

YEAR LEVEL	11 & 12
TITLE	The Language of Beauty
STRAND	TRINITY
SUGGESTED DURATION	40 hours (1 semester)
ENDURING QUESTIONS	Where and how do we discover God? What does God ask of me? Invite me into?



## Unit Focus

In this unit students will explore how religion and religious ideas are presented in art, architecture, music, dance, drama, literature or film. The theological perspective conveyed in various art works will be examined in the light of associated historical and societal perspectives. In this unit students will be exposed to the ways that the arts present religious ideas, express religious sentiment, engage people in prayer, and challenge religious ideas.

## Achievement Standards

By the end of Year 12:

*Students examine the complexities of the human response to the revelation of God's love and truth in human experience, in Jesus Christ, in Scripture and tradition and in other religious traditions.*

## Unit Outcomes

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. Investigate the ways in which religion and religious ideas are presented in various art forms and in a variety of historical and social contexts.
2. Identify the potential for personal religious experience through engaging in, and reflecting on, the Arts.

## Key Understandings for Students

- The Arts have a key role in all religions.
- The Arts communicate ideas and express feelings.
- Within the Christian tradition there are numerous examples of religious art.
- Artists bring their own theology, which has been shaped by contemporary influences, to their art.
- Religious art works are extremely diverse and are not limited to particular movements, cultures, subjects or styles.
- Insight into Christian history can be gained by examining the religious art from various periods.
- Many artists seek to convey a sense of the sacred in their art.
- Art can be a stimulus for, and an expression of, prayer and reflection.
- The Arts are a human endeavour and as such both reflect and challenge society.
- The Arts can explore and challenge religious ideas.

- The Church acknowledges how important religious art forms are in the development of religious ideas and in the expression of personal and communal spirituality.

## Student Context

Post Compulsory students are able to investigate cultural expression from an objective position. They have the capacity for critical analysis and can move beyond personal taste when considering the Arts. They can make the connections between the historical and cultural concerns of artists and the substance and form that their works take.

Students are part of a culture with a diverse set of beliefs and symbols, often quasi-religious. Investigating religious arts can support their search for a more mature sense of the sacred, and their quest to respond to contemporary issues in the light of Christian beliefs.

## Theological Background for Teachers

The Church appreciates the creative ability of artists, and considers this to be a “God-like” quality of humankind. Throughout history Scripture has been an inspiration for artists. The church respects the power of art to communicate and interpret mystery and encourages artists to do this in ways appropriate for today.

Humanity is like God in its ability to create. When individuals use their abilities to create, they share in the creative power of God.

Although God transcends every material representation, there are occasions in which God is revealed. The major revelation of God occurred in the incarnation when the Son of God became visible in person. This event and other key episodes and characters from the Scriptures have on countless occasions become image, music and poetry, and evoke the “Word made flesh” in the language of art. At times the representations of the Bible have been a concrete mode of catechesis, for example the use of stained glass windows in the Middle Ages. Even now, the various representations of the biblical texts unveil new dimensions of the message.

Today, many people no longer see religion and art to be as intertwined as was so in the past. Yet, even when culture and the Church are far apart, art remains as a bridge to religious experience. Art is by its nature a kind of appeal to mystery. In exploring beauty or unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice to the major concerns of a society and the universal desire for redemption.

Literature and the arts contribute to human life by seeking to probe the true nature of humanity. The Church recognises that artists exercise a form of ministry when their works reflect the beauty of God and lead people to consider the place of the sacred in their lives. Works of art can better reveal the knowledge of God and clarify the preaching of the Gospel. Works of art, both literary and figurative, are not only aesthetic representations but are genuine sources of theology.

From Pope Saint John Paul II’s Letter to Artists, we read that “in order to communicate the message entrusted to her by Christ, the Church needs art. Art must make perceptible, and as far as possible attractive, the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God. Art has the capacity to take one facet of the message and translate into colours, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen.”

Pope Francis has said that “the important and necessary task of artists emerges, particularly of those who are believers and allow themselves to be enlightened by the beauty of the Gospel of Christ: to create works of art that bring, precisely through the language of beauty, a sign, a spark of hope and trust where people seem to surrender to indifference and ugliness. Architects and painters, sculptors and musicians, filmmakers and writers, photographers and poets, artists of all disciplines, are called to make beauty shine, especially where darkness or greyness dominates everyday life; they are guardians of beauty, heralds and witnesses of hope for humanity.” Message to the Pontifical Academies, Dec 6 2016)

Each form of religious art reflects particular theological perspectives and shows the influence of the context of the artist.

As a result of their involvement in the Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) surveys, Sandhurst schools have a strong focus on recontextualisation, ie a reinterpretation of the Christian faith in light of the current pluralising and secularising societal context. The Arts have been used in schools in a wide variety of ways as a vehicle to recontextualise religious concepts in multi-layered, symbolic ways that help different individuals conceive of them at a personal level.

## Scripture

*Numerous selected works of art will also be based on particular scripture texts.*

### Acts 17:27-28

...so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.”

### Eph 5:18-20

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## Major Assessment Task

In consultation with your teacher, construct your own **recontextualised** religious expression or expression of spirituality using art, music, dance, drama, literature – as a single piece or as a folio of works (your teacher may present you with a matrix of options). In light of the intentionality of the art form, document and justify your use of the particular medium and explain the significance of the work's components.

PLEASE NOTE: There will be a range of media that each student can use to express their individual spirituality and/or religious beliefs. It may be painting, drawing, sculpture, music, poetry, fabrics and threads etc.

## Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

**Outcome 1 Investigate the ways in which religion and religious ideas are presented in various art forms and in a variety of historical and social contexts.**

- Discuss the nature and purpose of art. Discuss how art impacts on our feelings and emotions. Brainstorm as many different art forms as possible. Discuss specific language used in one of the arts (eg Painting – pigment, hue, palette, colour (primary, secondary, warm))
- Discuss ways in which humans have used the Arts to explore or explain the transcendent or God (eg architecture, art, music, opera, poetry)
- Investigate representations of religious ideas in at least two different art forms (eg painting, sculpture, stained glass, music, drama). What religious ideas are presented in the works? What messages are being conveyed by the artist or composer? Describe your personal reaction and feelings towards each piece.

### Art

- Provide students with a range of art works (eg paintings). They are to (i) provide a brief overview of the artist, (ii) a detailed description of the painting (using appropriate artistic language), and (iii) an explanation of how the piece links to religion or Christianity.
- Provide students with a range of examples of art works based on one concept or theme eg the Crucifixion, the Last Supper. Consider your reactions to each piece. Describe how the particular concept or theme is expressed each time.

- In consultation with your teacher, record an interview with an artist for her/his professional/personal responses to the art forms you are investigating.
- Investigate ancient Christian symbols eg fish, pelican, anchor, 8-spoke wheel, alpha / omega. Design a piece of jewellery or tattoo using at least one of these symbols.

### Music

- Begin by playing some background music. Discuss how music can capture or evoke emotions. Ask students to identify a song that uplifts them; a song that makes them want to sing along with it; a song that makes them want to dance; a song that makes them feel sad.
- Read “4 Purposes of Music in Worship” <https://cfdiocese.org/bishopsblog/4-purposes-of-music-in-worship/> According to the article, what is the purpose of music in worship? Ask students what music (general types and specific pieces) do they appreciate and why? What song reminds them of a special time, place or person?
- What did St Augustine mean when he said “He who sings prays twice”?
- Ask the students to identify contemporary songs with possible religious themes (they could begin with their own music collection). Musicians such as Paul Kelly, Gang of Youths, Mumford and Sons and Coldplay (there are many others) regularly reference spiritual or religious themes.
- Explore the music of contemporary Christian singers such as Fr Rob Galea, Matt Maher, Matt Redman, Lauren Daigle or Hillsong Worship. Ask students to choose one song they particularly like and analyse its themes.

### Icons

- Watch the clip <https://youtu.be/MklWDAU4b54>. Answer questions from the clip (eg what is an icon? what is the derivation of the word? are icons portable? what is the importance of the East?) Choose a saint (for example one whose feast day is about to occur) and apply some of the rules of iconography to represent them in an icon.

### Architecture

- Trace some of the major styles in architecture in church buildings demonstrating how they reflect changing beliefs and practices.
- Look at the stained glass in your local church or a church aligned with your school’s charism. Research the history of stained glass, for example how did it serve the mostly illiterate people of that time? Make a stained glass window using cellophane (or model in clay a medieval church; or design a floor plan of a medieval church)

### ***Outcome 2 Identify the potential for personal religious experience through engaging in, and reflecting on, the Arts.***

- Use a range of spiritual quotes (from Rohr, Nouwen, etc) as starting points for appropriate language for students to use when talking about spiritual ideas in art
- Create something for someone else, eg a picture story book for primary students. Arrange a combined class with your local primary school and read your stories to members of the other class.
- Homeless Jesus – Research where around the world these statues are located (including in Melbourne). How do you know it is a statue of Jesus? What does this piece say about the issue of homelessness? Is it effective? Relate the issue of homelessness to relevant scripture texts (eg the Good Samaritan). Research other pieces by Timothy Schmalz (especially “Angels Unawares”).
- Recontextualisation (see Teacher Background) – Complete a walk around your school. Identify and locate any religious objects, images or symbols (eg crucifixes, statues, paintings). Why are they present? Is their location significant? Is there a story to their presence in the school? What do they say about your school, including its origins?
- Select an old religious object (eg a crucifix) or image and recontextualise it.
- Assign students a psalm (eg Psalm 23). What is the psalm saying? What is it about? Analyse its use of language (eg particular words or phrases, any repetition). Look at contemporary expressions of it (eg Paul Kelly’s “Meet me in the middle of the air”). Create your own psalm praising God and/or God’s creation.
- Select a contemporary film and examine its religious substance, showing examples of where and how similar themes are present in Scripture. Examples include “Of Gods and Men”, “The Lion, the Witch and the

Wardrobe", "The Lord of the Rings", "Star Wars", "Amish Grace", "Silence", "The Mission", "Chariots of Fire", "The Odd Life of Timothy Green", "Tuesdays with Morrie".

- Investigate stories about Jesus, Mary (from scripture or church literature) or one of the saints and research how the story is portrayed in various art works.
- Alternatively examine a range of images of Jesus (or Mary or one of the saints). Describe your feelings towards each image and reasons why this may be the case. How realistic is each image (for example would Jesus have had pale skin or an angular face? Would Mary have been dressed in blue?). What is the artist trying to say about the subject of the image (for example does the representation of Jesus emphasise his humanity or divinity?)
- Imagine you have entered a competition to curate an exhibition entitled "Jesus: Then and Now" for the National Gallery of Australia. The rules of the competition ask you to present a folio of 6-8 works which are representative of the works you plan to exhibit. The works chosen should span various periods throughout history including the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Prepare the folio for the exhibition including the name of the work, when it was created, who created it and something about world events at that time. (from "Catholic Studies for senior secondary students" p.234)
- Choose two film titles from the list and, in essay form, examine the theological understandings, historical and social perspectives of each.

Note: (i) Teachers will need to preview each selected movie and ensure it is suitable for their class.

(ii) Teachers will need to be alert to scriptural and historical inaccuracies that may arise in each director's interpretation of the subject of Jesus.

(iii) Teachers are encouraged to show relevant excerpts rather than the whole film (eg "The Life of Brian" to emphasise its historical accuracy).

- *Godspell* (1973),
- *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973 and 2000),
- *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977),
- *Life of Brian* (1979),
- *The Miracle Maker* (2000),
- *Son of Man* (2006),
- *Son of God* (2014),
- *Risen* (2016),
- *Mary Magdalene* (2018),
- *The Chosen* (2019 Netflix)

- From two of the above movies, select the same scene eg Jesus' Baptism. Read the four gospel accounts of this scene and try to identify which gospel it most closely resembles – note similarities and differences. How has the filmmaker reinterpreted the gospel text (consider dialogue, costumes, music, film techniques)? Suggest reasons for these changes. Is Jesus presented as more divine or human?
- Write a review of an exhibition or performance that has a significant religious content eg Sandhurst Mackillop Art Prize, Blake Prize (for religious art), Handel's Messiah, works (Masses) by Bach or Mozart
- Choose a contentious piece of art that has religious content. Investigate the artist's intention and examine the theological implications for that artwork, explaining the basis of the controversy.

### Liturgical Connections

**Individually or as a class, create and participate in a prayer for the class which incorporates sacred images and sacred music. The concepts informing the prayer could centre on a theme studied in the course, for example God; Jesus; the Holy Spirit; the Trinity; the Resurrection; Creation.**

## Resources

### **Highly Recommended Resources**

Elliott, P. et al. (2006). *Catholic Studies for Senior Secondary Students*. Melbourne: James Goold House Publications (especially Chapter 9)

### **Community Resources**

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Artists, architects, actors, dancers, musicians, poets

Local galleries, theatres and cinemas

Places of worship

### **Literature**

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Leunig, M. (1990). *The Prayer Tree*. Melbourne: Harper Collins.

Leunig, M. (1990). *A Common Prayer*. Melbourne: Harper Collins.

Murray, L. (Ed.). (1991). *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry*. Melbourne: Collins Dove

### **Music**

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An enormous range of music can be explored, ranging from traditional Christian hymns (see the Catholic Worship Book, The Living Parish Hymn Book etc.) to contemporary Christian music (eg As One Voice etc.). Music with religious themes, but not specifically religious (eg Bocelli, A. *Sogno*, “The Prayer”) can also be used.