Perspective on the use of the construct 'Catholic Identity' for Australian Catholic schooling: Areas in the discourse in need of more emphasis and further attention - Part 2

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Abstract

This article is the second part of a discussion on the place of the construct 'Catholic identity' in the discourse of Australian Catholic schooling and religious education. Following the part 1 consideration of sociological situations that prompt identity anxiety – with parallels in Catholic education – and a brief sketch of the various sub-literatures related to Catholic school identity, this article proposes ideas and themes that need more emphasis and attention in the discourse. It draws on a particular view of what constitutes institutional identity, how it might be developed, enhanced and communicated, and how it relates to the process of individual personal identity development. It proposes the education of young people in identity as a purpose that could be fruitfully followed up in Catholic school religious education. This analysis is directed towards more discriminating use of the construct Catholic identity in Catholic schooling and religious education.

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Some proposed ideas/themes that could be given more emphasis in the discourse on the Catholic identity of Catholic schools

Appraising the various components to the construct 'Catholic identity' of schools

The NSW ACT bishops' statement (2007) on Catholic schooling states:

> At application for enrolment, at admission, and on other appropriate occasions, parents and students are reminded of the Catholic identity and mission of the school and of the expectation that they will assist in that mission. (p. 14)

This seems to presume that the Catholic identity of a school is something clear cut, self-evident and well understood. But in reality it is diffuse and complex. 'Which' mode of being Catholic and which aspect of identity does it mean? The Catholic identity of the school in Rockdale, Sydney conducted by the St Pius X Latin Mass society (founded by Archbishop Lefebvre in 1970) is different from that presumed in the average Sydney diocesan Catholic school; and this would probably be different again from that of Tangara or Redfield colleges run by the Opus Dei movement. But if you were a student in these schools successively, what differences would you notice and how important would you perceive them to be? And how obvious or not would any perceived differences relate to the distinctive religious identity of the schools? Is it possible that you could find there were few if any significant religious differences, apart from variations in organisation and discipline? The point to be made here is that differences in the religious identity of Catholic schools cannot be presumed – they need to be carefully identified and articulated.

The notion of the Catholic identity of schools is naturally problematic because of the diversity of views about what it means to be Catholic and the complexity of institutional identity, let alone the difficulties in working out how the 'development' of an institutional religious identity might translate into the operation of a school. It is suggested that this ambiguity can be overcome to some extent by breaking up the Catholic identity of schools into a number of components, each of which is easier to describe and appraise. This clarification is also crucial for any attempts to develop and enhance the school's Catholic identity.

Some proposed sub-identities are listed below as an initial attempt to cover the relevant components:

Different aspects / components of the religious (Catholic) identity of a school: The various ways in which religion and the spiritual enter into the school's self-understanding, self-expression and daily operation.

1. ***Ownership and funding of the school.***
    1.1   Official Church ownership and governance.
    1.2   Key leadership positions appointed by church educational authorities or governing board.
    1.3   Catholic name of the school.
    1.4   Not a 'community of faith' in the same sense as a voluntary religious community (E.g. parish, religious order), but can expect Catholic liturgy and religious education and other expressions of links with a Catholic heritage.
    1.5   Funded by State and Federal governments implying an accountability to the Australian community through government education authorities whose role it is to ensure that state standards for school education are met.

2. ***Buildings and physical structure, and architecture.***
    2.1   Chapel, prayer/quiet rooms, religious art, religious motto.

3. ***Public life of the school.***
    3.1   Theological and educational self-definition: How the school defines itself theologically in relation to its Catholic purposes, for example, it is concerned with educating young people in the faith tradition; to a limited extent, it contributes to the wider mission of the Catholic church. How the school defines itself educationally – achieving the best possible secular education.
    3.2   Liturgical and prayer identity: Celebrations of Eucharist at special events.
    3.3   Prayers and religious music and singing at various times and at public gatherings.

3.4 Values identity (See also under ethos): Christian values intentionally referred to in public statements, official documentation etc. as an expression of the sorts of values it is hoped will be evident in the school's operation as well as the personal values it might encourage in its staff and students.

3.5 Distinctive religious charism: The particular history, values and themes that the historical religious tradition of the founding religious order emphasises. If there is no particular religious order tradition to the school, it can articulate and initiate its own founding tradition. Just operationalising the standard Catholic diocesan purposes for schools amounts to articulating a religious identity for the school.

3.6 Enrolment policy: How religious elements are included in the enrolment policy.

3.7 Ministry to parents: Sometimes there are programs that reach out to parents to help foster relationships with local Catholic parishes.

4. *The school curriculum.* That is, all of the intentional ways in which the institution's educational aims are advanced.

4.1 The religion curriculum including activities like retreats and various pedagogies.

The theological identity of the religious education program would initially be implied in the diocesan religion curriculum.

4.2 Various ways in which values related content is handled across the curriculum.

4.3 Youth ministry. Special attention may be given to ministry to youth within the school and extra-curricular activities; this can include peer youth ministry.

4.4 Any religious aspects to pastoral care and guidance.

5. *Ethos and culture of the school.* For each of these aspects there is the normative/intentional ethos and the actual/operational ethos that is experienced as the reality. This begins with written and verbal reference to the values that are intended to underpin the life and curriculum of the school and which it is hoped both staff and students will uphold.

5.1 Operational values: The Christian ideals of justice, love, sanctity of the individual, personal freedom, care for individuals, and responsible stewardship for the environment are proposed to inform the operation of the institution.

5.2 Academic values: Ideals like academic excellence, intellectual freedom, inquiry, critical thinking etc.

5.3 Commitment values: The code of ethics of academic and general staff; commitment to individuals and to the community. Complemented by a student code of conduct/ethics.

6. *The school's organisational and administrative operation.*

6.1 How just and caring is the school as experienced in its teaching and organisational life? This is the moral identity of the school. Here too, there may be contrast between the intentional and actual moral identity.

More sense can be made of the notion Catholic identity of schools when it is related specifically to the different components noted above. These components are more readily evaluated and enhanced than if the approach is just to the general construct Catholic identity.

What is suggested above is not a definitive list of the parts to Catholic school identity, but only one example of a list. Other arrangements could equally be developed to cover all of what a school community considers to be parts of its religious identity.

Personal identity development in relation to institutional identity.
It is proposed that the discourse on the Catholic identity of schools needs to include an understanding of how personal and institutional identities are related. Here, brief reference will be made to earlier material on this topic in Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 89-170).

First, personal identity needs an educational working definition. A basic psychological definition is proposed that can be developed into a view of personal *religious* identity when referenced to a religious culture.

Personal identity is defined as the *process* in which individuals draw on both internal physical and mental resources, as well as external, cultural identity resources, for their self-understanding and self-expression.

This view includes both a sense of subjective 'identity permanence' and the capacity to change and develop. For most, identity will remain fairly stable, with gradual modifications across the life cycle resulting from experience; this applies especially to those whose self-understanding is confirmed positively by others. For some, the self-hypothesis may at times be insecure. While some may try to change aspects of their identity in response to new circumstances, including education, others may resist change, consciously reinforcing their established self-image.

This notion of both *process* and *content* in identity suggests that it makes use of external elements of culture (family life, heroes and heroines, peers, religion, school, artefacts, work, lifestyle, leisure, television, consumer products), in relationship with internal elements (needs, beliefs, values, ideals, attitudes, emotions and moods), to fashion the 'internal clothing' of individuals through which they identify and understand their own characteristics as a person. It is meshed with their sense of individuality and uniqueness. When individuals think about their identity, these self-defining elements come to mind as reference points.

From this perspective, *identity health* can be regarded as a *harmonious balance between internal and external identity resources.* It is proposed as a value judgment that personal identity should be based primarily on internal resources like beliefs, values and commitments. These can be thought of as spiritual identity resources; they may or may not include religious elements. Too great an identification with externals weakens individuals' autonomy and makes them slaves to expectations from outside, rather than being inner-directed. However, it would be unrealistic to expect people to be so spiritually strong and independent as to rely exclusively on their own internal resources for identity and meaning. It would be even more unrealistic to expect this of children and adolescents.

External reference points and links with culture (family, peers, cultural groups, film and television) are fundamentally important for personal identity. It is a basic part of the human condition to need the help of others, and access to cultural resources, for making sense of life, for achieving a worthwhile sense of self, and for the experience of happiness and fulfilment. Identity development and maintenance have an important interpersonal component. Some identity problems may be interpreted as too great a dependence on externals, or too much dependence on internals. Identity is displayed by what individuals think of themselves and what they do to express themselves.

A healthy identity is mainly self-validated. It does not need to be continually propped up somewhat artificially by externals, such as the approval of others or identity-related consumerism. Also, a healthy identity does not require too much energy for its maintenance, allowing for personal energies to be directed outwards and not tied up in self-analysis and self-assurance.

Institutional identity as a reference point for personal identity development.
Institutional identity can be defined in parallel with that of personal identity as the self-understanding and self-expression of the institution. It too is a process and it involves interaction between the historical cultural identity resources of the institution and the activities of its members who might be expected to live out the ideals and aspirations formulated for the institution. It is comparatively easier to articulate the identity of an institution like a business or sporting club; but for a religion with two thousand years of history and culture, it is a much more complex task.

One of the key functions of the institution is to resource the lives and identity development of its members. There will be differences according to the nature of the institution. At one point the family has a key role in communicating a basic sense of human meaning and purpose as well as personal identity. Religious and community agencies can make a valuable contribution as key identity reference points for individuals. National, regional, city as well as ethnic and cultural groupings can also contribute to individual identity development through their identity resources and

traditions. Even sporting organisations and clubs as well as friendship groups can contribute towards a personal identity. What is a concern is that film, television and social media have now become probably the most significant moral and spiritual reference points in the culture for both identity and spirituality.

The interactions between personal and institutional identity parallel those between personal and community meanings as discussed by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 23-88).

This basic, generic picture of identity is expanded when applied to a religion. Here there will be theology, scriptures, rituals, liturgies, religious history, educational institutions and so on, in the mix of the cultural identity resources. For example: The Judeo-Christian scriptures are an identity resource for Catholicism and Catholic schools. In the operation of Catholic school theological identity, the scriptures are identity resource *content*. How the school staff and students use the scriptures in expressing the school's spirituality, and how the scriptures figure in classroom religious education make up the process part of religious identity.

Given that a Catholic school is a civic educational institution, one might expect that a significant educational role would be a key aspect of its institutional religious identity. This means educating with respect to Catholic identity, or educating young people in identity with special attention to the way that they are given access to Catholic identity resources.

What it means to educate in identity

The notion of education in identity is a particularly valuable one for a religious school as it orients the institution's religious identity resources towards the personal identity development of its pupils. The first response that the phrase 'education in identity' commonly brings to mind is its association with the intention of a group to transmit a particular social identity to the young. Religious schools make this intention explicit. But it does not translate into success automatically. People these days in Westernised countries have a much more significant say in their personal identity development than they did in the past. Ultimately the students in Catholic schools will make their own free response as to how much of the religious identity displayed in school and church they are going to assimilate and adopt. Even a 'good' education in Catholic identity will not guarantee that young people will develop and retain an active Catholic religious identity.

Hence a more appropriate and realistic way of approaching education in religious identity is to aim to *resource young people's identity development,* especially by giving them *educational access to their religious heritage.* Catholic schools have long being doing this through religious education programs. But in the current secularised social situation, that is not enough; not all will include active engagement in a parish as a religious component of their identity, even if they internalise a lot of the values and basic human spirituality that they experienced in their Catholic schooling. Something specific also needs to be included in the religion program (or elsewhere in the curriculum) where they can learn how cultural meanings, including both religious heritage and a plethora of meanings from popular culture, affect identity development, and how they might make best use of the identity resources that life offers them. In other words, something needs to be done in the curriculum towards helping young people understand the psychological process of personal identity development.

The first task, giving access to religious heritage both educationally and in terms of experiencing Catholic religious liturgy, prayer and spirituality, is commonly done well in Catholic schools. This is the reason that the so-called crisis in Catholic identity noted earlier was judged to be unfounded. But this is only one cultural input to young people's identity development; and judging from the steady decline in engagement with Catholic parishes to its current low level, one could conclude that overt elements of Catholics' religious identity will not figure prominently.

Hence it is proposed that more attention needs to be given to the second aspect of education in identity – skills for a critical evaluation of how contemporary culture, particularly through its seductive consumerism, beautifully and convincingly marketed, can have a shaping influence on identity development. Details of the agenda that need to be addressed here are explained in Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 129-170).

Young people can be educated in the direction of seeing how the consumer-advertising-media complex both appeals to, and engenders, a sense of 'congenital identity deficiency' which will fuel consumerist buying (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, p. 150). Hopefully, they can get to the point of identifying the problem as illustrated by Eckersley (2006, p 11).

As consumerism reaches increasingly beyond the acquisition of things to the enhancement of the person, the goal of marketing becomes not only to make us dissatisfied with what we have, but also with who we are. As it seeks ever more ways to colonise our consciousness, consumerism both fosters and exploits the restless, insatiable expectation that there has got to be more to life. And in creating this hunger, consumerism offers its own remedy – more consumption.

Learning about their religion as well as studying the complex identity-forming process itself can help young people become better informed about identity formation in a way that prompts their own increasingly conscious participation (depending on their age and maturity). While learning about aspects of cultural, ethnic and religious identity, they could become more aware of identity-related issues. This could help them become more reflective about their own identity as linked interactively with heritage and contemporary cultural elements, while avoiding any excessive emphasis on self-analysis (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 233-236).

Once people have experienced democracy and freedom, it is unlikely that the clock can be turned back – nothing will ever stop the majority from wanting a significant say in the construction of their own idiosyncratic meaning, identity and spirituality. Hence a religious education that only tries to communicate a pre-fabricated religious identity and religious practice will not work. In addition to providing access to religious heritage, religious education needs to help resource and empower young people's own identity-forming processes – to make their DIY identity development more informed and healthy. This requires some understanding of what is involved in identity and spirituality development, and of how cultural meanings can have a shaping influence. Young people need to be set to work to research the issues so that they will be better informed about the potential pitfalls in the various ideologies and cultural practices that can affect their sense of identity.

In concluding this section, it is informative to refer to a soon to be published article on issues that the Australian Jewish community are having with regard to their education to engender a sense of Jewish identity in young people (Gross & Rutland, 2013). The similarities with some Catholic identity anxieties are instructive, and in the author's opinion, this tends to confirm further the case argued above.

Catholic school identity related to the joint church-state partnership and contribution to the common good
As suggested in the implications in Part 1, more attention in the discourse on the Catholic identity of schools should be given to the constitution of Australian Catholic schools as semi-state schools with Catholic sponsorship. Their identity statements need to reflect the partnership between the Catholic Church, Government and parents, acknowledging the schools' civic responsibilities and accountabilities to the wider community to educate young Australian citizens. This constitution also has a bearing on enrolment policy, justifying a more 'open-to-all' approach rather than seeing the schools as just for Catholics. This does not necessarily compromise the emphasis on Catholicism that is appropriate for a school sponsored by the Catholic Church.

Consistent with this partnership basis for Catholic school identity in Australia, is the thinking about the contribution that Catholic schools make to the common good. There is a good literature on this topic and it deserves more attention in relation to the Catholic identity of schools (c/f Bryk *et al.* 1993; McLaughlin *et al.,* 1996; Hollenbach, 1996; Donlevy, 2008; Williams, 2010).

The idea of Catholic religious education enhancing young people's identity and spiritual development is a helpful expression of the way Catholic schools might contribute to Australian education generally. This is an example of how Catholic schooling makes a valued contribution to the common good.

The Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project.
It is relevant here to comment briefly on the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSIP) because of its size and its significant contribution to the contemporary discourse about the Catholic identity of schools in Australia.

The research project was initially conducted in the schools of the four Victorian dioceses by Didier Pollefeyt assisted by Jan Bouwens from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, commencing in 2006 (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). Other dioceses are now participating as well. It is also scheduled for implementation in the UK, USA, the Netherlands, Germany and Lithuania.

The project is envisaged in two parts:

1. Assessing the identity of Catholic educational institutions by means of quantitative and qualitative survey instruments.

2. Enhancing the identity of Catholic educational institutions by means of practical-theological instruments, promoting post-critical belief and a re-contextualisation of Catholic identity in dialogue with the cultural context (Pollefeyt, 2011, p. 3).

With quantitative data from school staff, students and their parents, the survey interpreted the Catholic identity of schools in terms of statistical scales derived from questionnaire items. The items looked at style of spirituality and belief, as well as at thinking about the following issues: secularisation, affirmation of traditional Catholic identity as in the past (a form of 'confessionality'), relationship between faith and culture, values in the culture, and critical values dialogue with pluralistic culture. In addition, they looked at any differences between people's *ideal* Catholic identity and perceived *reality*. The scales were used to profile the responses of participants giving schools and dioceses a picture of the thinking of their own school communities about the Catholic identity of their school as they related to these identity-related issues. In addition, qualitative data on Catholic school identity was collected through the completion of School Identity Portfolios and records of various expressions of Catholic identity.

The preliminary parts of the online survey were concerned with the religious aspects of individuals and of schools: 1. the religious *Profile Questionnaire;* and 2. the *Doyle Questionnaire* which looked at perceived views of the religious aspects of the school (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010).

The core of the research then made use of three multivariate attitude scales for analysing and interpreting perceptions of the Catholic identity of schools.

The first attitude scale, the *Post-critical Belief Scale* developed by by professor Dirk Hutsebaut has been used by Leuven university to describe and characterise people's spirituality along two axes: 1. How theological and symbolic is their pattern of belief (as opposed to literal belief); and 2. How spiritual/religious it is (whether transcendent or not) (Pollefeyt, 2011, p. 10). This scale generated profiles of the spirituality of the various groups of participants in terms of cognitive belief styles. The proposed ideal is a more symbolic/theological style of belief.

The Melbourne Scale characterised the identity related thinking about Catholic schools according to response to secularisation. The analysis proposed 4 types for profiling the participants; they were originally developed by Professor Lieven Boeve:

Institutional secularization. Abandoning the effort to maintain Catholicity and going along with the secular culture. Example questionnaire item: "I'd prefer to go to a school where Christianity isn't too obvious." Here the relationship between faith and culture tended to mean uncritical acceptance of contemporary culture as well as a secularised Catholic school.

Institutional re-confessionalisation. Opposing secularisation by re-affirming a more traditional Catholicity as in earlier more religious times. Example questionnaire item: "I long for a school that wants to be purely Catholic again, just like the old times." The relationship between faith and culture tended to be an opposition to secularising culture by defensively adopting an antagonistic, overt Catholic stance.

Values education in a Christian perspective. Seeks commonality between Christian values and values in the culture. Example questionnaire item: "My ideal school promotes an ethical way of life, because this is the way for students to discover God in their lives." The dialogue between faith and culture tended to be accommodating – seeing where there was commonality, and stressing the need for good moral values.

Re-contextualisation – identity formation in a plural context. Critical dialogue between the Catholic tradition and culture, seeking a distinctive spiritual/moral contribution within pluralist, secularised culture. Example questionnaire item: "I'm all for a Catholic school that considers the present day religious and cultural diversity as an opportunity to learn what It means to be really Christian today." Here the dialogue between faith and culture is envisaged as critical/ evaluative. For example, the religious tradition can challenge the culture to be more human and not so seductive through its consumerist orientation; in doing this, a new Catholic identity in a spiritually plural world can be forged (Pollefeyt, 2011, p. 14; 2009, pp. 2-5).

The *Victoria scale* interprets how the school is perceived to be functioning, particularly as regards the spiritual/moral dimension. The two axes were strength of Christian identity and sense of solidarity or community. The four quadrants of responses were then characterised as follows, as originally developed by Prof Chris Hermans and W. Ter Horst:

The Monologue school. Low on Christian identity but strong on solidarity. This is proposed as the 'traditional' Catholic school identity from the past as if it were exclusively for Catholics and led by committed Catholics.

The Dialogue school. Maximum Christian identity and maximum solidarity. This is proposed as the ideal configuration where Catholicism plays a leadership role in an accepting pluralistic, spiritual environment.

The Colourful school. Minimum Christian identity but a strong sense of solidarity. This is the relatively secularised, spiritually plural school environment with not much affinity for Catholicism but with a sense of community and a congenial acceptance of diversity.

The Colourless school. Low on Christian identity and low on solidarity. This is also a relatively secularised, spiritually plural school but with less sense of community and commitment to the welfare of others (Pollefeyt, 2011, p. 22).

So far the project has concentrated on the profiling of views about school religious identity. As regards future efforts to actively promote a process of re-contextualisation of Catholic identity, Pollefeyt (2011, p. 32) proposed the following agenda:

- Propose the faith to students and teachers who are unfamiliar with it, but nonetheless receptive for it.
- Promote transcendent belief and a Catholic faith identity.
- Offer resistance against relativism and secularisation.
- Take away suspicion, scepticism and fear.
- Give existing values and norms a religious foundation.
- Provide solidarity and community with their deeper religious meaning.
- Make a re-contextualised Christian belief meaningful and redeeming for today's young generation.

The ECSIP is developing re-contextualising strategies and professional development as part of the project's second phase. Pollefeyt's (2011) convention presentation included a section that looked at example situations which reflected the project's identity typology in school architecture, religious art and noticeboard/poster displays. The final draft project report, soon to be published, will give more attention to re-contextualising activities for Catholic schools in the form of interactive, online activities called Practical-Theological Instruments (PTI) that are designed to help familiarise participants with the terminology, ideas and results of the research (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 209). In addition, the project website has an automated research generator through which participant groups can select and complete particular questionnaires and get an analysis of their results, together with the availability of the practical theological instruments (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010, p. 208-210).

General Comment

The project makes a valuable contribution to describing and interpreting the way Catholic school communities think about religious identity-related issues. Pollefeyt and Bowens not only presented their results in an informative way, their research reports were like 'works of art'. This showed in the sophistication and complexity of their statistical analyses that yielded neat, schematic, informative interpretations of trends. If one looks at the thinking a participant might have when answering the individual questionnaire items, it appears that the analysis has stretched this thinking of the natural explanatory power of the items to somewhat enhanced conceptual interpretations. But such interpretation is part of the useful statistical and interpretative art of the researchers; it indicates high quality quantitative research.

The researchers stated the preferred normative position as regards Catholic identity to be as follows: "The normative framework of this research is the ideal of the re-contextualisation of Catholic identity, based on dialogue with plurality and a symbolic understanding of religion." (Pollefeyt & Bowens, 2010, p. 193). This signals the distinctive strength of the research in its underlying roots in the Belgian theologian Lieven Boeve's theology of interruption and re-contextualisation (Boeve, 2005; 2007; 2011).

Lieven Boeve's theology of interruption and re-contextualisation

Boeve's theology is considered to be a wise, insightful and compelling interpretation of the contemporary secularised social situation. His interpretation of contemporary culture makes a particularly valuable contribution to Catholic theology and spirituality, as well having implications for religious education and ministry. He considered that behind secularisation are three interrelated cultural processes – de-traditionalisation, individualisation and pluralisation. *De-traditionalisation* (overlapping considerably with secularisation) has resulted from a radical disjunction or 'interruption' that has occurred in the way that cultural traditions are handed on from one generation to the next; for example, the Christian faith is no longer the taken-for-granted cultural horizon that almost automatically communicated a sense of religious identity to the younger generation. This process is complemented by *individualisation* where there is now a widely accepted view that individuals should have the principal say in constructing their own personal identity. It needs to be 'DIY' rather than institutionally determined. *Pluralisation* is reflected not only in the plurality of religious views in multi-faith society, but in the multiple meanings about life that are advertised in the culture, seeking adherents.

Boeve considered that there is an interplay between these cultural processes that affects the way individuals construct personal meaning and identity – with parallels for collective, institutional meanings and identities. People take up different stances when they try to address or cope with the challenges. Some of the identity stances taken can be flawed and unhealthy – particularly those that are ideologically based (c/f Rossiter, 2011). Boeve proposed the need for a re-contextualised Catholic theology. It calls for an, at times radical, critical dialogue with contemporary culture that challenges Christianity to positively engage in enhancing human life and community. Boeve regarded the extensive breakdown in the traditional ways through which communities hand on their beliefs and values – the primary interruption – as a challenge for Christians to construct a new and deeper relationship with God with the hope that the interruption to the relationship will eventually result in many positive gains.

Pollefeyt openly endorsed the Boeve theology underpinning the ECSIP. But one might wonder whether all of the Australian Catholic church authorities who funded the project are fully aware of how radical the notion of re-contextualisation can be; perhaps some may really be more in favour of a re-confessionalisation, but felt that the ECSIP might bolster the Catholic identity of schools in opposition to the widespread erosion of parish engagement with the Catholic church.

Re-contextualisation of Catholic identity: A process going back to Pope John XXIII

What appears to be of great significance for the ongoing success of the ECSIP is the need to acknowledge that re-contextualisation of Catholic identity is not something novel in Australia or in the Catholic church generally. It has roots in significant movements since the time of Pope John XXIII (1963) when he stated:

Today's world, the needs made plain in the last fifty years, and a deeper understanding of doctrine have brought us to a new situation ... It is not that the Gospel has changed, it is that we have begun to understand it better. Those who have lived as long as I have ...were enabled to compare different cultures and traditions, and know that the moment has come to discern the signs of the times, to seize the opportunity and to look far ahead.

More recently this was reinforced by Pope John Paul II (1984):

. . develop your culture with wisdom and prudence, retaining the freedom to criticise what may be called the 'cultural industry' remaining all the while deeply concerned with truth … faith will ask culture what values it promotes, what destiny it offers to life, what place it makes for the poor and the disinherited with whom the Son of Man is identified, how it conceives of sharing, forgiveness and love.

While Boeve's theology makes a distinctive, novel contribution, there is much evidence of theological and pastoral re-contextualisation going on in Catholicism and Catholic education since Vatican II and before that, even though the label re-contextualisation was not used. These efforts were part of processes variously described as: Responding to the signs of the times; Making Catholicism more *relevant* to the contemporary world; Critical dialogue between faith and culture (inculturaltion); Questing for social justice; Christian humanism and humanistic psychology; Addressing the real personal and spiritual needs of people; Christian praxis; Raising critical consciousness; Evangelisation of culture and such like.

Hence the ECSIP's re-contextualising agenda needs to be understood as part of a long term movement to try to make Catholic schools and their religious education more personal and relevant for pupils and the families that support them (Rossiter, 1999). One could add here a long list of Catholic religious education scholars and practitioners from Australia and overseas who have contributed in this direction.

Re-contextualisation and the Lombaerts-Pollefeyt theory for classroom religious education
It is pertinent here to note the theory of classroom religious education out of which Pollefeyt works – 'hermeneutical communicative competence' – developed primarily by Herman Lombaerts (Lombaerts, 2000; Pollefeyt, 2008).

Lombaerts and Pollefeyt, (2004) made a valuable contribution to religious education theory in highlighting the key place of hermeneutics (or interpretation). They noted:

The art of interpreting the traces of communication is a specifically human quality. It is the alphabet of the human search for understanding the self, the interaction among people, the meaning of life and for establishing the truth. (p. 1)

The hermeneutical communicative competence approach is primarily an intimate, small group, psychological method based on young people's reviewing their 'hermeneutical knots' or issues in the interpretation of meaning and purpose in life. Rossiter (2001) considered that this approach had limited application to the usual religion classrooms where groups of 25 or more students are engaging more in a study of religion than in reflective personal exchanges, even though such exchanges can at times make a valuable contribution when they occur naturally. The hermeneutic communicative approach was felt to be more suitable for small voluntary commitment groups. It appeared to this author as leaning too far in the direction of a psycho-therapeutic process.

Conclusion

These two articles have drawn attention to the need to differentiate the situational causes of identity anxieties from an analysis of Catholic school identity as such. After a brief signposting of the areas of literature that have a bearing on the Catholic identity of schools, the following were proposed as areas that could be given more attention to broaden and enhance the discourse on the Catholic identity of schools.

1. Avoiding the use of the construct 'Catholic identity' generically by identifying a range of component sub-identities that can more meaningfully and easily be addressed, and which are more amenable to handling contemporary complexities.

2. Develop an understanding of the relationships between personal and institutional identity development – the psychology and sociology of identity. This includes understanding how individuals construct personal meaning and identity with reference to available cultural meanings.

3. Develop an understanding of the role of the Catholic school in offering an education in identity. From this perspective, the Catholic school needs to be a repository of Catholic culture to which young people have educational access as identity building resources. But this also needs to include studies of the psychology and sociology of contemporary identity development, acknowledging that just providing Catholic identity resources is not sufficient. Catholic schooling, and religious education in particular, can usefully review their role in resourcing the spirituality and identity development of young people. This approach needs to eschew thinking that problems with the identity of Catholic schools are linked with their apparent low efficacy in producing churchgoing Catholics.

4. As semi-state schools with a consequent principal function as civic education institutions, together with accountability to the Australian community, Catholic school identity needs to be framed more from this perspective of joint venture rather than from a perspective which gives the impression that they are exclusively Catholic institutions like seminaries. This proposal involves giving attention to the contribution that Catholic schools make to the common good and to the education of Australian citizens.

Final theological reflection: Identity issues in the New Testament communities and with the historical Jesus

New Testament scholars have shown that there were religious and organisational identity issues in the early Gospel communities (Brown, 1984; Crossan, 1998). For example, this was evident in the community for which the Gospel of Matthew was written. Excluded from the synagogue, these early believers in Jesus needed some sort of scriptural reinforcement and enhancement of who they thought they were as a small believing community (Meier, 1980). Only gradually did the early Christians come to see that their unique faith meant becoming more than a sect within Judaism. The question "Who is the *true* Israel?" was important for their religious identity; and it remains the same sort of iconic identity question asked by Christian groups ever since. It seems inevitable therefore that questions will always be asked about what constitutes *authentic* Catholic identity, and this will be applied to schools as well as to other Catholic institutions. Trying to answer this question in ways that are faithful to the New Testament vision will be an ongoing task. But the focus on religious identity needs to be balanced and not excessive.

The work of New Testament and historical Jesus scholars has peeled back the literary layers in the New Testament generating portraits of the *historical Jesus,* contrasted with the *Christ of faith* who was the primary focus of those scriptures viewed through an Easter, resurrection perspective (Borg, 2006; Crossan, 1991; Meier, 2009). In the light of this scholarship, it is possible to speculate what would the historical Jesus have thought about enhancing institutional religious identity. The answer is probably "very little". Jesus was involved with addressing the temporal and spiritual needs of the 'little ones'. He was acutely aware of identity-related issues such as the marginalisation of the poor by the 'temple system' and by the prevailing culture of 'religious purity' – issues which he courageously addressed. Hence one could propose that Jesus would be likely to see contemporary questions about culture and personal identity as of vital concern and in need of redress; but he would be unlikely to give much attention to institutional identity. Rather he would be expected to be more action oriented, concerned about what can be done to enhance the personal and spiritual lives of people. In other words, he would be likely to be more focused on mission than on institutional religious identity – more on what we do rather than what we *look like* (c/f Sullivan, 2011).

A healthy personal identity does not require too much effort for its maintenance, allowing for personal energies to be directed outwards towards engagement with others, and not tied up in self-analysis, self-assurance and in seeking self-validation (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). One could equally apply this value judgment to a sense of healthy institutional

religious identity. While not wanting to discount the value of what has already been done in relation to the Catholic identity of schools in Australia, I wonder about the long term strategic value of concentrating too much on Catholic school identity. I would like to see further attention given to other constructs like 'promoting the spiritual/moral development of young people' and 'educating young people in identity', as an expression of the mission of Catholic schools.

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