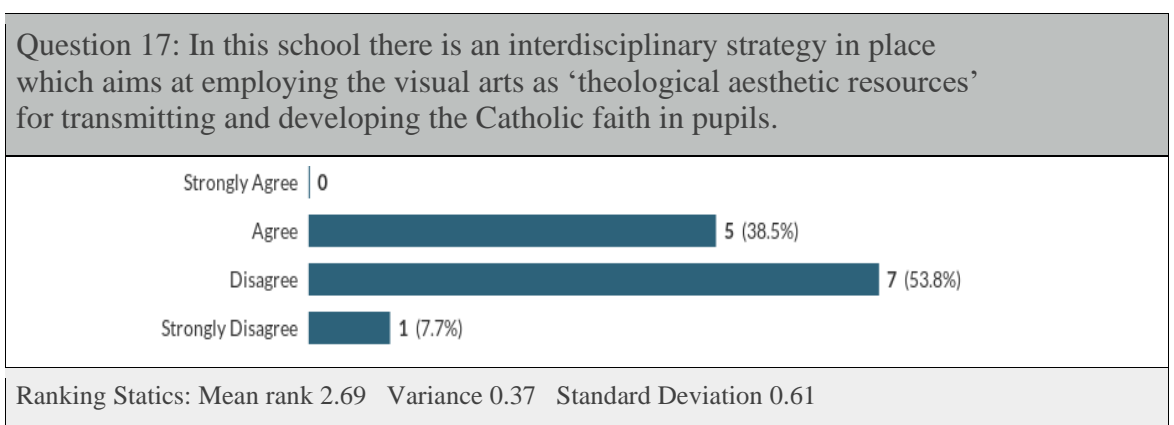


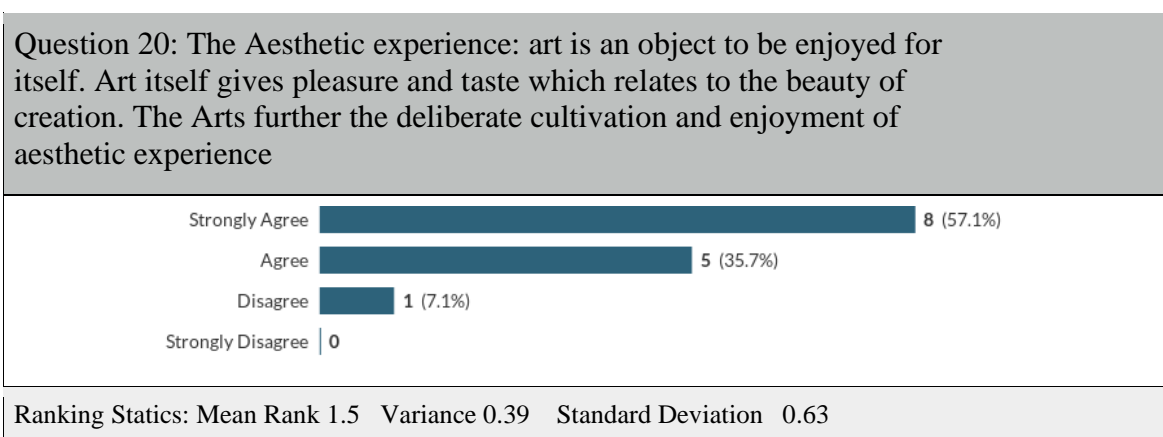
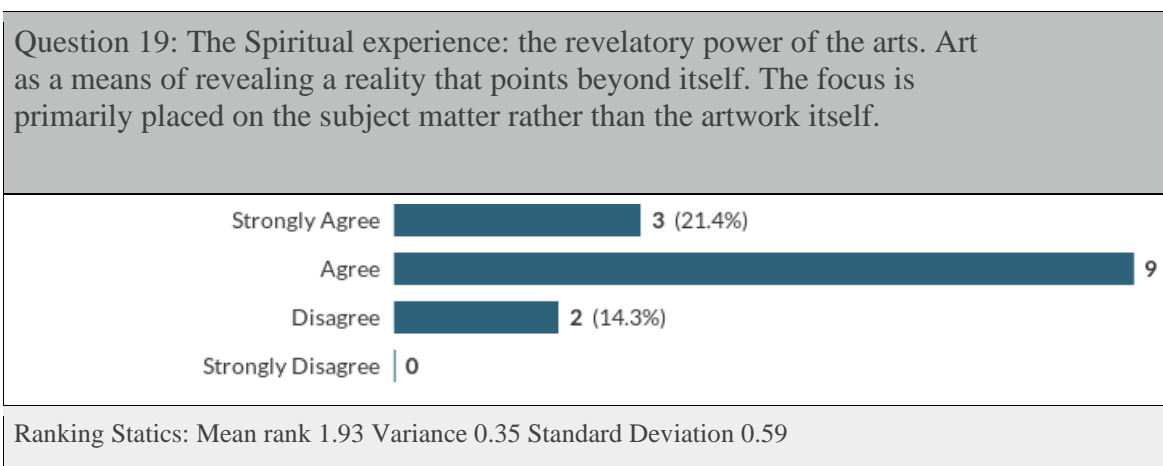
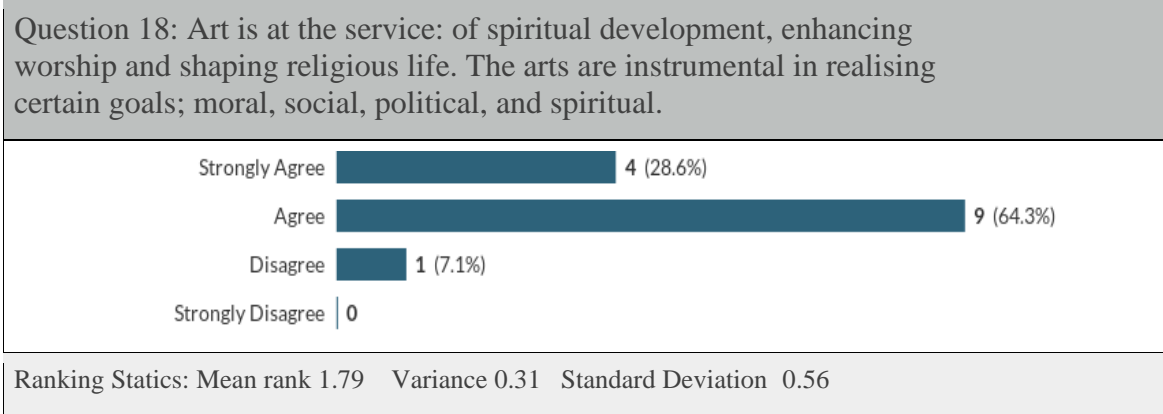
Ranking Statics: Mean rank 1.57 Variance 0.39 Standard Deviation 0.62





### 6.3.5. JISC Survey - Section Three - Questions & Responses 17-20





#### 6.4. Response Rate of the Online Survey

The response rate to the Jisc survey on *the use of the visual arts in a Catholic school setting* was 13%, which reflects the average survey response rate based on external surveys. As the expert reporting survey company *PeoplePulse Research*<sup>515</sup> states, medium length surveys, which consist of 12-25 questions, on average generate the following results,

<sup>515</sup> PeoplePulse. *Survey Response Rates*. Available at: [peoplepulse.com/resources/useful-articles/survey-response-rates/](https://peoplepulse.com/resources/useful-articles/survey-response-rates/). (Accessed:16 January 2022).

*Internal surveys will generally receive a 30-40% response rate or more on average, compared to an average 10-15% response rate for external surveys.*<sup>516</sup>

The results of the data collection of the Jisc survey, although lower than the average internal<sup>517</sup> survey rates, demonstrate just over a midpoint response in relation to the average response rate of external surveys. However, according to *QuestionPro Research*, an international survey provider,

*Internal surveys have between a 30%-40% completion rate whereas external surveys have between a 10%-13% completion rate.*<sup>518</sup>

According to *QuestionPro Research* this places the Jisc online survey on *the use of the visual arts in a Catholic school setting* at the top end of the completion rate of external surveys, which could indicate the salience of the survey of those who took part. Two reminders were sent out to the person responsible for the distribution of the survey in the school, which may have enhanced the rate of response. Research carried out by both *PeoplePulse* and *QuestionPro* have shown that sending more than two reminders results in a loss of interest.

#### **6.4.1. Definition of Terms**

##### **Mean Rank**

In statistics the arithmetic mean, or the mean, is the simple average, which is the most commonly used measure. For example, if you take question 11, which states, *The visual arts are an underused resource with regard to transmitting the Catholic faith in an educational setting*, from the Jisc online survey results, the mean rank was 2.07. The meaning is found by dividing the average response by the number of responses, which in this case indicates the respondents largely agreed with the statement, namely 71.4%.

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<sup>516</sup> PeoplePulse. *Survey Response Rates*. Available at: [peoplepulse.com/resources/useful-articles/survey-response-rates/](https://peoplepulse.com/resources/useful-articles/survey-response-rates/). (Accessed: 16 January 2022).

<sup>517</sup> According to research the difference between the internal and external response rates may be due to association and loyalty to the association in question. Cf. *PeoplePulse and QuestionPro*. (January: 2022).

<sup>518</sup> QuestionPro. *Survey Response Rate: What it is & how to make it better*. Available at: <https://www.questionpro.com/blog/good-survey-response-rate/>. (Accessed: 17 January 2022).

## Variance & Standard Deviations

The variance is simply the average of the squared differences of the mean, while the standard deviation is the squared root of the variance.<sup>519</sup>

### 6.4.2. The School Environment

The first stage of the Jisc online survey on *the use of visual arts in a Catholic school setting* consist of four questions. The main area of interest in this section of the survey relates to the impact that visual religious symbolism has on the pupil population within the school environment.

Question one in the first section of the online survey was concerned with the amount of the religious symbolism found within the school environment. The results culminated in a mean rank of 1.57. This demonstrated that the vast majority of respondents either agreed (42.9%) or strongly agreed (50%), resulting in combined total of 92.9%, who said that the visual arts were deeply embedded within the school. This verified the findings from the semi-structured in-depth interviews, namely that the schools which are affiliated with Religious orders tend to have a good standard of religious symbolism within them.

With regard to the second question in this section of the survey, namely whether the presence of visual religious symbolism in a school helps to nurture and sustain a Catholic ethos, the participants either strongly agreed (42.1%) or agreed (57.1 %) with the statement. This meant that 100% of the respondents agreed albeit in varying degree that religious symbolism helps to aid and maintain a Catholic ethos. Notwithstanding that, the responses to question three of the survey in this section revealed that 35.7% of the pupils would not understand the theological significance of the religious symbolism located within the school. This seemed to affirm the findings of both the literature review and the semi-structured interviews, namely that the religious literacy of the pupils in Catholic education is in decline. Equally it may suggest that the pupils who are not familiar with the meaning of the religious artifacts within the school are not from a faith background.

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<sup>519</sup>Cf. Pierce, Rod. (2021) *Math is Fun*. Available at: <https://www.mathsisfun.com/data/standard-deviation.html>. (Accessed: 17 January 2022).

On the whole, compared to the results emanating from the in-depth semi-structured interviews the outcomes from the first section of the Jisc online survey were more optimistic with regard to the level of religious literacy amongst pupils. The main difference that emerged from the interviewees of the semi-structured interviews was that the teachers tended to compare their own faith formation background to the pupils that they teach. Whereas the respondents who participated in the Jisc online survey merely stated that over a third of the pupils do not understand the theological meaning of the religious symbolism found within the school.

Notwithstanding that, what was of significance in section one of the Jisc online survey was that 92.9% of the respondents of the survey either agreed (57.1%) or strongly agreed (35.7%) that the presence of a priest, teacher or persons of faith play a significant role in transmitting the Catholic faith within the school. This reflected and supported the findings of the semi-structured interviews, namely that the visual arts are useful in increasing spiritual capital of the faithful, but the presence of persons of faith had a stronger impact on their faith formation. That is, the outcomes from the semi-structured interviews and the findings of the literature review highlighted that those teachers who modelled and adopted Jesus' style of ministry were highly significant in terms of passing on the faith.<sup>520</sup> The extent to which participants focused on and referred to the impact that persons of faith had on them in terms of 'formation influences' compared to the visual arts was clearly evident.

However, as the sociologist Peter Berger states in *The Sacred Canopy* (1990), something has a greater degree of plausibility if there are visible symbols of it.<sup>521</sup> What this means is that teachers who model their ministry on Jesus have a greater degree of plausibility when they are supported by visual representation. As Lydon states,

*It is easier, therefore, to be influenced by a religious charism if one is surrounded by those who are visibly religious...Berger's*

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<sup>520</sup> For an in-depth discussion on modelling Jesus' style of ministry see Lydon. (2011) *The Contemporary Catholic Teacher*. Chapter 3. pp.67-71.

<sup>521</sup> Cf. Berger, P. (1990) *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Anchor Press.

*theory that, at the level of the individual...means that one's acceptance of a belief system depends on participation in networks of individuals who share that belief system. In these networks or plausibility structures, the individual engages in conversation with significant others who confirm or reinforce his or her definitions of reality, ensuring that the definitions remain credible.*<sup>522</sup>

Here Lydon is suggesting that Berger's theory, 'plausibility structures,' is best underpinned and understood when there are persons of faith who are visually recognisable and engage in communication. The outcomes from the semi-structured interviews brought to light that visual imagery, the arts, added to the reality of the belief system by depicting the stories of the Gospel and people of faith in pictorial form, namely Jesus and the Saints in light. That is, the visual arts reinforce and add credibility to the teachers who model their ministry on Jesus in a Catholic educational setting (and possibly elsewhere).

#### **6.4.3. The Role of Visual Arts in the Classroom**

In the second section of the Jisc online survey teachers were asked about the role that the visual arts play within the classroom. This was the largest and most in-depth section of the survey consisting of eleven questions.

Despite 100% of the respondents from the survey either agreeing (64.3%) or strongly agreeing (35.7%) with the statement that the visual arts point beyond themselves and inspire pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding and gain life skills in all aspects of education, 58.3% said that they did not use the visual arts in cross-curricular collaboration activities. These figures resembled the findings from the in-depth interviews, inasmuch as the majority of teachers who took part stated that cross-curricular activities were not commonplace. That is, to reiterate, all the teachers in categories one and two of the status classification models said that interdisciplinary events were either an ideal to strive for, or not on the agenda. This is somewhat surprising given that (92.9%) of the respondents of the survey either agreed (71.5%) or strongly agreed (21.4%) that visual arts aid spiritual development in pupils.

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<sup>522</sup> Lydon. (2011) p.249.

Notwithstanding that, 100% of the survey respondents agreed that field trips to art galleries and museums are instrumental in helping pupils to link their faith and values to the culture which surrounds them (50% agreed and 50% strongly agreed). This implies that the visual arts are recognised by the teachers as valuable theological aesthetic resources, and yet they are not used as fully as they could be. Again, this verified the statements from the interviewees of the semi-structured interviews inasmuch as the majority of the respondents of the status classification model said that the visual arts are an underused resource for the spiritual and educational development of pupils.

#### **6.4.4. Understanding the Purpose of the Arts in Schools**

The closing section of the online survey was concerned with understanding the purpose of the arts within a Catholic school setting.

In answer to the statement, *in this school there is an interdisciplinary strategy in place which aims at employing the visual arts as 'theological aesthetic resources' for transmitting and developing the Catholic faith in pupils*, 61.5% of the respondents said that they disagreed. This response shed light upon the lack of interdisciplinary activities within the school. This confirmed the findings of the in-depth interviews inasmuch as many of the teachers who were interviewed said that interdisciplinary strategies were not part of school policy. That is, interdisciplinary events happen on occasion, but not in general, and when they did happen were largely the initiative of individual teachers.

Alongside that, there were three statements which were dedicated to discovering how the respondent understood the function of the visual arts within a Catholic school setting, namely, *Art is at the service of spiritual development* (q.18); *the arts as enablers of spiritual experience* (q.19), and *the arts as an aesthetic experience* (q.20). Question 19 scored the highest mean rank at 1.93, compared to question 18 with a mean rank of 1.79, and question 20, which had the lowest mean rank of 1.5. This confirmed the findings of the literature review, namely that from a historical theological point of view the visual arts function primarily as aids to evoke a spiritual encounter, which

points beyond itself, thus, enabling the beholder to encounter that which it beholds.

At this point it is appropriate to conclude this chapter with a summary of the findings in relation to the research questions posited in 1.5. of this thesis.

## **6.5. Summary of Findings**

In order to summarise the findings resulting from the Jisc online survey and the in-depth semi-structured interviews it is appropriate to revisit the questions posited in 1.5 of this thesis.<sup>523</sup> The first aim of the fieldwork research questions posited in 1.5 was concerned with identifying current practices as the stand with regard to utilising the visual arts as ‘theological aesthetic resources’ for increasing spiritual capital in Catholic education. The results and the subsequent analysis of the Jisc online survey and the semi-structured interviews demonstrated that modern technology in the form of digital learning, internet access, zoom, and PowerPoint presentations have enabled teachers to utilise the visual arts to a far greater extent than in previous years. Alongside that, the new specifications for the GCSE RE Course have incorporated the use of visual arts (and music) into the syllabus.

Notwithstanding that, 71.4% of the responses emanating from the Jisc survey maintained that the visual arts remain an underused resource for increasing spiritual capital in pupils in a Catholic educational setting. This phenomenon was reflected in the semi-structured interviews, but to a far greater extent inasmuch as all of the teachers’ interview stated that the arts remain an under-used resource within Catholic school settings. Moreover, disappointment was expressed with regard to the current A Level RE Course inasmuch as, unlike the ‘old’ A Level RE Course, it does not contain a section on religious art. The omitting of religious art from the specifications of the A Level RE syllabus was seen by many as a lost opportunity.

The main reasons given by the participants as to why the visual arts remain an under-used theological resource for transmitting the faith in a Catholic

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<sup>523</sup> The fifth question will be revisited, analysed, and reappraised in the following chapter.



educational setting ranged from a lack of financial funds to purchase visual resources, and time constraints put on teachers to deliver the GCSE curriculum in effect means that they often do not have the time to be creative. Alongside that the teachers said that there is a lack of training with regard to employing the visual arts within a classroom setting. At the same time, the interviewees believed that most key stages, apart from GCSE RE, do not, in general, use the visual art on a systematic basis.

The second aim of the fieldwork research posited in section 1.5 was concerned with investigating the use of the visual arts in relation to interdisciplinary collaboration between departments. To reiterate:

Investigate the extent of interdisciplinary collaboration between different departments taking place in Catholic education (schools), i.e., Theology (RE), English, History, Social Studies, the Arts and Culture and other subjects which utilise the Arts as a pedagogical tool for increasing spiritual capital in students and staff.

The results from the semi-structured research revealed that, when the arts were used in interdisciplinary events as a pedagogical tool for transmitting and nurturing the faith it was enjoyed and well received by the pupils. However, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews demonstrated that in categories one and two of the status classification model interdisciplinary collaboration between departments was a rare occurrence, and only happened infrequently. This was due to a combination of factors, namely time constraints, the pressure to deliver the RE GCSE syllabus, and in most cases, there was no policy within the school with regard to interdisciplinary collaboration. This was reflected in outcomes of the Jisc online survey inasmuch as 59.4% of respondents answered that the arts were not used in interdisciplinary collaboration within the school. However, in category three of the status classification model it was evident that interdisciplinary collaboration between departments happened on a regular basis, and utilisation of the arts played a significant role in bringing this about. This was possibly due to the confidence, experience, and expertise of the teachers in this category inasmuch as they knew their subject matter well, and therefore had extra time to devote to interdisciplinary activities.

The third objective of the fieldwork research was concerned with what strategies, styles and values, which guide current practices with regard to the use of the visual arts in a Catholic education setting with the purpose of increasing spiritual capital within the pupils.<sup>524</sup> On the whole, it was evident from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews that the teachers' personal experiences, values, and lived reality of the faith was the main motivation for incorporating the visual arts into their teaching practices. All the teachers said that, apart from the specifications of the new GCSE RE, there were not any strategies in place to promote the use of the visual arts within their schools with regard to interdisciplinary collaboration. This was reflected in the outcomes of the Jisc online survey inasmuch as 61.2% of respondents stated that there was no interdisciplinary strategy in place within the school's policy which aims at employing the visual arts as 'theological aesthetic resources' for transmitting and developing the Catholic faith in pupils. However, in relation to this one teacher stated that,

*The best possible educational setting is when there is fusing together to celebrate and glorify God. We have done a lot of work in our school on this in relation to section 48 inspection from the bishops. They ask every department what they are doing to promote the Catholic faith. Whether every department takes that seriously and are not just doing it to fill in a form when you are having some sort of inspection... if its genuine then I think that is when it is extremely exciting.*

What this implies is that although it is a requirement for all departments within the Catholic educational system to promote the Catholic faith, the extent to which this actually happens seemed to be something that largely depends on the knowledge and enthusiasm of individual teachers. It was felt that the use of the visual arts in this area seemed to be something that could be made better use of as it contributes to the plausibility structures of belief already in place. This was affirmed in the Jisc online survey results inasmuch as it revealed that 76.9% of respondents agreed that the visual arts are useful as a vehicle for cross-curricular collaboration. What this implies is that when interdisciplinary events do occur within a school setting the arts play a significant role in bringing this about.

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<sup>524</sup> Cf. Section 1.5 of this thesis.

Finally, to summarise the fourth aim of the fieldwork research, namely:

Sacramental Perspective: Investigate and evaluate guidelines that assist teachers to develop their confidence and skills in using the visual arts as theological aesthetic resources for evangelising and increasing faith and values in students.

The data which emerged from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews in relation to developing skills with regard to utilise the visual arts more effectively within the classroom was multifaceted. Primarily, all the teachers maintained that modelling one's ministry on Christ was instrumental in guiding, assisting, and developing their own faith and that of pupils that they teach. Notwithstanding that, three teachers said that attending workshops on faith and the arts had greatly contributed to their understanding, knowledge, and skill set, which gave them the confidence and the inspiration they needed to deliver lessons. Moreover, teachers either suggested or expressed an appreciation for *In Service Training Days* (inset days / TD's) with experts in the field of faith and art. Ninety percent of the practitioners who were interviewed called for case studies, examples, and exemplars to be produced and made easily available. They felt that this would ease the pressure on them to create something from scratch and may provide teachers who are from a non-faith background to have a greater understanding of the Catholic ethos and help them to 'get it right.'

With regard to the Church's teaching on exploring faith through the arts, namely *The Way of Beauty*, seven out ten teachers interviewed said they had not come across the term, while one teacher said she had heard of it, but was not confident on it.

## **6.6. Reappraisal**

To reiterate, the results from the quantitative data acted as a comparator to the qualitative research, which provided the necessary material for a reappraisal of the salient points arising from the literature review, thus affording a degree of triangulation.<sup>525</sup> In the process of exploring, analysing and evaluating the outcomes emanating from the fieldwork research, it was clear from the

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<sup>525</sup> See chapter five for a full explanation of the DLQQ method employed in this thesis.

transcripts of current practitioners that modelling one's ministry on Christ is the most effective means of transmitting the faith in a Catholic educational setting. Notwithstanding that, in order to affirm and support plausible structures and networks of belief within this setting, it was apparent that the visual arts contribute to the education, understanding and faith formation of pupils. For instance, the specifications of the new GCSE RE Course, which incorporates the arts into its syllabus, has been greatly welcomed and recognised as a means of transmitting the message of the Gospel by both staff and students.

However, it was evident that the newly emergent concept of visual theology is not widely known or used in the professional practice of the practitioners within a school setting. Only one out of the ten interviewed said that they had come across the notion. Moreover, the one practitioner who was familiar with the term visual theology disclosed that he has never used the term in his professional practice. Another teacher asked, 'Is it (visual theology) just a buzz word?' The data collected from the fieldwork research confirmed the findings of the literature review inasmuch as if visual theology is to move beyond a mere figure of speech to describe/address 'the problem of visual expressiveness of religious experience,'<sup>526</sup> then further research is required to articulate it's theological meaning in each particular sphere of interest. Notwithstanding that, the literature review established that headway is being made in this area with the *Journal of Visual Theology* (established in December: 2019), and two <sup>527</sup> online sites, namely *Visual Commentary on Scripture* (established in January: 2018),<sup>528</sup> and *Visual Theology* (established in April: 2018).<sup>529</sup> However, from a Roman Catholic perspective, it is clearly evident that there is a need for more research to be done in the field of visual theology to redress the enormous imbalance between textual and visual forms of theological investigation. The thesis argues that the framework provided for

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<sup>526</sup> Avanesov. (2019) pp.39-40.

<sup>527</sup> There is a third website called *Visual Theology – Teaching biblical truth with beautiful visuals* which was established in December: 2015 Available at: <https://visualtheology.church/>. However, the literature review established that this site uses infographics rather than the visual arts, which most scholars argue do not qualifying as the visual arts per se. See chapter three for a more detailed discussion on the debate between infographics and the visual arts.

<sup>528</sup> Quash, Ben. (Director) *Visual Commentary on Scripture*. Theology and Religious Studies. Available at: <https://thevcs.org/> (Accessed: 13 April 2020).

<sup>529</sup> Beaumont, Sheona & Thiele, Madeleine, Emerald. (Directors) *Visual Theology*. Available at: <https://www.visualtheology.org.uk/> (Accessed: 13 April 2020).

the theological aesthetic interpretation of Christian images, *the site of its beholding*, has the potential to address this lacuna.

With regard to Catholic Church teachings on exploring faith through the visual arts, namely its threefold theory on beauty, *The Beauty of Creation*, *The Beauty of the Arts*, and *The Beauty of the Christ as Prototype of all Holiness*, known as *The Way of Beauty*,<sup>530</sup> there was a real sense that it has not yet filtered down into the mindsets and practices of the teachers responsible for delivering GCSE RE. That is, only two teachers were familiar with it, understood it, and knowingly put it into practice. This is somewhat problematic, as one teacher said *The Way of Beauty* appears in key Church documents which form part of the GCSE RE syllabus.

Alongside that, practitioners who had experience of working in schools founded by Religious Orders as well as schools/academies founded by a Diocese, noted that the latter tended to have significantly fewer visual religious artefacts embedding into the school environment. In real terms this means that the visual Catholic identity of schools founded by Dioceses may not be fully realised. In addition to that, teachers across all three categories of the status classification model believed that they and their colleagues did not always have the necessary training, the necessary visual resources, and the necessary funds needed to support good practice in relation to using the visual arts as a means of transmitting the faith. What this suggests is that investment in both people and materials are needed to rectify the situation.

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<sup>530</sup> See Pontifical Council for Culture. (2006) *Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly: The Via Pulchritudinis, Way of Beauty: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue*.

## Chapter 7 Recommendations and Conclusions

### 7.1. Recommendations

Based upon the evidence and the analysis of the fieldwork research, it is evident that in order to create a broad and more balanced curriculum there is a need to reappraise the way the visual arts are utilised in a Catholic educational setting. That is, conducive to ‘developing and enhancing opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement utilising the visual arts within the school timetable,’<sup>531</sup> further measures need to be taken. Therefore, the thesis recommends the following threefold proposal, namely investment in people, investment in materials, and the implementation of new policymaking procedures, which prioritise the use of the arts as a means of cross curricular activities.

#### 7.1.1. Investment in People

Based upon the responses and subsequent analysis of the in-depth semi-structured interviews and the Jisc online survey, it was evident that ongoing training is key to the formation and development of the teacher, and their ability to deliver the subject that they are entrusted with. Therefore, the following are recommended: -

- Training in the form of *In Service Training Days* (INSET days) and *Continuing Professional Development Courses* (CPD) - e.g., one day workshops and short courses on: How to utilise the Arts more effectively in the classroom; How to use the arts as a medium for interdisciplinary activities; A Catholic understanding of the arts as theological aesthetic resources; Utilising an interpretative theological aesthetic framework as a means of understanding and transmitting the faith through the arts; Creative workshops on how to source and create visual resources for use in the classroom, etc.,...would be of benefit to all who are concerned with maintaining and nurturing a Catholic ethos within a school setting.

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<sup>531</sup> Cf. The fifth and final aim of fieldwork research posited in section 1.5 of this thesis.

- The induction of fresh staff to include a workshop on understanding the purpose of the missionary statement of the school, namely, how to implement the Catholic ethos into their working practice.

### **7.1.2. Investment in Materials**

Based upon the outcomes of the DLQQ dialogue it is clear that the visual arts play a significant role in guiding, assisting, and delivering subject matter.

Therefore, in addition to investing in people through training opportunities, the fieldwork research brought to light that there is a real need to invest in visual resources.

- Provide teachers with exemplars, case studies, and theological aesthetic frameworks which utilise the visual arts as a means of expressing and understanding the faith across all the key stages of education within the school.
- Investment in both new and traditional religious artefacts to create a visual sense of Catholicism within the school environment.

### **7.1.3. Policy Making**

Based upon the responses and subsequent analysis of the transcripts of the professional practitioners who took part in the research, it is evident that the use of the visual arts as a means of transmitting Catholic ethos would be of beneficial interest across all key stages of education. Therefore, the implementation of the following recommended policies and practices ought to be considered for the best course of action:

- The Bishops of England and Wales to create and introduce specifications into the syllabus which aim at utilising the visual arts across all key stages of education.
- Create and introduce policies/strategies that aim at increasing interdisciplinary and cross-curricular activities through the medium of the arts.

- Introduce a policy which aims at creating partnerships and collaboration with Museums and other organisations who have expertise in visual theological art education.
- Regular renewal courses for all staff which link the missionary statement of the school to the delivery of educational services.
- Create a budget especially for the purchase of religious artefacts and visual theological resources to contribute to the outward signs of a Catholic ethos.

In order for improvements to be made to systems of organisation there must be a willingness and a desire to make changes to the standards which act as instruments of governance. One of the key challenges for schools today is translating policy into practice. As Valverde, G.A., Bianchi, L. J., Wolfe, R.G., Schmidt, W. H., and Houang R.T. state in *According to the Book* (2002) collectively write,

*A common feature of these instruments, regardless of the precise manner in which they are intended to govern, is that they establish goals without clearly identifying the concrete actions that must be taken to ensure delivery of the intended opportunities.*<sup>532</sup>

The thesis argues that recommendations suggested above will afford practitioners concrete opportunities to participate in training and make use of the visual materials that they need to develop a clearer understanding of their individual roles, and responsibilities with regard to transmitting the values of the Gospel in a Catholic educational setting. That is, the implementation of the aforementioned recommendations will enable headteachers, policymakers, and governing bodies to make changes that lead to the visual arts playing a more significant role in the transmitting the faith in a Catholic educational setting. The value of making more use of this vital under-used resource is that it complements plausible structures of belief, which aim at supporting and enriching the Catholic ethos of the school. Alongside that, it strengthens critical thinking, encourages student engagement, and fosters creativity. As the National Art Education Association rightly state,

*The current body of research demonstrates the far-reaching and lasting impact of visual arts education, including increased math*

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<sup>532</sup> Valverde G.A., Bianchi L.J., Wolfe R.G., Schmidt W.H., Houang R.T. (2002) *According to the Book. Using TIMSS to Investigate the Translation of Policy into Practice through the World of Textbooks*. Dordrecht: Springer. p.166.



*scores, language acquisition and many other positive outcomes. By investing in visual arts education from nursery through postsecondary education, education leaders, policymakers and practitioners can support student achievement and build a strong foundation for lifelong success.*<sup>533</sup>

## 7.2. Conclusion

The motivation behind this thesis' study was a concern for the steep decline in religious literacy and practice of the faith (as it currently stands) found within Catholic educational settings, and elsewhere. The literature review established that there was both a need and a call to find new ways to increase the spiritual capital of the faithful and thereby [re]evangelise the society and culture in which we live.<sup>534</sup> In direct response to this the thesis argues that the newly emergent field of visual theology approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective is an apt vehicle by which these concerns could be addressed anew.

However, set within the context of the Incarnate God the literature search established that there is a plethora of approaches emanating from different spheres of theological interest attempting to address the same problem, namely *'the problem of making meaning from visual representations of religious experiences.'*<sup>535</sup> Therefore, it is evident that further investigation is required into how visual theology is understood in each particular sphere of interest. Moreover, it is clear from the research conducted that there is need to redress the enormous imbalance that exists between textual and visual theological inquiry. Consequently, the literature search ascertained that, although von Balthasar's project of returning beauty to the mainstream of Catholic Christian theological thought has influenced Popes, and others, it (beauty) has some way to go before it is placed on an equal footing with that of the good and the true within the public square.

Therefore, the thesis explored current methodologies and frameworks for the interpretation of the visual arts, and critically analysed how they might aid as

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<sup>533</sup> National Art Education Association. (March:2019) *Visual Arts Matter: How Visual Arts Education Helps Students Learn, Achieve and Thrive*, Denver, CO.

<sup>534</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) Chapter II. *The Proper Development of Culture*: Vatican City; Pontifical Council for Culture. (2006) *Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly: The Via Pulchritudinis, Way of Beauty: Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue; Instrumentum Laboris*. (2015: preface) *The Pastoral Challenges of The Family in The Context of Evangelisation*: Vatican City; Pope Francis. (2013) *Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel*.

<sup>535</sup> Avanesov. (2019) p.39.

well limit a theological aesthetic understanding of the visual arts from a Catholic perspective. From the research carried out, it was evident that art historical frameworks and methodologies for the interpretation of the visual arts by themselves were deemed insufficient because of the consistency in which they fail to notice the theological meaning of Christian works of art.<sup>536</sup> Hence, the thesis argues that a framework for the interpretation of Christian art necessarily includes *the theological aesthetic thread* that places the Incarnate Christ at its centre.

Alongside that, although it is clear from the literature research that this lacuna is beginning to be addressed in the new and exciting field of visual theology, this thesis established that from the few contributions that currently exist with regard to the theological interpretation of Christian images, they tend to fall somewhat short from a Catholic sacramental perspective.<sup>537</sup>

Therefore, inspired by von Balthasar's project of returning beauty to the main artery of Christian thought, this thesis developed a theological aesthetic framework as a means for interpreting works of Christian art from a Catholic sacramental perspective. The uniqueness of the framework that this study provides consist of trifold criteria. Firstly, *the site of its beholding*: the moment the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith. Secondly, *the site of the image*, namely the theological significance of the subject matter within the image. Thirdly, *the theological thread*: with its hierarchical ways of seeing.

This distinctive framework allows the content, context, and form of the image to be explored in depth from a faith perspective, which incorporates and draws upon Scripture, the teachings of the Catholic Church, the lived lives of the Saints in light, and the practices of the faithful. Alongside that, art historical methods of seeing things their way and the period eye were utilised to add

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<sup>536</sup> Cf. Reddaway. (2013), McGregor. (2018), Crow. (2019).

<sup>537</sup> For instance, Reddaway's methodology for the interpretation of art in *Visual theology in 14th and 15th century Florentine frescoes: a theological approach to historical images, sacred spaces*. (2013) is from a Protestant perspective. While Avanesov contribution in *On Visual Theology* (2019) is from a Russian Orthodox perspective. Jensen, Robin M., & Vrudny, Kimberly J. (2009) *Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts*, contribution to the field of visual theology is, in part, from a Catholic perspective, but it 'lacks a unifying theological methodology.' That is, it is an 'amorphous idea of the spiritual' rather than a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art. See chapter 4 of this thesis for a more detailed analysis of approaches to visual theology.

depth and knowledge. In doing so, it contributes new knowledge to the innovative and exciting field of visual theology research from a Catholic perspective. Moreover, the thesis argues that combining the theological aesthetic framework and the above-mentioned methodologies reveals and enables a deeper and more profound appreciation of what Christian images express and mean for the faithful (and possibly others) today.

Secondly, the thesis demonstrated the effectiveness of the theological aesthetic framework offered by conducting a case study on a series of representation of the Annunciation as depicted in Early Italian Renaissance Art. Five renditions of the Annunciation were chosen, each of which represented one of *the five laudable conditions of the Virgin Mary* as alluded to in the Angelic Colloquy at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke 1. Text and images were explored, and theologically interpreted together, which gave an indication of how the theological aesthetic framework might be applied to works of Christian art for both edification and formation purposes.

This thesis argues that '*the site of its beholding*' provides the beholder with an interpretive theological aesthetic framework that is of significance because it focuses on the role of contemplating Christian images in the light of faith, which ultimately leads the beholder into an ever-deeper encounter with the divine. That is, the beholder is not merely viewing a sacred image to 'look at,' understand, and enrich their knowledge (the aesthetic experience). Rather through *the site of its beholding: the moment when the viewer encounters the image in the light of faith*, the beholder strives to unite themselves to that which they behold, namely the beauty of the form and splendour of Christ (the spiritual experience). In doing so, the act of beholding the beauty of the form attaches and thus unites the beholder to that which is beheld. This is achieved, in part, through the graced eyes of the mind/heart (the act of perceiving), which enables the beholder to be transported beyond the image into the realms of divine love (enraptured). Ultimately en-Christening the beholder and transforming them into the likeness of the beheld. In this sense '*the site of its beholding*' sheds new light upon visual representations of Christ, and the lived experiences of the saints for the sanctification of the faithful, and the praise and glory of God. Hence, this thesis argues that the theological aesthetic

framework, *the site of its beholding*, contributes to the newly emergent field of visual theology from of a Catholic sacramental perspective.

Finally, utilising the DLQQ method a fieldwork research project was conducted into the role that beauty plays in Catholic education. From this a comprehensive picture of the current practices of professional practitioners was revealed in relation to the use of the visual arts as a means of increasing the spiritual capital of pupils within a Catholic educational setting. The salient points arising from the literature review, and the theological framework for the interpretation of Christian art were then reappraised in light of the outcomes, which afforded a degree of triangulation.

Based on the outcomes of semi-structured interviews and the Jisc online survey it was evident that the visual arts are largely seen as theological aesthetic resources for teaching, understanding and transmitting the faith, which the teachers and pupils welcomed, found effective, and valued. Notwithstanding that, it was clear from the transcripts of the qualitative semi-structure interviews and the data collected from the quantitative Jisc online survey that modelling one's ministry on Christ is the most influential and effective means of teaching and transmitting the faith within a Catholic educational setting. Thus, increasing spiritual capital in students. Nevertheless, based on the results emanating from the fieldwork research it was clearly apparent that the visual arts brought value to and complemented the plausible structures of networks of belief within the school. As a result, they enrich the Catholic ethos of the school environment and contributes to the understanding, and faith formation of pupils.

However, although headway has been made in the form of the new GCSE RE course, inasmuch as it contains within the specifications a section on forms of expression, which include utilising the arts as a means of gaining knowledge about the Catholic faith, it is clear from the data collected that the visual arts remain largely an underused theological resource. This was especially so with regard to interdisciplinary activities, understanding and transmitting the message of the Gospels, the teachings of the Church, and the practices of the faithful within Catholic educational settings. In response to this, the thesis

provided a threefold proposal of recommendations. *Firstly*, investment in people - in the form of teacher training; *secondly*, investment in visual materials, viz., religious artefacts, exemplars (readily available case studies), and *thirdly*, a recommendation that schools put into place policies utilise the visual arts as means of teaching and transmitting the faith across all key stages of Catholic education.

In summary, this thesis consists of three main interlocking components that explored the role that beauty plays in Catholic education with regard to increasing spiritual capital in pupils. Firstly, the study investigated the newly emergent field of visual theology from a Catholic sacramental perspective. This was inspired by von Balthasar's project of returning beauty to the mainstream of Christian thought. From which a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art was developed with the purpose of increasing spiritual capital in pupils within Catholic educational settings, and possibly elsewhere. Secondly, in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the theological aesthetic framework it was applied to a case study on a series of depictions of the Annunciation emanating from the Early Italian Renaissance period. Thirdly the thesis conducted an empirical research project, namely *the use of visual arts in the field of Catholic education*, which gave a glimpsed of the current practices of practitioners' practices. This afforded a degree of triangulation so that a reappraisal of the salient points of the thesis were advanced, and recommendations posited.

Announcing the Word of God is only truly possible when the proclaimer speaks from a position of authenticity, a lived experience rich in knowledge and understanding. This thesis argues that visual theology approached from a Catholic sacramental perspective has the potential to advance the spiritual capital of the beholder, which in turn may lead to the [re]evangelisation of society in which we live. The study argues that increasing the spiritual capital of pupils within a Catholic educational setting is aided by utilising the visual arts as theological aesthetic resources. The theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of Christian art, *the site of its beholding: a Catholic approach to visual theology*, together with the implementation of the recommendations as posited in chapter 7.3 go some way in addressing the

salient issues arising from the literature research and qualitative and qualitative elements of this study.

Finally, it is my intention to further develop *the site of it beholding; the moment when the viewer aesthetically encounters the image in the light of faith*, as a theological aesthetic framework for the interpretation of both historical and contemporary Christian art. Ultimately it will function as a didactic tool for the edification and formation of the faithful within Catholic educational settings, and possibly elsewhere. Moreover, the framework that this thesis provides assists the return of ‘beauty’ to the mainstream of theological thinking and has the potentiality to be of significance in other interconnected fields such as Art History.

The visual arts, like faith, invite the viewer to participate in the scene. Yet, it is always a free choice on the part of the beholder to either take a fleeting glance or to fix his or her gaze on that which they behold.

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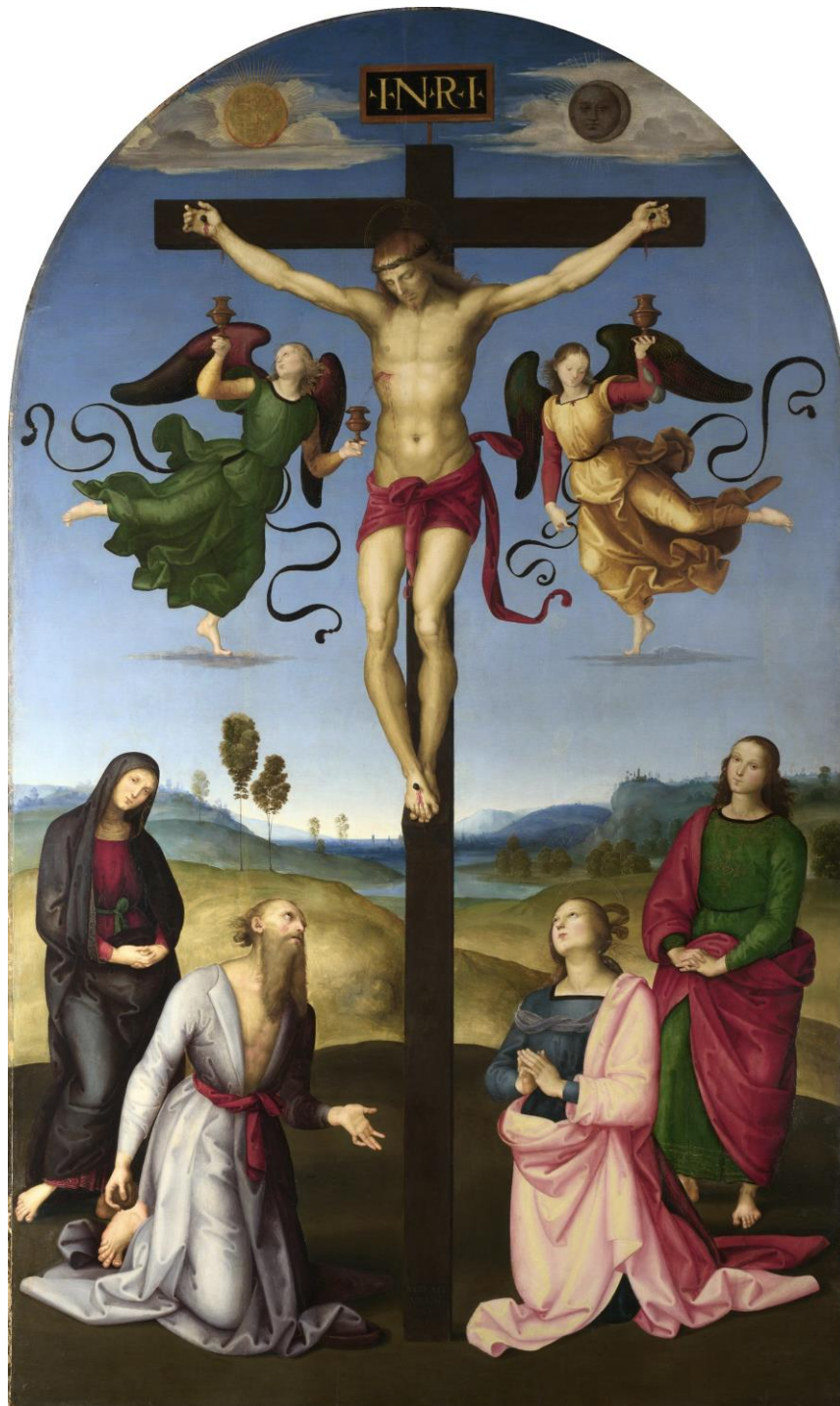


## Table of Figures

### [FIG. 1] Raphael. The Mond Crucifixion. c.1502-3.

Full title: The Crucified Christ with the Virgin Mary, Saints and Angels.

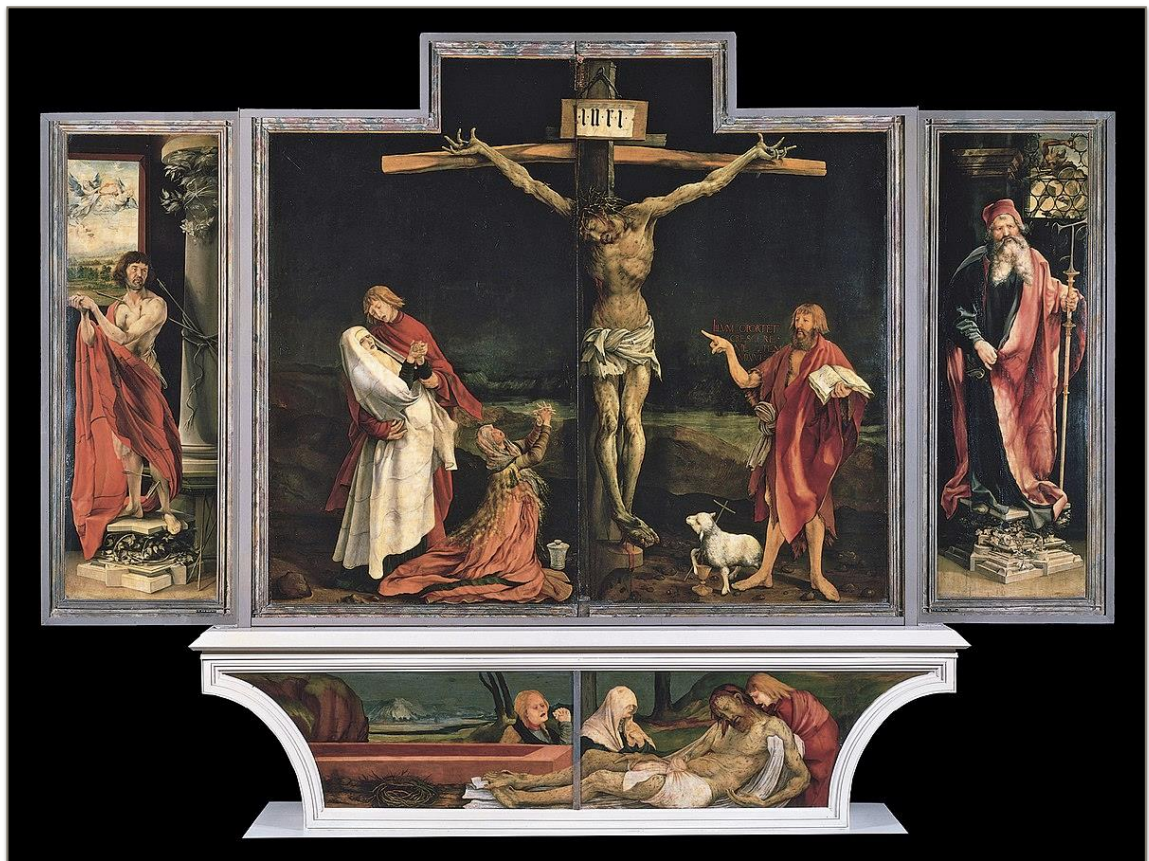
Medium: Oil on poplar. Dimensions: 283.3 × 167.3 cm. Location: The National Gallery



**[FIG. 2] Grünewald, Matthias. *Isenheim Altarpiece*. c. 1512–1516.**

Medium: Oil on wood. Dimensions: 298.45 x 327.66 cm. Location: Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, France.

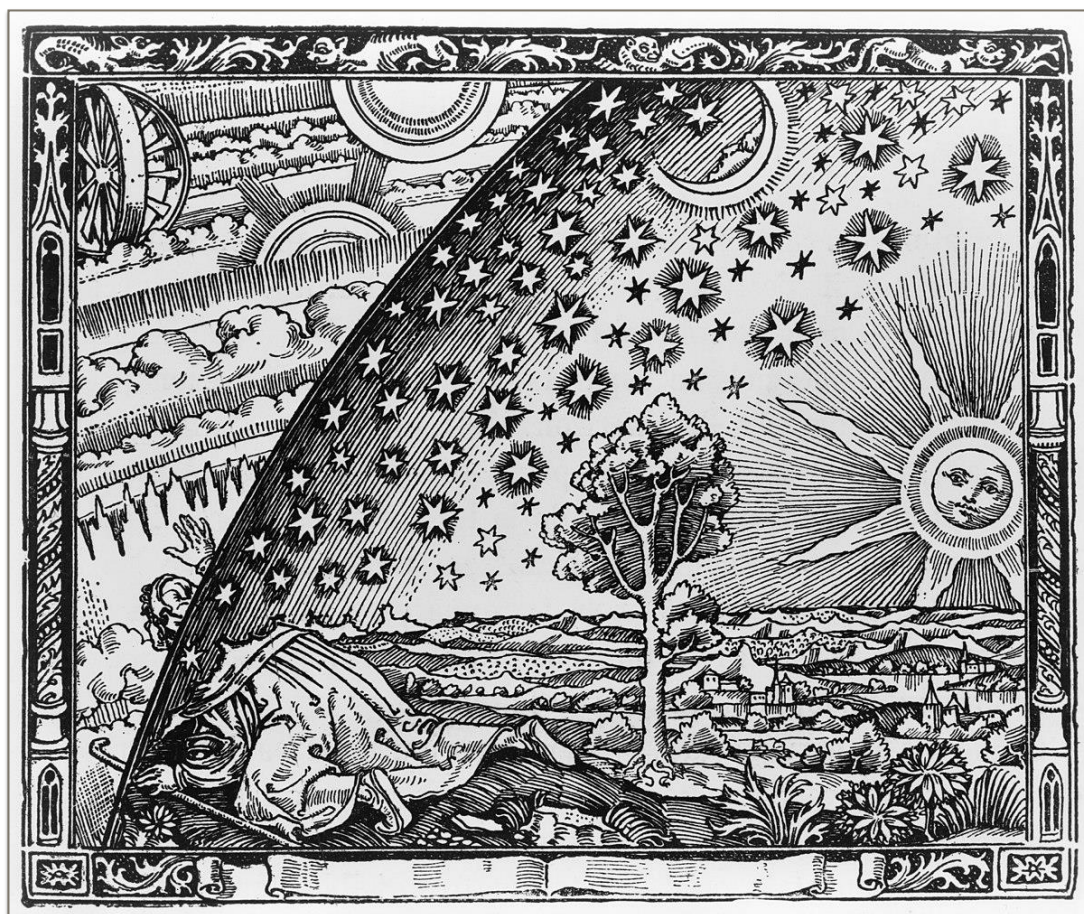
*At the Isenheim hospital, the Antonine monks devoted themselves to the care of sick and dying peasants, many of them suffering from the effects of ergotism, a disease caused by consuming rye grain infected with fungus. Ergotism, popularly known as St. Anthony's fire, caused hallucinations and skin infection, and attacked the central nervous system, eventually leading to death. It is perhaps not incidental to Grünewald's vision for his altarpiece that the hallucinogen LSD was eventually isolated from the same strain of fungus.<sup>538</sup>*



<sup>538</sup> Hickson, S. (9<sup>th</sup> August: 2015) *Grünewald, Isenheim Altarpiece*. Available at: <https://smarthistory.org/grunewald-isenheim-altarpiece/> (Accessed: 5 May 2022).



[FIG. 3] Unknown artist. *The Flammarion Engraving*. c.1888.



Black & White Version

[FIG. 4] Weir, Roberta. *The Flammarien Engraving*. c.1970





[FIG. 5] Challies & Byres. *Penal Substitution Atonement*. c. 2010.

Available at:

<https://www.challies.com/visual-theology/visual-theology-the-atonement/>



[FIG. 6] Hogenberg, Frans. Beeldenstorm. c. 1570.

Medium: Coloured Print

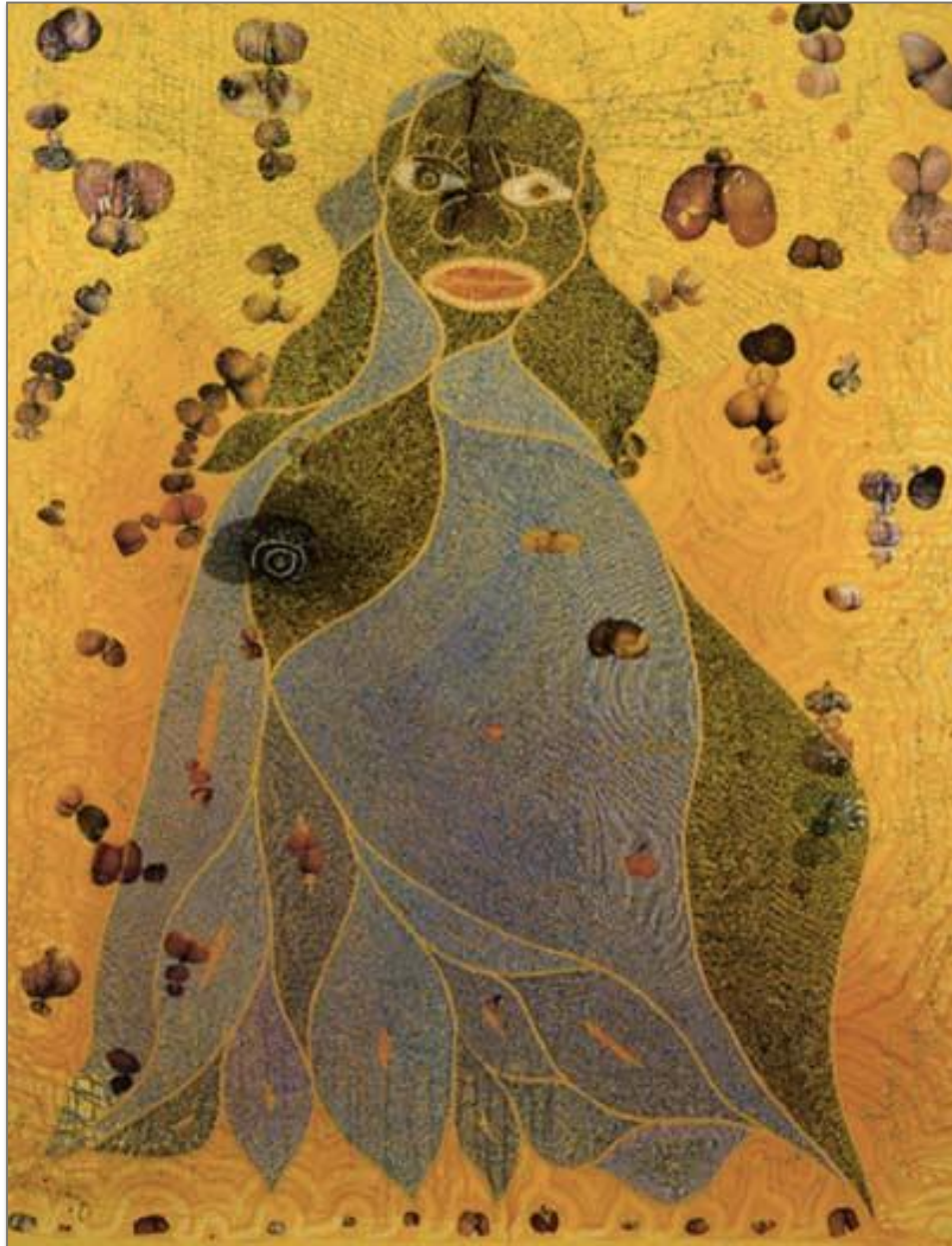
*The Calvinist Iconoclastic Riot of August 20, 1566, in Antwerp, the key moment of the Beeldenstorm in 1566, when paintings and church decorations and fittings were destroyed in several weeks of a violent iconoclastic outbreak in the Low Countries. Several similar episodes occurred during the early Reformation period.*



[ Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain]

[FIG. 7] Ofili, Chris. *The Holy Virgin Mary*. c.1996.

Medium: Acrylic, oil, polyester resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins, and elephant dung on canvas. Dimensions: 243.8 × 182.8 cm.





**[FIG. 8] Giotto. *Communion & Ascent into Heaven of Mary Magdalene*. c.1300**

Fresco, watercolour on plaster. Location: Chapel of St Mary Magdalene in St Francis Basilica, Assisi.

Photograph taken by Sr. Carolyn Morrison RA.



[FIG. 9] Sandro Botticelli. *The Annunciation*. c.1489

Medium: Egg tempera on a wooden panel. Location: Uffizi Museum, Florence



### Disquiet

[ Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain]



[FIG. 10] *The Annunciation* by Fra Carnevale. c.1445-50.



Egg tempera on a wooden panel. Location: The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

### Reflection

[ Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain]



[FIG. 11] Filippo Lippi. *The Annunciation*. c.1437-39.

Egg tempera on a wooden panel. Location: Frick Collection, New York.



### Inquiry

[Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain]

[FIG. 12] Fra Angelico: *The Annunciation with St Peter Martyr*. c.1440-41.



Fresco, watercolour on plaster. Location: Museum of San Marco, Cell 3, Florence.

### Submission

[Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain]



[FIG. 13] *The Annunciation*. c.12 Century.

Location: The northern facade of the Church of San Nicolás, Portomarín, Spain  
The Annunciation is situated in the tympanum and is framed by archivolts with

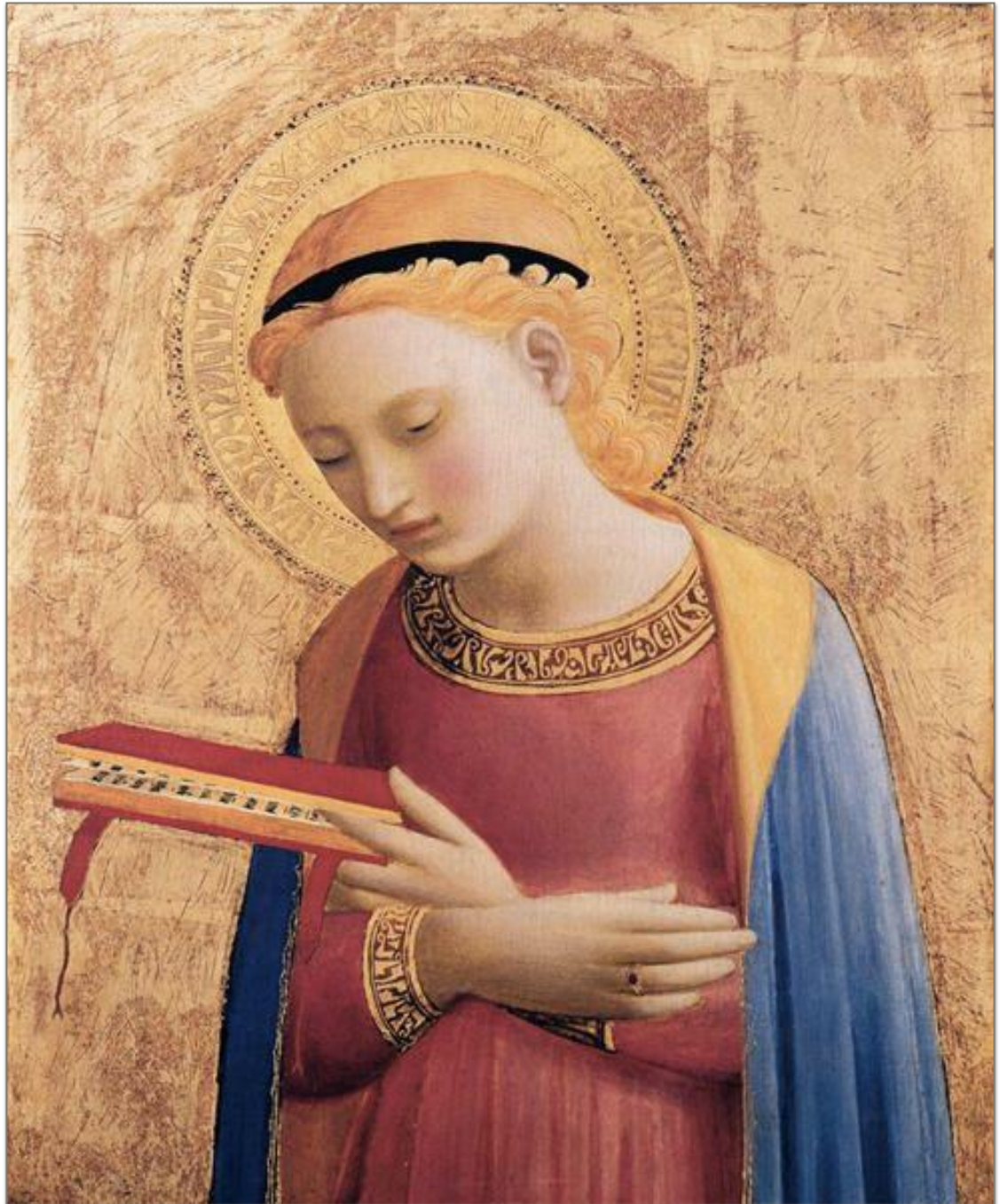


geometric motifs.

[Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain]

[FIG. 14] Fra Angelico. *Virgin Annunciate*. c.1450-55.

Egg tempera and gold leaf on a wood panel. Location: Institute of Arts, Detroit.



**Merit**

[Image courtesy of Wikiart. Public Domain]



## Appendix 1 Ethical Approval



St Mary's  
University  
Twickenham  
London

26 August 2021

Dear Carolyn

I am writing to confirm that your application for ethical approval of your research enquiry has been approved at Level 1.

**Researcher's name:**

Carolyn Morrison

**Regnum:**

186098

**Title of project:**

The Use of Visual Art in Catholic Education / Formation

**Supervisors:**

Prof. Dr John Lydon/Dr Jacobs Phillips

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Dr Mary Mihovilović**

Institute of Education Ethics Sub-Committee Representative

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## Appendix 2 A Sample of the Semi-Structured Interviews

Questions for the semi-structured interview: *On the use of the visual arts in a Catholic educational setting.*

The interview consists of three stages:

Stage 1: The Personal and Religious Background of the Practitioner

Stage 2: The Professional Practice of the Practitioner

Stage 3: The Attitudes and Feeling of the Practitioner

### Stage 1: The Personal and Religious Background of the Practitioner

The first section of the interview is concerned with gathering information about the personal and religious background of the practitioner.

a. Were you born into the Catholic faith?

*Yes, I was born in Scotland in 1965 and went to a Catholic primary school, and I also went to a private school for a year because I had won a bursary. Before I came to England we went to Mass every Sunday, and that continued. I wouldn't say that that is the norm for students today. It's the reverse in fact. So, there is a huge difference in faith formation today compared to fifty years ago, it's massive.*

b. Do you feel that religious symbolism was deeply embedded in your school environment? E.g., Statues, paintings and crucifixes etc....

*I think from what I can recall it was there. I wouldn't say it was explicit. You didn't know any different, it was just there. I wouldn't say that it was pointed out either. It was just the common theme all the time.*

Prompt question: Do think that schools today have the same level of symbolism as they did when you were at school?

*Probably less I would say. They don't have the same number of statues, but crucifixes are probably about the same. I think that the nature of visual art or symbols has changed, which is interesting. A combination of things I think that students would probably notice them now because they see less of them in their ordinary experience. It's rare that the students have religious symbolism in their homes as compared to before. Religious literacy or even*



*symbolic literacy has disappeared amongst students, in my experience, has virtually disappeared.*

- c. Did the visual Arts play a role in your faith formation?

*Probably after I left school. It didn't impact while I was at school. It was only my personal interest. My background was I went to Catholic secondary school when we moved to England from Scotland. I intended when I was 16, I was going to go to the seminary. So, I did my A Levels at school. I didn't do A Level RE. I dropped out of sixth form over an argument about A Level Mathematics compared to A Level RE. So, when I left the seminary, I had no A Levels. So, I had to take A Levels at the junior seminary. That's when my personal interest in the Arts occurred, it's what I wanted to explore. But I can't remember anything from school being a standout moment at all.*

## **Stage 2: The Professional Practice of the Practitioner**

The second section of the interview is concerned with the professional practice of the practitioner.

- a. In your experience, do the visual Arts enable or facilitate an encounter with Christ?

*I would say without a doubt, absolutely. I go back to one of the answers I said before which was about religious literacy which has virtually disappeared. I think that gives us a good opportunity to explore the arts because I suppose they haven't been exposed to it before so it's brand-new to them. So, when I have used it in lessons or in the boarder context of school students take more notice of it now because it's different to them. Whereas when I was at school it was what you expected to see. In assembly you'd see a picture of a Saint or religious art, it was just normal stuff. Whereas now I think it's a bigger hook, far more opportunity for it to be used more than it is.*

- b. Do you use the visual Arts as theological aesthetic resources to transmit the message of Christ? If so, to what extent?

*I do love using them. Funny enough there is another member of staff, who is head of year in sixth forms, and she works towards me we have this ongoing conversation. She doesn't hate religious art, but she feels uncomfortable with delivering it. Because she does know what she is talking about. So, it's a great means of conversation, that it's not her thing.*

*There was the old A Level course that had a section especially on religious art. It's gone now, which is a shame, but that was a fantastic part of the course. That I absolutely loved to teach. It was brilliant. But I use it across all key stages, and any chance that I can get to do that and beyond assemblies. But our sixth form is particular in that half of the students come not from schools but are from non-Catholic schools and over half our students are from non-Catholic backgrounds.*

*It's good because even with our own students it stops you from assuming a level of knowledge that just isn't there. There is a danger teaching A Level RE to students with mixed levels of GCSE RE knowledge is that it is safe to assume that they don't know a great deal. So, using those pieces of art helps to explain and that's the beauty of it. And because you are looking for hooks for students that really haven't had any experience of that at all. It makes me go out more to find pieces that will speak. It does really matter if they know that or not. It really is a personal journey of mine to go out and find things.*

- c. Do you think that the visual Arts help to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration in an educational setting?

*Yes, absolutely.*

- d. Have you ever used the visual Arts in an interdisciplinary way? E.g., Employed the visual Arts as a means for cross-curricular activities with other colleagues/departments?

*We use it with other departments. I'm trying to think of an example. One of the big things was that in A Level RE I'm quite keen to work with the History department. They do the Reformation or the Tudors at least. Historians don't the religious meaning of the Reformation and my students don't know the history, so it put theology into context. So, there is a great need to marry the two. There was a great experience with Durham University. They had an online lecture to do with art. They explore some elements of art then some elements of theology and I was involved with that. And there is great contact developing between the History and the RE department. Because although we are in a Catholic school both of our Historians are not Catholics or even practicing Christians. So, they have an interesting view on theology of Reformation, which is quite different from the theological view of the RE department. So that makes for an interesting collaboration between us, without a doubt.*



### Stage 3: The Attitudes and Feeling of the Practitioner

The final and most in-depth section of the semi-structured interview is concerned with identifying the extent of the practitioner's attitudes and feelings towards the use of the visual arts within a Catholic educational setting.

- a. Have you come across the term 'visual theology'? If yes, how do you understand the concept?

*I would, rightly or wrongly, understand this as the expression of theological truths through objects of art.*

- b. With regard to the New Evangelisation, have you come across the term 'The Way of Beauty'? If yes, how do you understand it?

*No, I haven't. But I suppose it's the value of aesthetics not from a subjective view but from an objective one, which sometimes is overlooked.*

- c. Do you think that the visual arts are an underused theological aesthetic resource for transmitting the faith in a Catholic educational context?

*Absolutely, one hundred percent, if I were being critical then I would say that it is massively underused and poorly used. And you see that when you ask students to create a piece of work of something, and my pet irritation is kinder when students think oh its RE, so I'd do a cross. I'm not saying that I expect them to create fantastic works of art. But it is the default image even for students of GCSE level. But if they had more exposure to art, you would be able to explore more just a cross in that sense. And I think that a combination of that staff are nervous, and the staff don't really know themselves to be honest. The CDP for staff comes to mind. It depends on what they did for their degrees themselves really.*

- d. Do you think that a certain level of visual literacy is required before the visual arts can be an effective means of communicating the message of Christ in an educational setting?

*A lack of religious literacy is not a bad thing. Because it gives you more scope. First of all I'm interested in what they think. Especially with modern art, one of my passions is to look at modern art I'm not looking for the shock value, you are looking for what the earth is that value. And I think that that's great to explore with what they would see in comparison with classic Religious art. But even classic religious art it lost on them.*

*In GCSE RE there are two pieces on the exam board syllabus. One is the Sistine Chapel and one is San Clemente, a Church in Rome, of a mosaic of the tree of life. Now that is great, probably the tree of life mosaic is by way more symbolic in terms of the symbolism in religious life. Now I teach it not always just as a GCSE part of the course but in relation to what the symbols mean. And try to get that across to the students. In fact it's better that they don't have any visual literacy as it gives the opportunity to explain.*

- e. Do you think that a common theological framework for the interpretation of the visual arts would better aid cross-curricular activities with regard to transmitting the message of the Gospels within a Catholic educational setting?

*I think in terms of strategies I suppose suggestions, exemplars or case studies would help. Staff are always looking for examples. There is no criticism of staff wanting to use the arts, but half the time they are thinking I don't know what to do. So, if you give someone some examples then they would take it. So, it's just that initial start that is lacking for some staff.*

*Resources and how they can be used in the classroom. If I go back to that old A Level RE course that we used to do before it was all changed, that whole section on religious art was probably the best thing that I have seen in terms of visual theology in 20 years of teaching. It was genius, and on the back of that I took students to the London to the National Gallery and the Tate Modern and use that as springboard for those students who would never have seen or if they did go and see it for themselves, they might not understand the relevance of it, and where it fits in the theology. So, if you gave staff an example of how art is used and how it can be taken forward, I am sure more and more staff would use it. The AQA and CDP for staff comes to mind. One thing that needs to improve is the level of religious literacy.*

Prompt question: Is there anything that is negative about religious art?

*Some images are off putting. Traditional images of piety (kitsch art) would switch students off straight away. I got interested in art because I didn't like what I saw. So, I like to find modern interpretations that have a different slant.*

Thank you for your time and your expertise.