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# Perspective on the use of construct “Catholic Identity” for Australian Catholic schooling: Sociological background and literature – Part 1

*Graham Rossiter*

## Abstract

Increasingly over the past 20 years, the construct ‘Catholic identity’ is being used with reference to Australian Catholic schools and their religious education. Recently, new designated religious coordination positions in schools like ‘Director of Catholic Identity’ have been created, along with others related to mission and evangelisation. Substantial research on the Catholic identity of schools, commenced in Victoria, is now being conducted in a number of Australian dioceses. This article, in two parts, seeks to put the contemporary interest in Catholic school identity into perspective, working from 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 some elements that could be given more attention in the discourse on the Catholic identity of schools, especially the idea of an ‘education in identity’ in which Catholic schools are engaged in resourcing the personal identity and spirituality of young people. The perspective and follow up proposals may help with discernment of the wisest and most productive ways of using the construct identity in Catholic schooling and religious education. This is the first part of the discussion.

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The construct 'Catholic identity' has become increasingly prominent in Australian Catholic educational discourse and school practice. For example, the document *Catholic Schools at a Crossroad* by the Catholic bishops of NSW and the ACT (2007) was concerned about "reaffirming our commitment to the Catholic identity of our schools and in continuing to demonstrate this clearly in the future" (p. 11). It stated that school leaders, staff, parents and students should understand and be committed to the Catholic identity and mission of the school. A strong commitment to Catholic identity has been proposed while at the same time there has been some recognition that it is more difficult to communicate a religious identity in Westernised countries today. In 1996, Bishop Robinson, the chair of the Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board noted that "There has been a weakening of Catholic identity and culture in Australian society, so that it is more difficult to convey to young people a sense of belonging to the Church" (p. 1).

In their recent book *Education from a Catholic Perspective*, McKinney and Sullivan (2013,) considered that Catholic identity has become a crucial issue: "Maintaining Catholic identity in Catholic educational institutions emerges as the challenge for Catholic education, in a 21st century cultural context that is increasingly ambivalent if not hostile, to religion" (p. 29).

Over the last decade, the burgeoning of new designated religious role positions in Australian Catholic schools has also reflected greater interest in the Catholic identity or Catholicity of the schools. While not all of the roles included identity specifically, most reflect identity-related concerns about how visibly Catholic the schools should be. The themes of mission and evangelisation were also prominent. Similarly, and related to this development, new leadership positions have been created in Australian Catholic University that specifically include the title of Catholic identity (Assistant Dean Catholic Identity, Professor of Catholic Identity).

Table 1

*Examples of designated religious education leadership/coordination positions in Australian Catholic schools*

<b>Religious Coordination positions that predominated into the 1990s</b>	<b>Some examples of new religious coordination positions that have emerged in the last decade</b>
Religious Education Coordinator	Director of Catholic <b>identity</b>
Assistant Principal Religious Education (Queensland)	Assistant principal <b>identity</b>
Faith Development Coordinator (Victoria)	Assistant principal religious education, <b>identity</b> and mission
Director of Religious Studies (New Zealand)	Director of mission
Liturgy Coordinator	Director of mission and Catholic <b>identity</b>
Retreat Coordinator	Deputy principal mission
Appearance	Dean of Mission
Appearance Use	Director or Evangelisation
Appearance Interest	Director of Religious Education and Evangelisation
	Director of Faith and Outreach
	Director of faith and mission
	Vice principal faith and mission
	Ministry coordinator
	Director of spiritual activities
	Family liaison coordinator

Attention has been given to Catholic school identity in the literature (E.g. Heft, 1991; Haldane, 1996; Hugonet, 1997; Rossiter, 1997a, 1997b; Duminuco, 1999; Groome, 1996, 2002; McKinney, 2008; Sultmann & Brown, 2011). Rossiter (1998), Boeve (2006) and Chia (2013) provided examples of the parallel discussion of the Catholic identity of Catholic universities. Recently, led by the Victorian Catholic school systems, a large scale research project on the Catholic identity of schools has been conducted by Pollefeyt from the Catholic University of Leuven (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010).

This article, in two parts, seeks to put these developments into perspective. It considers what may be driving the interest in the religious construct Catholic identity. And by looking into the psychological and sociological dimensions to institutional identity, it tries to identify both the strengths and the potential problems with the use of this construct as a central element in the theory and practice of Australian Catholic schooling and religious education. After signposting briefly the literatures related to various aspects of, or perspectives on, Catholic school identity, it proposes ideas/themes that could be given more attention within the discourse of the Catholic identity of schools. It concludes with an outline of the potential contribution of the Catholic school to *an education in identity* – an approach that can be well accommodated within religious education.

### Some sociological background to the interest in institutional religious identity

#### What drives the interest in identity?

#### Examples of factors precipitating institutional identity anxiety. Comments on implications for the discourse on the Catholic identity of schools.

Discussion of institutional identity tends to regard it as a 'static' thing – something that can be modified and enhanced and then "It will be OK." But in reality it is an *interactive* process.

Voiced concerns about some perceived crisis in institutional identity can be directed towards changing and strengthening that identity. But the real problem may not be institutional identity per se, but some underlying concerns and anxieties that get projected onto identity; addressing the institutional identity as the 'presenting problem' will then not necessarily resolve the anxieties. Crawford and Rossiter (2006,) discussed this question, pointing towards what they called the "emotional substrate to identity" (p. 91). Constructive progress in the building and enhancement of institutional identity requires identification and differentiation of the identity concerns / anxieties from the components of identity. Sometimes, the concerns may not have a lot to do with the actual identity itself. In other words, it may be ultimately more fruitful to address the anxieties that are driving the special interest in Catholic identity than to address identity itself. Hence it is helpful when trying to appraise the current interest in Catholic identity of schools to take into account the background factors that may have catalysed and possibly fuelled the interest in institutional identity.

In this section, I will identify and describe briefly seven generic examples of sociological situations that result in a concern about institutional identity to see if this throws light on the current special interest in the Catholic identity of schools. For each, some comments on *implications* will be added, reflecting on how these situations might apply to the interest in Catholic identity.

**Times of crisis or institutional failure.** A national or institutional failure often triggers identity concerns. For example: The launch of the Russian satellite *Sputnik* in 1957 caused widespread anxiety about United States and Western technology, education and scientific training; The failure to win the Vietnam war caused considerable angst in the United States – 'What is wrong with America?'; The loss of the space shuttles (*Challenger* in 1986 and *Columbia* in 2003) prompted soul-searching beyond NASA. Political turmoil and even the poor performance of the national or regional sporting team can lead to identity self-searching by the group.

**Implications: Crisis of Catholic identity in schools?** The very title of the NSW/ACT Catholic bishops' statement *Catholic Schools at a Crossroad* (2007) suggests some sort of crisis of identity in Catholic schools. An identity anxiety seemed to underpin the document (it was even more prominent in the first draft). The impression given was that despite the extensive resources invested in Catholic schools, they were not arresting the slide away from parish participation and the decline in Catholic culture. Increasing the mass attendance rates of pupils was included as a key performance indicator of progress for Catholic schools (p. 18). An impression was also given that if Catholic identity was 'stronger' and more 'overt' in the schools, then this would somehow 'stick' – affecting the sense of the personal Catholic identity of pupils in a positive and lasting way.

Rossiter (2010) discussed this question, considering that in practice there was no compelling evidence of any significant identity crisis in Catholic schools, but rather an unrealistic projection of anxiety about crisis in participation in the Catholic church onto Catholic schools – which were in fact thriving. It was as if the reality of a 'booming Catholic school system in a declining church' could not be comprehended and accepted (See Dixon, 2003, for an account of the decline in Catholic church participation). Hence the issue was not so much about Catholic school identity, but an underlying anxiety that Catholic schools did not seem to be substantially communicating an overt, lasting Catholic identity to their pupils and were not improving their church going behaviour (See Boeve, 2011, who discussed the communication of faith and religious identity in contemporary secularised society). In other words, it is not an identity crisis in Catholic schools, but rather an identity crisis for a particular, unrealistic view of what Catholic schools might contribute towards resolving the problem of low engagement in the Catholic church itself.

One could conclude that a healthy Catholic identity for Catholic schools might exist but which of itself is not naturally capable of 'producing' a traditional Catholic identity in pupils. This is because the socio-cultural situation has changed so much and people today are more selective in consciously choosing the identity resources to which they will reference their personal sense of identity; for many, they see no useful place for formal religious components in their identity resources (Rossiter, 2010; Crawford & Rossiter, 2006).

**Implications: Educating in Catholic identity.** It is suggested that the notion of Catholic identity of schools needs to include an understanding of the dynamics of personal identity development and how it can be resourced by institutional identity – and of how this relationship might operate in a pluralist secularised society. In turn, this relates to content and pedagogy for 'educating' young people in identity and in trying to ensure that the wisdom of the Catholic religious tradition can be accessed in the process (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, 228-239; c/f discussion of Catholic curriculum in D'Orsa, 2013 and D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012).

**A new or reconstituted institution.** This development often calls for a statement of institutional identity, purpose and mission as part of its initial self-presentation to the community outside.

**Implications.** New Catholic schools created without a history rooted in religious order traditions that characterised most Australian Catholic schools needed to articulate identity and mission in Catholic terms. Schools which lost their traditional religious order staff members also needed some revision to their Catholic identity; often here their historical religious roots were reinforced with considerations of the charism of the religious order which they strived to maintain and further develop (Brien & Hack, 2010, 2011; Lydon, 2009).

**Change in institutional leadership.** People often think that new leadership will resolve crises and give new enthusiasm to the institution. This can range across things like sporting teams, political parties, business corporations, schools and such like.

**Implications.** Much will depend on the view of Catholic identity of the new leadership. Hence the importance of any professional development on this topic.

**Challenging comparisons with other institutions.** Looking at the identity and work of other institutions is often a stimulus to reviewing the identity and mission of one's own.

**Implications.** Institutions can learn from observing how others conduct their mission and how they articulate their religious identity. This can affect the growth of Catholic school leadership positions that include the term 'Catholic identity' and promote an interest in the discourse about religious identity.

**Image consciousness related to advertising.** Increasingly, how institutions are perceived in the market place has become a concern of institutional leaders. It has to do with 'status' (de Botton, 2004), 'image', 'branding' and 'badging'. It is nourished by, and it reinforces a consumerist mentality. Slogan advertising has become ubiquitous – for example: guess what products are being advertised by the following slogans:- The relentless pursuit of perfection, Don't hold back, Live the pleasure, Born to perform, The power of dreams. (They are car advertisements for Lexus, Jeep, Peugeot, Jaguar and Honda.)

**Implications:** Religious school slogan advertising. Table 2 shows a recent example of schools' identity slogan advertising. It would be a difficult task to place the schools concerned as listed below the table in the correct places. Is it possible to distinguish the Catholic, other Christian and state schools on the basis of their slogans?

Table 2

*School Advertising Slogans*

School advertising slogan	School
Liberating the potential in every learner	
Integrity, respect, courage and service	
Caring creative learning community	
A love of learning	
Skill and honour	
Investigate, develop, reflect	
Small enough to care, big enough to challenge	
Learn, love, live	
Let your light shine	
Girls make their marks	

*Identity slogans from schools.* Arden School, Barker College Wahroonga, Loreto Normanhurst, Meriden Strathfield, Orange Grove Public School; Pymble Ladies College, Redlands School, St Catherine's School, St Scholastica's College Glebe, Waverley College. It can be amusing to put school names into the online *Advertising slogan generator* and compare these with the above. The site <http://thesurrealist.co.uk/slogan.cgi> appears to draw on many marketing examples and it randomly generates advertising slogans on request.

**Implications: Catholic identity branding and badging.** Australian Catholic University was 'badged and branded' as *ACU National* for a period of less than 10 years before returning to its original name. Just whether this re-badging / re-branding made any real difference to the perceived quality of the educational and research service the university delivered to its students and the wider community would be difficult to determine. This episode also prompts questions about how worthwhile it has been for the mission of Catholic educational institutions to invest heavily in image marketing and public relations activities. Community service institutions like schools and universities can overdo their identification with the consumer marketplace. Where this happens, there is a risk that the educational services they deliver are treated like commercial commodities whose ultimate purpose can appear to be the profitability of the institution rather than the relevance and quality of their service to the community.

The question remains as to what aspects of a school's identity are important in its self-expression and how might these best be displayed. There are issues in making the school appear to be more of a business, operating according to current commercial marketing thinking and strategies. There is an identifiable hint of narcissism in Facebook-Tweeting behaviour that Catholic schools could well avoid. It is suggested that concentrating more on what can actually be done to *educate young people well* would be more healthy and productive than a commercial focus on institutional identity.

**Confusing personal identity issues with institutional identity, and confusing expectations for different contexts.** Sometimes personal identity anxieties are projected onto the institution. This is more likely to be a problem for institutional leaders who tend to have more sway as to the institutional identity that is projected. Also, expectations of identity in different contexts can be mixed up.

*Institutional identity problems arising from the action of the leadership.* The focus on institutional identity can be driven by the idiosyncratic concerns of its leaders. Because of the power they exert over the operation of staff members, their view of what the institution's identity should look like can be very influential – for better or worse. The personal needs and interests of the institutional leaders may have a disproportionate effect on identity-promoting strategies and activities. Two examples arising from discussions with colleagues are noted.

Firstly, there is the ESIT syndrome – the Executive Slide into Inconsequential Trivialities. This occurs where CEO and/or executive staff appear to be preoccupied with minor externals, while what are regarded as glaring issues by many of the other staff seem to go by unnoticed as if these were of little or no consequence.

Secondly, the SIS syndrome. The Seduction by Image and Status syndrome was also referred to as the Coffee-table book / Facebook Preoccupation. It is about inordinate attention given to what the key leaders think the institutions should look like; and these days this can be the image hopefully projected on Facebook.

*Confusing the Identity related expectations of different contexts:* A classic example of this problem is evident in the widespread expectation that schools should solve society's problems. Over the years, this thinking has contributed to the overcrowding of the school curriculum with a range of initiatives related to social problems. For example education programs related to: Aids, peace, bullying, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, obesity and so on. It is not that the school cannot make a limited but valuable educational contribution to the community's efforts to address social problems; but it is a problem where there is an 'over-expectation' of the school to bring about social change by itself.

**Implications: Leadership problems.** There is a perennial need for school leaders who are focused on resourcing and enhancing the educational process; this makes the most effective contribution to the school's Catholic identity. Where leaders may be side-tracked to some extent by personal ambition, status, executive perks or unhelpful idiosyncratic preoccupations, the school community suffers and its mission is inhibited.

**Implications: Confusion of contexts.** *The Joint partnership context.* One of the problems with concerns about the Catholic identity of schools is that the identity expectations of Catholic schools may be more appropriate for a Catholic seminary or theological college than for a school. In the former, the institution is fully owned and operated by the church, and the religiously committed participants freely choose to participate in the institution. But schools are primarily civil institutions for the handing on the intellectual culture to children and adolescents, where attendance is compulsory. They can contribute to the church's mission; but it is unrealistic to think of them as if they were primarily theologically focused ecclesiastical institutions with an evangelising potential like that of a seminary.

Catholic schools in Australia are semi-state schools and not exclusively ecclesiastical structures, and this needs to be reflected in the identity and mission expectations that are proposed for them. They are constituted and funded through a joint venture partnership among federal, state, church and community (parents). This sort of partnership with governments is also evident in the funding of Catholic health and welfare agencies, Catholic hospitals and Catholic aged care. But these institutions are not expected to change significantly the religious practices of their patients and clients in the same way that Catholic schools are often expected to with their students. This has something to do with the success of compulsory schooling for all where there is often too great an expectation put on them to solve society's problems (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 255-263).

**Implications: Religious effectiveness.** Unrealistic expectations of the identity and evangelising potential of a civic institution like a school, by contrast with those for a seminary or a religious order, result in unrealistic expectations of religious effectiveness. No matter how many times Catholic school educators point out that whether or not young people will engage with a local Catholic parish is unlikely to depend solely on their Catholic schooling and religious education (Crawford & Rossiter, 1988), there still remain expectations from some in the Catholic community



that Catholic schools should produce church-going Catholics somewhat automatically – and if not, "There must be something wrong". Rather, a different measure of religious effectiveness for schools is needed; the measure should be about the quality of their religious education which gives substantive access to Catholic traditions, but which cannot impose them. In other words, school religious effectiveness is about how well young people are educated religiously, not about their final options as regards active church membership.

**Creating executive coordinating positions to address identity related issues.** At an institutional level, it is not uncommon for a pressing concern to lead to the creation of a new coordinating or leadership position related to the problem as a step to show that something is being done about it. A new 'director' position can be created without much practical clarity as to the real needs and how they might be addressed; the new role may sound important, but at the same time it can have vagueness, uncertainty and jargon about what the role implies in practice. It is also not uncommon to see that the creation of such new positions does not necessarily bring about significant change. Some institutions appear to have created directorial positions that are not productive, but which seem to create superfluous work for others.

**Implications: New Catholic identity-related leadership positions in schools.** The rapid increase in new designated religious role positions in Catholic schools as illustrated in Figure 1 appears to have been driven at least in part by Catholic identity-related concerns. Even the roles that do not specifically use the term identity still seem to have been affected by a desire to make Catholic qualities and identifiers more prominent. The new terms seem to be more prominent in secondary schools; and more prominent in independent than in diocesan schools.

So far there is no clear evidence that the burgeoning of new religious identity positions has brought about notable change in the Catholic identity of the schools or their students. Also, while the new jobs have role descriptions, these tend not to clarify in detail what is understood by Catholic identity. In addition, what tends to be missing is a theory of institutional identity and how this might relate to individual personal identity development.

### **Comments on the literature and practice related to Catholic identity of schools**

It is beyond the scope of this article to review the literature on the Catholic identity of schools in any detail. This section will be limited to signposting a number of identity-related sub areas of literature, referring only to one or a few example references. It will be complemented in part 2 with the proposal of some areas/themes that could usefully be given more attention in the discourse.

Initially the term Catholicity was prominent in this literature, describing how Catholic the institution appeared as well as the qualities and characteristics that were thought to be distinctive of Catholicism (Rossiter, 1997a; Bezzina & Wilson, 1998; Sullivan, 2000). Gradually the synonym Catholic identity was preferred (Brennan, 2001; Sharkey, 2002; Rymarz, 2007). A search of the archives of the *Journal of Religious Education* shows that since 1997 the word 'Catholicity' appeared in 21 articles whereas 'Catholic identity' appeared in 41. The more generic term 'religious identity' appeared in 63 articles, but in many of these instances, it was referring to the personal religious identity of individuals and not institutions.

### **Theological qualities of Catholicism**

One approach to the Catholic identity of schools focuses on qualities that are thought to be distinctive of Catholicism (E.g. Groome, 1996, 2002). This approach begins with a relatively abstract theological analysis, concentrating on the spirituality of Catholicism in general. This gives a normative theological definition of Catholic identity. Operational identity can then be evaluated in terms of how well it measures up to the ideal qualities – but measuring performance on such qualities is problematic.

Prominent in the characteristics of Catholicism are its community, liturgical and sacramental qualities and its commitment to social justice; it has a diverse range of theologies and endeavours to adapt to different cultural settings. While there is a need for a theology of identity, one of the potential problems is that the approach can be



sociologically distant from the school; it can be somewhat static and it can tend to stay at the stage of theological analysis of Catholicism as a world religion and not be anchored sufficiently in actual school practice (that is, in the qualities of the school that affect those who work in it).

### **Distinctiveness and inclusiveness**

Sullivan (2000) considered that there was a need for balance between the distinctive religious aspects of Catholic identity, and a significant inclusiveness. This would have implications for enrolment policies. Chambers *et al.* (2006), Chambers (2012) and Donlevy (2008) gave attention to the identity implications of having a legitimate, and valued place for pupils who are not Catholic. Chia (2013) took up the same theme looking at the place of Catholic schools and universities in multi-religious societies.

### **Catholic curriculum and pedagogy**

The first issue of the current volume 5 of the journal *International Studies in Catholic Education* addresses the theme "Can there be a Catholic curriculum?" This topic has figured in the literature of Catholic school identity for a long time – for example the late Barry Dwyer's book *Catholic Schools at the Crossroads* (Davis, 1999; Dwyer, 1986). Dwyer spoke about "evangelising the curriculum" as a way of including content and pedagogy that reflected Catholic interests in helping pupils to be informed religiously and to learn how to think critically. The topic is best understood as an evaluation of curriculum and pedagogy to see whether they reflect a range of Catholic values and principles – especially social justice (Riley & Danner-McDonald, 2013). This could also be described as checking that the curriculum is consistent with a Catholic philosophy of education. The term 'Catholic curriculum' runs some risk of being misinterpreted as meaning 'Catholic maths, Catholic science and Catholic geography' and so on, which does not make sense.

Similarly, care is needed with the term Catholic pedagogy – pedagogy which might reflect Catholic principles would be a better language format. More recent publications discussing issues related to the Catholic qualities in a curriculum include D'Orsa T, 2013, D'Orsa et al. 2012, Davis & Franchi, 2013).

### **'Permeation' of Catholic identity**

The idea of 'permeation' of Catholic identity in a school was developed from the age old Christian ideal for personal spirituality where it was hoped that all aspects of the everyday lives of individuals would be inspired and enhanced by their faith. The permeation of gospel values in the personal life of the Christian was projected onto Catholic institutions. Archbishop Miller (2006), when Secretary of the Roman Congregation for Catholic Education, articulated this as:

the gospel of Jesus Christ and his very person are to inspire and guide the Catholic school in every dimension of its life and activity – its philosophy of education, its curriculum, its community life, its selection of teachers, and even its physical environment. (p. 3)

A recent Australian interpretation mirrored this as follows:

Where Catholic identity and mission permeate a school, they will be evident in all its aspects – its governance, leadership, organisation, programs, administration and overall culture. The relationships between leaders, staff and students, and the nature of the education, pastoral care and community life will reflect the Christian inspiration of the schooling. (McMullen, 2012, p. 21)

Permeation of gospel values has been used either explicitly or implicitly to distinguish Catholic schools from others (Buetow, 1988; Groome, 1996; Miller, 2007) and also it is implied in some of the discussions of a Catholic curriculum (D'Orsa *et al.*, 2012). But when the phrase 'permeation of *Catholic identity*' is used, there is not the same clarity because what is understood by Catholic identity is more ambiguous and diverse.

In my opinion, the permeation theory for Catholic identity in a school is good at expressing a moral ideal; but it can become problematic when there is a tendency to presume that permeation actually exists by theological definition, rather than something that has to be worked at continually, acknowledging that human institutions often fall short

of the ideal. My concern is about where the use of permeation language gives the impression of some smugness and moral superiority – hence my disquiet when it is used as a distinguishing features of Catholic schools. For example, state schools could equally claim that they are ‘permeated’ with the values of respect and care for individuals, with all aspects of the school life enhancing student learning. When talking about the desired qualities of Catholic schools, there is a need to balance the ideal of Christian values permeation with acknowledgment of the natural limitations to achieving it. This can help avoid projecting an unrealistic assumption about how prominent Catholic identity markers are – a projection that sets up Catholic schools for criticism about the gap between rhetoric and reality.

### **Key religious leadership roles in schools**

Research has been done in articles and doctoral studies on the roles of key religious leadership personnel in Catholic schools. This has focused mainly on the role of Religious Education Coordinator (Faith Development Coordinator or Assistant Principal Religious Education) (c/f Buchanan, 2007; Crotty, 1998, 2005, 2011; Engebretson, 1998; Fleming, 2001, 2003; Rymarz, 2006). Bezzina and Wilson (1998) looked at religious leadership beyond this specific role merging into the literature of Catholic educational leadership.

### **Catholic school religious education**

Having a special place for religious education in the curriculum has long been a distinguishing feature of Catholic schools, both in Australia and elsewhere (Catholic Bishops of NSW & ACT, 2007). It also has a pre-eminent place in the idea of a ‘Catholic curriculum’ (D’Orsa *et al.* 2012). It is beyond the scope here to identify where and how the extensive literature on Catholic school religious education touches on religious identity.

### **Catholic educational leadership**

This field has its own extensive literature which refers variously to Catholic identity related issues. Some example references are Bracken (2000) and Brennan (2001).

### **Evangelisation (New evangelisation) and mission of the church**

Evangelisation has long been a key theme much written about with reference to Catholic religious education and schooling, and church ministry. Gascoigne (1995) considered its relationship with religious identity. Sharkey’s (2002) article is an example of writing that focuses on the evangelising role of the Catholic school, including ‘New’ evangelisation and on the contribution of the Catholic school to the mission of the church. Rymarz (2012) addressed New evangelisation in particular, considering the challenges it posed for Catholic schooling.

### **Responding to the challenge of secularisation**

As suggested earlier, one of the driving forces behind the interest in Catholic school identity is trying to address secularisation – that is the phenomenon of secularity and not the ideology of secularism as such (Arthur, 2009; Rossiter, 2011). Rossiter (2010) described the secularising process in some detail with a view to a more positive and constructive approach to it in Catholic school religious education. The extensive literature on secularisation will not be referred to here. This issue will come up again in part 2 in the section on the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project.

### **Distinctive religious charism**

Lydon (2009) and Brien and Hack (2010, 2011) considered the significance of historical religious charisms for Catholic school identity. This applied to schools that originally were conducted by religious orders and which have endeavoured to maintain some sense of historical continuity with the distinctive spirituality and mission of their founding religious orders. Sometimes new schools without any religious order tradition will choose a distinctive historical religious spirituality with which to align their identity.

### **Liturgy and prayer**

The liturgical and prayer identity is an important component of a school's Catholic identity (Rosier, 2006). Generally, Catholic schools have a good record on liturgy and prayer.

### **Student response to institutional Catholic identity**

Extensive writings on youth spirituality suggest that contemporary young people are not using much in the way of religious elements in their construction of personal identity (E.g., Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Mason *et al.* 2007; Smith & Denton, 2005). How personal identity development relates to institutional identity will be examined in part 2.

### **Measuring and assessing Catholic identity**

The research paper of Curran and Francis (1996) demonstrates the perennial difficulty in devising quantitative measures of personal religious identity. No matter how statistically reliable the study's 12 item scale was, a close look at the items suggests that their link with a rich concept of personal religious identity is problematic, mainly because the latter is so complex. For example, three of the 12 items in the scale were "I think that religious sisters are good people", "I think we should have fewer masses at school", and "I sometimes pray to a saint" (Curran & Francis, 1996, p. 386). What a participant thinks about when answering questions like these will hardly give a significant insight into their personal identity. Hence there is a 'conceptual enhancement' occurring in the interpretation of identity from somewhat limited and at times questionable 'identity markers'.

This same problem tends to arise in research concerned with measuring and assessing institutional Catholic identity (c/f Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010; Sultmann & Brown, 2011). In part 2, it will be suggested that it is easier and more helpful to try to assess particular Catholic identity components rather than the more general construct 'Catholic identity' (E.g. the liturgical identity, the theological dimension of the religion curriculum, the moral identity in the way individuals are treated within the school and such like.)

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