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A shared understanding of the nature and purpose of religious education seems an almost impossible exploit as researchers, scholars and religious educators continue to argue the what and how of religious education. However, is this necessarily problematic? Here we are some two thousand years since the death and resurrection of Jesus still discussing, debating and deliberating the most appropriate way of religious education. Such robust debate and discussion indicates the thriving nature of religious education. Religious education is not a static, sterile and stagnant discipline. Rather, it is a discipline that is dynamic, messy and shifting and such dynamism, messiness and shifts have remained with us since the time of Jesus’ death, as his disciples struggled with how to make his life and ways of living known to those who had not known him or lived his culture. Ryan (2013) captures the essence of this ongoing dilemma, “Is religion best conceived as a way of life, or as a series of teachings or propositions to which people give assent?” (p. 3). He goes on to argue “both aspects – knowing and being – are not completely separate, therefore both should be represented in any complete understanding of religious education” (p. 4).

The dilemma of where to place the emphasis, on the being or the knowing, has perhaps caused the most consternation for religious educators across the years. As testified by the range of topics published in this journal since its modest beginnings, the dilemma has always been and remains to be, shaped by both global and local cultural and religious contexts. For example, one needs to scan only the tables of contents in national and international religious education journals in recent years to note the increased emphasis on the being aspect of religious education, particularly in terms of Catholic identity and how Catholic schools are promoting that.

This issue of the Journal of Religious Education makes important contributions to both aspects of religious education – being and knowing. The articles cover a range of topics including Catholic identity and how that can be permeated in schools, the question of where Jesus was born and what that might mean for religious educators, how pre-service teachers prepare for their tutorials in religious education and the handing on of faith to youth. As in all areas of academic enquiry, the focus of each of these papers is embedded in research and scholarship in which contested ideas and positions are critiqued to ensure our practice is informed and scholarly.

Graham Rossiter provides an informative and thought provoking overview on the development of the topic Catholic identity. He highlights important issues concerning the actual construct of Catholic identity and challenges the ways this construct has been developed and understood as well as how it is being enacted in Catholic educational institutions including schools. One insight (though not the only one) worth noting in this paper is the expectations the Church has of how Catholic institutions, such as health and pastoral agencies, enact Catholic identity, which are different from those expected of Catholic schools. Graham highlights and questions the various attempts and responses to Catholic identity made by educational institutions and schools. His paper provides worthwhile points for continued discussion in this area at all levels. In part 2, Graham proposes ideas and themes that require more emphasis and attention in the discourse.

Through a comprehensive survey of the scholarship surrounding the birth of Jesus, Maurice Ryan contributes to the knowing aspect of religious education highlighting important insights and implications for classroom religion programs. Contemporary biblical scholarship is divided on the actual birth place of Jesus but increasingly biblical scholars believe it was Nazareth. The development of the scholarship in this area which is substantial has implications for religious education. As curriculum designers increasingly emphasise students’ religious literacy in the area of scripture, they are confronted with how to rigorously educate students about the discrepancies between biblical texts and actual events and what all of this might mean for their religion programs.

Although the education of pre-service teachers of religion is an important one for Catholic tertiary institutions preparing future religious educators, the research and scholarship in the area is limited. Brendan Hyde’s report on a small research study examining pre-service teachers’ levels of preparation and engagement in religious education tutorials makes worthwhile contributions to the paucity of the literature in this area at the higher education levels. Not only does he provide insights into pre-service teachers’ attitudes to their tutorials in his discussion, Brendan also highlights key implications for tertiary religious educators.
Richard Rymarz’s article explores and challenges the onus placed upon the religious education curriculum as the key vehicle for permeating Catholic identity in Catholic Canadian schools. He makes two key points. First, he questions the prominence given to the classroom religion curriculum in relation to that given to other subjects taught in Catholic schools. If the classroom religion curriculum is not strong and given the same prominence as other disciplines, then the foundations in the tradition will not be known or understood. This then leads to his second point. Any potential permeation of Catholic identity into the school placed solely on a weak religious education curriculum will not be successful. Richard presents a number of ways that would facilitate permeation of Catholic identity which complement but do not depend on religious education.

Margaret Ghosn’s paper explores handing on the faith to youth in the Maronite tradition. She applies the framework of *kerygma, koinonia* and *diakonia* to examine some possibilities for handing on the faith as it caters to the spiritual, pastoral, cultural and social aspects of young people’s lives. She argues that all three roles, proclamation of the Word, living as community and education in the faith are necessary as the Church and school work together to develop young people’s knowledge and living of their faith. This paper offers practical ways that both Church and school communities can enact *kerygma, koinonia* and *diakonia*.

It is important that religious education continues to be confronted by the context in which it resides; that it continues to wrestle with the complexities and ambiguities of such contexts; for to do otherwise will undoubtedly ensure stagnation and sterility which in turn will lead to its demise.

References


*Dr Jan Grajczonek*
—Editor
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.

Author Note

Professor Graham Rossiter is Professor of moral and religious education at Australian Catholic University in Sydney.
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*

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

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 solve 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

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

Identity slogans from schools. 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 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 (cf. 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.)

References


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

Graham Rossiter

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:

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 ‘confessionalism’), 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.

References


Where was Jesus born? Challenges for religious educators teaching the infancy narratives

Maurice Ryan

Abstract

Biblical scholars over many years have raised questions about the likely birth place of Jesus. While the gospels of Matthew and Luke indicate his birth place as Bethlehem, doubts have traditionally been registered about the historical validity of these gospel accounts. Today, many mainstream scripture scholars believe that Jesus was born in Nazareth, not Bethlehem. This widespread scholarly perspective presents religious educators who teach the Christmas story with a range of educational challenges. This article briefly surveys the historical and contemporary literature on this issue from biblical scholars. Then, three educational responses are described and explained that seek to assist religious educators in the design and presentation of their programs.

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The biblical stories about Jesus’ birth and childhood can only be found in the first two chapters of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Mark and John are virtually silent about anything to do with Jesus’ life before his public ministry. Matthew and Luke vary markedly in their details about the birth and early life of Jesus, but both agree that he was born in Bethlehem. Nevertheless, a strong trend has emerged among contemporary biblical scholars that questions the historical plausibility of the infancy accounts. A feature of this questioning is a consistent supposition among a growing number of scholars that Jesus was actually born in the Galilean village of Nazareth, not in the Judean village of Bethlehem as recorded by Matthew and Luke.

This article surveys the views of contemporary scholars on this question. The implications and consequences for religious educators teaching the infancy narratives will be considered and three possible ways of proceeding when teaching the Christmas story will be discussed.

Historical Perspectives on the Birth Place of Jesus

Doubts about the actual birth place of Jesus have circulated in and around Christian communities for centuries. In the nineteenth century, a chorus of critics raised questions about the historical plausibility of the gospel accounts in general and the birth narratives specifically. David Friedrich Strauss (1860) was influential among many scholars in his estimation that the infancy narratives contain little or no historical fact. He claimed that the stories we read in the gospels are mythical rather than factual and tell us more about what the first Christians believed and understood about Jesus than biographical details of the life of Jesus himself. Strauss thought it most likely that Jesus was born in Nazareth:

“The statement that Jesus was born at Bethlehem is destitute of all valid historical evidence; nay it is contravened by positive historical facts….It can therefore cost us no further effort to decide that Jesus was born, not in Bethlehem, but, in all probability at Nazareth.” (p. 190)

A later generation of scholars influenced by the growing field of form criticism noticed that the infancy stories shared a similar form to legendary stories in other religious traditions. Martin Dibelius (1933) was reminded of the stories of the Buddha as an infant when he read the infancy accounts of Jesus in the gospels. In the encounter in the Jerusalem Temple between the infant Jesus and the religious elders, Simeon and Anna, “The law of biographical analogy is obviously active when a holy man, while still a child, is recognized by an aged seer” (Dibelius, 1933, p. 127). Dibelius thought that literary forms – legends, tales, stories – were at work in these independent accounts of the birth and infancy of holy men that could not be explained by reference to any historical connection between them.

We cannot be surprised to learn that these and other similar criticisms of the gospel accounts of Jesus’ birth and infancy disturbed many Christian commentators: if these narratives are merely myth or legend without any specific historical reference point, what religious value did they contain and how might such categorisations affect the foundations of personal Christian belief and practice? These constant questioners were challenged by Sir William Ramsay (1898) who replied specifically to Strauss and others – whom he labelled as scholars of the “destructive school” (Ramsay, 1898, p. 2) – with the simple question: “Is it consistent with human nature that a writer who claims to be earnestly setting forth the simple facts should begin with so impudent a series of fabrications?” (p. 51). Ramsay answered his own question, where was Jesus born? with a strong affirmation of the historical validity of Luke’s account of the birth: yes, we could confidently trust Luke’s gospel; Luke was as reliable an historian as any of his contemporaries.

Modern Questioning of the Location of Jesus’ Birth

Despite attempts to settle the question of the birth place of Jesus in favour of the gospel accounts, the issue never completely retreated from scholarly interest. In the modern era, attention was drawn to the issue by the work of two Roman Catholic priests from the United States - Raymond Brown and John Meier. Brown wrote an encyclopedic study of the infancy narratives in 1977 which he subsequently updated in 1993 titled, The Birth of the Messiah. In this influential study, he argued that gospel evidence for a birth in Bethlehem was weak, citing “grave objections against the claim that we are dealing with a historical fact” (p. 514).
WHERE WAS JESUS BORN? CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS TEACHING THE INFANCY NARRATIVES

Brown’s objections included the fact that Matthew and Luke do not agree with each other in their presentations of the birth narratives: in Matthew the parents live in Judea; in Luke they are from Galilee and journey to Bethlehem for the birth in response to a requirement to enrol for a Roman census. Also, Brown maintained that outside of the second chapters of both Matthew and Luke, Bethlehem is never mentioned as the birth place of Jesus: “There is not only a silence in the rest of the New Testament about Bethlehem as the birth place of Jesus; there is positive evidence for Nazareth and Galilee as Jesus’ hometown or native region: his patris” (p. 515). Brown observed that Mark betrays no knowledge in his gospel of a birth in Bethlehem and only ever identifies Nazareth as Jesus’ patris (Mark 6:1-4). John similarly offers no indication of a Bethlehem birth. Brown rounded out his argument by asking: “how can there have been such a general ignorance of Jesus’ birth place in Bethlehem when the parents would have had to come from there as strangers with their child to a small village in Galilee (Matthew’s scenario), or to come back to the village with a child born to them during a short journey to Bethlehem (Luke’s scenario)?” (p. 516). While not pronouncing definitively on the issue, Brown raised sufficient doubt about the historical plausibility of a Bethlehem birth to encourage a new generation of scholars to pronounce their own views on the question.

John Meier from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, was another influential advocate for the birth of Jesus in Nazareth. He (1991) claimed that “while Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem cannot be positively ruled out (one can rarely ‘prove a negative’ in ancient history), we must accept the fact that the predominant view in the Gospels and Acts is that Jesus came from Nazareth and – apart from Chapters 1-2 of Matthew and Luke – only from Nazareth” (p. 216). In support of his position, Meier noted the consistent New Testament attribution of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Nazarene, or Jesus the Nazorean – never Jesus of Bethlehem.

Meier pointed to the fact that apart from the infancy narratives, the only time in the whole of the New Testament where Bethlehem is mentioned is in the gospel of John 7:42. This is an ambiguous scene and Meier devotes an extended discussion to examining its meaning in relation to the issue of Jesus’ birth place. John records the doubtful opinion voiced by some members of a crowd who had gathered to listen to Jesus: “Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” (John 7:41-2). Meier (1991) thinks this passage should be read as an example of John’s irony: “what the objector says is perfectly true and totally irrelevant. Thus in 7:42, the objectors are correct in saying that Jesus comes from Nazareth, not Bethlehem. This is not surprising, since John’s Gospel as a whole does not show great interest in a Son-of-David Christology” (p. 215). Like Raymond Brown, Meier cannot definitively rule on Nazareth as Jesus’ birth place, but raises sufficient doubt about the historical plausibility of Bethlehem to make Nazareth the more likely candidate.

Scholarly Opinions on the Birth of Jesus of Nazareth

The ground-breaking studies by Raymond Brown and John Meier encouraged other scholars to offer support for the idea of a birth in Nazareth. One of the significant planks used to bolster arguments for a Nazareth birth by these scholars is the notion that both Matthew and Luke located the birth in Bethlehem in order to demonstrate the fulfilment of the prediction of the prophet Micah that the promised messiah, the Son of David, would come from David’s home town of Bethlehem:

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

Scholars suggest that the gospel authors’ identification of Bethlehem as Jesus’ birth place originated in reflections on this passage in Micah and the desire to confirm the messiah as a descendant of King David, rather than from any historical event. Bethlehem is a town 6 kilometres south of Jerusalem. In the bible, it is the place where Ruth and Boaz met, married and produced their son Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of King David. Bethlehem remained a town of significance to David throughout the stories of his life and career. Micah’s prophetic work was conducted in the late eighth century BCE at the time of the Assyrian invasion. Micah yearned for the time when a new leader would once
again be raised up from Bethlehem to rule and save the people. Such powerful imagery associated with Bethlehem, embedded in the psyche of the Jewish people, presumably proved irresistible to the gospel authors who wished to fortify their claims for Jesus as the messiah descended from David.

Contemporary scholars have explained how the stories of the birth of Jesus reveal something of the processes of gospel composition. Both gospel authors create unique scenarios to align Jesus at his birth with the events and great figures of Jewish sacred history. Both Matthew and Luke’s accounts of Jesus’ birth, each in their own fashion, “reflect distinct mechanisms for narrativizing the idea of Jesus’ descent from David” (White, 2010, p. 241). John Dominic Crossan (1994) expresses the same idea more bluntly: “It is a little sad to have to say so, because it has always been such a captivating story, but the journey to and from Nazareth for census and taxation registration is a pure fiction, a creation of Luke’s own imagination, providing a way of getting Jesus’ parents to Bethlehem for his birth” (p. 20). E.P. Sanders (1993) thinks “the birth narratives constitute an extreme case” of the way the gospel authors placed Jesus within Jewish salvation history:

It seems they had very little information about Jesus’ birth (historical in our sense), and so they went to one of their other sources, Jewish scripture. There is no other substantial part of the gospels that depends so heavily on the theory that information about David and Moses may simply be transferred to the story of Jesus. But we note that the early Christians regarded this as perfectly legitimate. By their lights, it was. Their view of God was that he planned it all: the call of Abraham, the life of Moses, the exodus, the reign of David, the life of Jesus. (p. 88)

To accept the argument of the scholars opting for the birth in Nazareth is to believe that, in the infancy narratives, the desire to communicate a theological message trumped concerns to communicate an historically accurate narrative. Henry Wansbrough (2009) explains how this was achieved in the story of Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem in Luke and Matthew:

That Jesus was son of David is a principal message of Matthew’s first chapter, with its great drum roll of Israelite history and its story of the divinely inspired adoption of Jesus into the House of David. In this case theology will have shaped quasi-history, or (to put the matter more clearly) the theological truth that Jesus was the fulfilment of the promises to David and his lineage was expressed by the placing of Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem. Each of the two evangelists will have used this location and decorated it in his own way, expressing in a picturesque narrative form some aspects of the theological truth about Jesus that seemed to him important. (p. 5)

This view is supported by Francois Bovon (2002) who says that “the birth probably took place in Nazareth. By Luke’s time, however, only Bethlehem could be considered the birth place of the Messiah” (p. 82).

The other major plank in the scholarly discussion of Nazareth as the birth place is the silence of all other sources, apart from Matthew and Luke, about Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem and the universal recognition of Jesus as coming from Nazareth, never Bethlehem. Robert Crotty (2009) thinks “that Jesus was conceived in the normal way by two Jewish parents, named Joseph and Mary, born around 4 BC in Nazareth not Bethlehem” (p. 169). Etienne Nodet (2008) argues that the gospel of John consistently says that Jesus was from Nazareth and never mentions any association with Bethlehem, even when it would have been appropriate to do so (see John 1:46: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”; 4:43-5: “He went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honour in the prophet’s own country)”; 7:52: “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you?”) (p. 106). Paul in his letters available to us in the New Testament never mentions anything about Jesus’ birth place. Neither does the gospel of Mark, nor Josephus the Jewish historian and contemporary of the gospel authors. Nor does any other Roman historian (Mason, 2009).

Notwithstanding the burgeoning scholarly option for a Nazareth birth place, Steve Mason (2009) explains why any declaration about the actual birth place of Jesus must be tentative and cautious. In answer to the question, “Where was Jesus born? Was it Bethlehem or Nazareth or even Sepphoris, Tiberias or Jerusalem? We cannot know for sure because the early Christians themselves apparently did not know” (p. 45).
Support for Bethlehem as Jesus’ Birth Place

While many modern scholars question the historical foundations of the infancy narratives including claims about the likely birth place of Jesus, some scholars challenge these ideas and defend Bethlehem as the birth place of Jesus. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor (2009) offers a spirited defence of Bethlehem. He says that conflicts in the infancy accounts between Matthew and Luke actually add weight to the identification of Bethlehem as the birth place.

Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 are completely independent witnesses. One does not borrow from the other, nor do they both draw on a common source. This only enhances the reliability of the points on which they agree. According to Matthew, “Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king” (2:1). Luke mentions “the days of Herod, king of Judea” (1:5) as the period of the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist, which was separated from that of Jesus by only a few months. Jesus’ birth took place after a journey “to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem” (2:4). The two evangelists, therefore, independently confirm each other as to the time and place of Jesus’ birth. (p. 52)

In addition to the gospel accounts of the Bethlehem birth, Murphy-O’Connor cites a range of early Christian traditions that focus on Bethlehem as the location of the birth. Principal among these early Christian sources is the Protoevangelium of James, an anonymously authored second century non-canonical gospel which describes the birth of Jesus in a cave in Bethlehem: Mary is guided by Joseph to the cave during their journey to Bethlehem. Later, a star guided the magi to the cave.

Murphy-O’Connor argues for a careful, nuanced reading of the gospel infancy narratives. He agrees with the majority of scholars who doubt the historical existence of the census described by Luke (2:1) and its connection with the birth of Jesus (McLaren, 2005). But, he does not think the fact that Luke mistakes the existence of the census is significant for the rest of his account: “that Luke is wrong on X (the census) does not necessarily mean he is wrong on Y (the location of Jesus’ birth)” (p. 54). In Murphy-O’Connor’s estimation, the gospel reader is left to decide whether Matthew and Luke wrote about Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem: because they had read about the prophecy in Micah; or, because it had actually occurred there and Micah’s prophecy was later relied upon to provide context and significance to the story of his birth.

Some other scholars, while not prepared to accept Bethlehem in Judea as the birth place, nevertheless wish to maintain some links with Bethlehem in Jesus’ story. These historical links may have influenced the identification of Bethlehem in the gospel accounts. Consider, as an example, the idea advanced by Sean Freyne (2010) who was asked in an interview whether he believed Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He responded:

My sense would be no. He was born in Nazareth, I believe. He’s never called “Jesus of Bethlehem”; he is called “Jesus of Nazareth.” Now, that said, what I would want to add is that he comes from parents who may well have roots in Bethlehem. From the second century B.C. onward, we know that émigrés from Judea settled in Galilee….So I would say Jesus’ family may well be a Judean family who moved to Galilee. Therefore one can’t dismiss entirely the possibility of links with Bethlehem.

Another inventive solution, though one that has so far failed to gain a groundswell of scholarly support, has been advanced by Bruce Chilton (2006). He claims the existence of another biblical Bethlehem in Galilee about ten kilometres from Nazareth, and this village may have been the reference for the stories in Matthew and Luke. The Galilean Bethlehem is mentioned in Joshua 19:15 as a village assigned to the tribe of Zebulun. Chilton thinks this Galilean site is “much more plausible than having Joseph and Mary traveling to Judea for the birth” (p. 96) and suggests that “the Bethlehem that Matthew and Luke remember, dimly and distantly (and through the lenses of scripture and legend), was actually in Galilee” (p. 95).

Modern scholars who defend the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem appear not to comprise a majority. However, sufficient doubt and lack of compelling evidence exist to limit those on either side of the discussion from making definitive claims.
Implications for Religious Education

For religious educators who teach the Christmas story, scholarly opinion on the birth place of the historical Jesus presents some immediate educational challenges. Scholarly assertions about the birth place of the historical Jesus in Nazareth undermine the historical plausibility of the events traditionally associated with Jesus’ birth, especially the visit of the magi following a star, the flight of the family into Egypt, the visit of shepherds, the over-crowded Bethlehem inn, the placement of the child in a manger, the journey of the couple to Bethlehem for a census, and the slaughter of young boys in the Bethlehem area by King Herod (Ryan, 2012). Christians maintain a fondness for the events celebrated at Christmas; modern scholarship that casts doubt on the historical plausibility of these events can be met with resistance, even hostility. A religious educator would be wise to recall the experience of the celebrated teacher, Francisco Sanchez de las Brozas, at the University of Salamanca, Spain in 1584. His students reported him to the Spanish Inquisition after a lecture in which he criticised church paintings of Jesus’ nativity. He told his students that Jesus was not born in a stable, nor were his parents rejected by an innkeeper, and that Mary gave birth to her son in a private house (Carlson, 2010). While this over-heated reaction to a plain reading of the gospel texts could be rated as extreme, it might serve as a caution to those who doubt the seriousness with which some may respond to modern gospel studies. Promisingly, it should be added that de las Brozas was exonerated by the Inquisitors for his progressive biblical interpretations of the birth of the Saviour.

When deciding how religious educators should proceed in teaching the infancy narratives in the light of this research, three options seem possible. These will be discussed in this section.

Option 1: Teach only the version of the infancy contained in Matthew and Luke

The first option is to teach the infancy narratives as they appear in the gospels. This approach opts for a presentation of the events as intended by the two gospel authors who mention Jesus’ birth place in their accounts. The presumption is that we know the authors’ intentions concerning the birth of Jesus: we assume both Matthew and Luke believed that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. While the precise circumstances surrounding that birth vary between the two accounts, they agree with each other on the place of the birth. This close reading of the gospel text can be conducted in a way that identifies and evaluates conflicts and discrepancies between the accounts of the birth presented by Matthew and Luke. Also, with this option, the study can highlight discrepancies that arise between the two gospel accounts and the conventional Christmas story as celebrated by Christians over the centuries.

An example of this kind of study is Carlson’s (2010) research on kataluma, the accommodations mentioned in Luke 2:7 which is usually translated in the phrase “no room at the inn”. Carlson interrogates the biblical and historical evidence to imagine what the author intended in describing the couple as having no place at the inn. Another example is provided by O’Kane (2005) and his study of representations of the magi – the wise men who visit the child bearing gifts in Matthew’s account – in traditional and modern art. O’Kane (2005) explains how “a range of visual instances of a biblical subject, whether traditional or contemporary, can be used to expand the viewer’s horizons to think, feel, and reflect on a biblical story or text as it becomes bodied forth in surprising, gentle, challenging, shockingly immediate or meditative fashion in a work of art” (p. 373). An engaging third example of this kind of study is provided by Trexler’s (1997), The Journey of the Magi – a research study of the magi in biblical and Christian tradition. The common thread in these studies is the close reading of the gospel texts and an exploration of the way these texts have been received throughout Christian history. They do not raise the issue of the historical plausibility of the people and events mentioned in the gospels.

The positive dimension of pursuing this option is to maintain fidelity to the gospel accounts, to the tradition of celebration of Jesus’ birth over the centuries and to confront and manage the specific challenges of understanding the conflicting accounts of Jesus’ birth in Matthew and Luke. The negative dimensions of following this option are contained in the question posed by Gregory Dawes (2006): “Can one claim to be expounding what the evangelists intended – while remaining indifferent to the historicity of the events they narrate?” (p. 158). This issue raises a
fundamental dilemma: while modern scholars may raise a litany of doubts over the likely historical foundations of the gospel accounts of the birth, this does not mean that the original gospel authors believed anything other than that their accounts were based on historically verifiable facts about the birth.

Option 2: Emphasise the theological meaning of the infancy narratives
The second option is the reverse of option one. To follow this option involves the religious educator presenting the gospel infancy narratives as “quasi-history”, literary creations of the gospel authors who were not primarily concerned with accurately portraying the biographical facts concerning Jesus’ birth. Pursuing this option, the religious educator would emphasise the theological meaning and intentions of the gospel authors. Robert Crotty (2009) explains this way of reading the gospel accounts:

As historical sources the Matthew and Luke stories are practically worthless. But, history aside, they are brilliant and dynamic stories that have been grossly devalued because readers, especially Christian readers, have treated them as history rather than Christian drama. Instead of expecting to find and then not finding history, Christians should have read the stories in Matthew and Luke as sacred stories. (p. 170)

The advantage of pursuing this option is to align with the trend in modern scholarship that emphasises the literary and theological dimensions of the infancy narratives. This way of reading the stories accepts them as central to the treasury of sacred literature cherished by Christians over the centuries. The negative aspects involved in pursuing this option concern the way this approach might be exercised with children and others not sufficiently skilled, or ready, to accept and respond to the literary subtleties and nuances involved in this way of reading the gospel texts. Can unsophisticated readers of the bible be expected to comprehend the complex structures of the literature which the infancy narratives represent?

Option 3: Present the range of scholarly opinions about the birth and infancy of Jesus
The third option seeks to present a middle path between the two options described above. Religious educators can present a range of ways to read and understand the infancy narratives, including the versions described in the gospels. This way of proceeding allows for students to consider the issues and come to their own conclusions about the likely foundations for the Christmas story. It also allows them to contend with the nature of the gospel as a text and its nature and purpose in the life of the Christian community.

So, religious educators will present the evidence for the gospel authors’ choice of Bethlehem and the associated events surrounding that location recorded in their gospel accounts. They can also present the fruits of modern scholarship on the question and engage in critical appraisal of the evidence for Nazareth or alternative locations for Jesus’ birth. It allows students to replicate what biblical scholars do in their own work. As David Clines (2010) has observed, most teaching and learning approaches to biblical material ignore the contested nature of biblical interpretation and the process for coming to understand both the particular text and the nature of biblical texts: “We screen from our students the contested nature of all that we handle, and we teach them to believe what really matters is the conclusion” (p. 26). This style of biblical study is one devoted “always to the punch lines, never to the arguments” (Clines, 2010, p. 26). This insight refers not only to the meaning of the infancy narrative accounts, but also to the understanding of the gospels as texts.

Scholars currently debate among themselves the nature and purpose of the gospels as a genre (Diehl, 2011). They discuss how the words and deeds of Jesus were remembered by the followers prior to them being written down in the gospels as we know them. Many accept that the gospels are “the memory of Jesus interpreted and applied to the context of the early Christians” (Bird, 2005, p. 134). This context compelled Luke and Matthew to tell about the birth of a Jewish child whose life and career would be significant for Judaism in particular but also for all people in general throughout the Greco-Roman world. Students can be introduced to some of this contested and lively scholarly discussion.
This option offers fairness and intellectual freedom to the study of Christmas. Unfortunately, it does not resolve the issue of how to present this complex material to unsophisticated gospel readers. It may, in fact, be appropriate only for senior secondary students who have achieved some advanced skills in critical reading and biblical studies. Nor is it likely to meet approval from conservative Church members who are likely to prefer a reading of the gospel texts that remains closer to the stories presented in the gospels.

Conclusion

Any religious educator who would tamper with accepted readings of the Christmas story should do so only with full recognition of the potential perils. It seems that most modern Christians prefer to imagine, despite the absence of any corroborating gospel evidence, a baby Jesus resting peacefully in a stable in the presence of three oriental kings. For these gospel readers, even a plain reading of the infancy narratives is a bridge too far. So, a confrontation with the growing tide of scholarly convictions about a Nazareth birth place for Jesus is likely to be inflammatory and to be met with sustained resistance. Biblical education has a two-fold purpose – to understand the meaning of particular biblical texts and to understand the meaning and significance of the bible as a sacred text for committed believers. The case of the infancy narratives provides a series of fruitful challenges for religious educators who wish to pursue these dual aims with their students.

References


WHERE WAS JESUS BORN? CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS TEACHING THE INFANCY NARRATIVES


Variation in students’ experience of tutorials in religious education at Australian Catholic University

Brendan Hyde

Abstract

Purpose: To explore the variation that occurred in pre-service teachers’ understanding and experiences of tutorials in religious education at Australian Catholic University.

Methodology: A convenient sample of ten 4th Year Bachelor of Education (Primary) pre-service teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide and asked about their understanding of the role of the tutorial in religious education.

Analysis: Phenomenographic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts of these ten pre-service teachers.

Findings: The analysis revealed five qualitatively different ways of understanding the role of the tutorial in religious education. These conceptions were related to each other by way of a hierarchical inclusive relationship. They were found to pertain to different student understandings in terms of the relationship of the tutorial to the lecture, the work undertaken in preparation for the tutorial, discerning implications of the tutorial content and activities for teaching in the classroom context, and the quality of learning expected to take place within the tutorial itself. A tentative implication for learning and teaching includes an evaluation of the ways in which tutorials in religious education are structured to include a greater focus on problem-based learning and critical thinking.

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While the scholarship of learning and teaching has contributed to improved learning outcomes for students in higher education generally (Biggs, 2003; Ramsden, 2003), there appears to be a paucity of formal research conducted at the author’s own institution, Australian Catholic University (ACU) in terms of the impact of tutorials on student learning, and of the perceptions students themselves have of the role of the tutorial in their own learning. Given that tutorials form a substantial component of learning and teaching in undergraduate courses at ACU, knowledge on the part of academic staff in relation to students’ perceptions and understandings of the role and purpose of tutorials may lead to approaches being offered in which the learning of students can be improved.

The purpose of the small exploratory study reported in this paper was to investigate the variation which occurred in some Bachelor of Education (Primary) students’ (referred to hereafter as pre-service teachers) understandings and experiences of tutorials in the discipline of religious education at ACU. The findings contribute to a growing body of literature on students’ conceptions of their academic tasks, which suggests that these conceptions are related to the quality of their own learning (see for example, Ashwin 2005; Duarte 2007).

In the study reported in this paper, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are pre-service teachers’ experiences of tutorials in religious education?
2. What do pre-service teachers understand to be the purpose of tutorials in religious education?
3. How do/do not pre-service teachers prepare for tutorials in religious education?

The focus was on ten pre-service teachers in their final year of the Bachelor of Education (Primary) course enrolled in EDRE 102 Religious Education 2 on the Melbourne campus of ACU (there are campuses also at Ballarat, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane). This unit involves 3 hours of face-to-face contact – a one hour lecture, followed by a two hour tutorial, and is one of a sequence of units which prepares and accredits students to teach religious education in Catholic primary schools.

Tutorials at ACU

Since the term “tutorial” is used in slightly different ways within the higher education system, it is necessary to briefly describe the understanding of this term and its usage at ACU. There are three particular factors which are pertinent here. Firstly, tutorials at ACU are a part of a learning system which, at undergraduate level, consists of a lecture (one or two hours in length) generally delivered to the entire cohort of students enrolled in a particular subject, or unit, followed by smaller seminar-type groups, consisting generally of between 25 and 30 students (although in some circumstances up to 35 students), with a duration of between one and two hours. At ACU, these groups are known as tutorials. In the Bachelor of Education (Primary) program at ACU, full time pre-service teachers enroll in up to 4 units, each semester. Each of these would usually consist of both a lecture and tutorial in each week of the semester.

The second factor which is of relevance is the size of the tutorial groups at ACU. Unlike some universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge in England, where a tutorial is considered to consist generally of one student meeting with one tutor, that is, a “one-on-one” situation, tutorials at ACU generally comprise one tutor working with up to 30 (or sometimes more) students. Although common in much of Australian higher education, this conception differs greatly from practice in higher education elsewhere, where workshops with groups of students are known as seminars.

The third factor of significance concerns the expectation of preparation required for the tutorial. At universities such as Oxford and Cambridge, students would typically spend between 11 and 14 hours in preparation for a tutorial (Ashwin 2005). ACU does not prescribe a specific requirement for tutorial preparation. The expectation is that pre-service teachers should anticipate 150 hours of study for each entire unit, which includes class attendance (including lectures and tutorials), readings, engaging with online materials, and assignment preparation.
Therefore, at ACU, a tutorial is considered as a part of the learning system in undergraduate programs, usually consisting of smaller groups of up to 30 students who meet together weekly with a tutor after the lecture has been delivered to the larger cohort of students enrolled in a particular unit. (Due to logistical constraints, there are instances in which tutorials are not always timetabled to occur after the lecture. Academic staff then manipulates the imposed timetable so that students engage with the lecture topic from the previous week.) The expectation is that students will prepare for their tutorials as a part of the 150 hours of study to be anticipated for the entire unit.

Select literature review

Students' conceptions of learning
There are a number of studies which have investigated academic staffs' perceptions and conceptions on student learning in higher education (see for example, Ashwin, 2006; Prosser, Martin, Trigwell, Ramsden & Luikenhausen, 2005; Stes, Gijbels & Van Petegem, 2008). There are also an increasing number of studies which have explored the ways in which students themselves understand various aspects of learning in higher education (Ginns, Prosser & Barrie, 2007; Robertson & Blacker, 2006; Phillips & Bond, 2004; Collier & Morgan, 2008). However, there are very few which explicitly explore students' perceptions of the role of the tutorial in their learning.

In terms of understandings of learning generally, Marton and Saljo (1976) identified two opposing conceptions of learning commonly held by students. The first is reproductive or quantitative learning, in which the activity of learning is viewed as a process of accumulating information in order to reproduce or apply it. The second is comprehensive or qualitative learning, whereby learning is viewed as pertaining to comprehension and the interpretation of meaning.

More recently, Duarte (2007) investigated Portuguese students’ conceptions of learning and their approaches to learning. Although much of this investigation replicated many conceptions of learning which have been previously described in the body of literature exploring this field, for example Marton and Saljo’s (1976) opposing conceptions of learning, and Biggs’ (2003) notion of surface and deep approaches to learning, Duarte reported some new variants of known conceptions. These included learning occurring through exploratory practice, and motivation. As well, Duarte reported an apparently new conception described as learning as understanding and application. While Duarte’s investigation offered valuable insight for the research reported in this paper, particularly the variant on known conceptions, the focus was on conceptions of learning generally, rather than on students’ conceptions of the role of the tutorial in their learning.

Some studies have investigated higher education students’ engagement and participation in classes. Through the development of a Student Engagement Survey, Ahlfdeldt, Mehta and Sellnow (2005) found that students engaged in higher levels of thinking in classes in which there were fewer students, and in which problem-based learning methodologies were used with students. However, Ahlfdeldt, Mehta and Sellnow’s study suggests that students can best be engaged in their learning only when class sizes are small and when problem-based methodologies are employed. The growing reality in many higher educational institutions, including ACU, is that class sizes are of necessity increasing, rather than decreasing. Also, questions need to be raised in terms of problem-based learning approaches. While Ahlfdeldt, Mehta and Sellnow’s study demonstrates the usefulness of such methodologies, other approaches too could equally increase students’ engagement in classes providing such approaches were appropriately implemented.

Students' conceptions of tutorials in their learning
The research literature outlined above has, for the most part, a focus on students' learning, and on students' perceptions of their own learning in higher education generally. The focus was not on students’ perceptions of the role of the tutorial in their learning. One notable exception to this is Ashwin’s (2005) study of students’ conception of the role of the tutorial in their learning at the University of Oxford. The focus of that study was on the qualitative variation in the ways in which the students experienced their tutorials. After analysing the interview transcripts of 28 undergraduate students from a variety of disciplines and years of study, Ashwin derived four qualitatively different ways in which students understood the role of tutorials:
VARIATION IN STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE OF TUTORIALS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

1. Tutorials as the tutor explaining to the student what the student does not understand;
2. Tutorials as the tutor showing the student how to see the subject in the way that the tutor does;
3. Tutorials as the tutor bringing things into relation to each other to help the student develop a new perspective in the wider context of the discipline;
4. Tutorials as the tutor and the student exchanging different points of view on the topic and both coming to a new understanding.

Each of these understandings formed a hierarchy, so that, for example, a student who adopted conception 4 would also be aware of the other three conceptions. Although highlighting the potential limitations of this study, including the uniqueness of the Oxford tutorial system, Ashwin (2005) nonetheless suggested that the variation in the ways students conceived tutorials may be applicable to a larger sample. If such variation in the ways that students experience tutorials can be related to the quality of their learning, then the approach can offer a way in which the learning of these students can be improved.

However, and as noted by Ashwin (2005) the Oxford tutorial system is quite unique to higher education. In this system, a tutorial consists of a tutor typically working with one student, although in some instances, a tutor may work with between one and six students. As discussed, this is a considerably smaller tutorial size when compared with those conducted at ACU, where, in the Faculty of Education, tutorial numbers consist typically of between 25 and 30 pre-service teachers (although as noted, tutorials can occasionally consist of up to 35 pre-service teachers). The second major difference is in the expectation of preparation required for the tutorial. Ashwin notes that at the University of Oxford, students usually have 3 tutorials per week, each of which is preceded by an intense period of preparation on the part of the student, usually of between 11 and 14 hours. The preparation could include the completion of an essay or problem sheet which then becomes the focus of the tutorial itself. As also previously discussed, at ACU the expectation is that students will prepare for their tutorials as a part of the 150 hours of study to be anticipated for the entire unit. Typically, undergraduate students at ACU would have 3 hours of face-to-face class contact with academic staff for each unit of study in which they enrolled. This includes both lectures and tutorials, and is considered to be included in the anticipated 150 hours of study for each unit in which they are enrolled.

Although these differences are significant, Ashwin (2005) argues that the variation in the ways students conceived tutorials, as identified in his study may be applicable to a larger sample. If such variation in the ways that students experience tutorials can be related to the quality of their learning, then the approach can offer a way in which the learning of these students can be improved. Therefore, the research reported here investigated some pre-service teachers’ conceptions of the role of the tutorial in the discipline of religious education at ACU. From the findings, it was anticipated that means by which the learning of these pre-service teachers could be improved may be posited.

Methodology

A qualitative approach to this research was employed. After ethical clearance from ACU’s Human Research Ethics Committee had been obtained, individual interviews with ten pre-service teachers in their final year of the Bachelor of Education (Primary) course enrolled in EDRE 102 Religious Education 2 were used to explore the qualitatively different ways in which they perceived and described the purpose of the tutorial in religious education. Pre-service teachers were selected from among those who responded to the invitation to participate in this study using a convenient sample. All participants were volunteers, having made the decision to participate based on informed consent.

The interview itself was semi-structured in nature, that is, an interview with an agenda, yet utilising open-ended questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). It lasted for approximately 20 minutes. During the interview, pre-service teachers were asked to describe a typical week of study in religious education with particular attention being paid to the way in which they described the tutorials they attended and their purpose. The interviews were audio-taped, and transcribed for analysis.
The analysis was conducted using a phenomenographic approach (Akerlind, 2005; Ashwin, 2005, 2006; Bowden, 1996; Marton & Booth, 1997). The core premise of phenomenography is the assumption that the different ways in which individuals experience a phenomenon, such as a tutorial, are related to one another, most often by way of hierarchical inclusive relationships. While Akerlind (2005) presented six types of variation in the ways in which the data of phenomenographic research might be managed, the aim of phenomenography, in essence, is to constitute not only a different set of meanings arising from the ways in which individuals experience a particular phenomenon, but a logically inclusive structure relating to those different meanings. Within such a context, variation refers to revealing and describing the different ways in which individuals see a particular phenomenon, such as a tutorial, and the hierarchical structure relating to those meanings (Akerlind, 2005).

The unit of analysis was the pre-service teachers’ conceptions of their tutorials. The focus was thus on qualitative variation in the ways in which these pre-service teachers experienced tutorials in religious education at ACU. The different understandings of the tutorial were used to form categories of description. From these, a hierarchy of empirically grounded and logically consistent categories of description of the different ways in which these pre-service teachers experienced tutorials in religious education at ACU has been offered.

Findings
Phenomenographic analysis of the interviews revealed five qualitatively different ways of understanding the role of the tutorial:

1. Tutorials as consolidating the lecture material with no real onus on the pre-service teacher to prepare;
2. Tutorials as consolidating the lecture material with minimal onus on the pre-service teacher to prepare;
3. Tutorials as processing the lecture material with a view to highlighting classroom application;
4. Tutorials as integrating aspects of course material rather than leaving them as discrete lecture topics, and connecting these with classroom application;
5. Tutorials as critical analysis of the lecture material and discerning implications for the classroom context.

These five conceptions formed a layered hierarchy. This implies that a pre-service teacher adopting Conception 5 possessed an awareness of the previous four conceptions. However, it cannot necessarily be inferred that a pre-service teacher adopting Conception 1 would have had an awareness of Conceptions 2, 3, 4 and 5 (see Ashwin, 2005).

These qualitatively different understandings of the purpose of the tutorial were found to be related to different pre-service teacher understandings in terms of the relationship of the tutorial to the lecture (which generally precedes the tutorial), the work undertaken in preparation for the tutorial, discerning implications of the tutorial content and activities for teaching in the classroom context, and the quality of learning expected to take place within the tutorial itself. Each of these dimensions is included in the descriptions of each of the conceptions as outlined below.

Conception 1: Tutorials as consolidating the lecture material with no real onus on the pre-service teachers to prepare
Pre-service teachers adopting this particular conception understood the purpose of the tutorial as being to revise the key points of the lecture material which preceded the tutorial, and to ask questions in order to clarify aspects of the content presented in the lecture. Such a conception is consistent with reproductive or quantitative learning (Marton & Saljo, 1976) in which the activity of learning is viewed as a process of accumulating information. In such a conception, the pre-service teachers saw little need to prepare for the tutorial through attending to the set weekly reading, or by undertaking their own summaries and revision of material. They viewed the tutorial as the arena through which to summarise and clarify concepts and material which had been presented in the lecture. The following quotes from pre-service teachers illustrate these dimensions of this conception (the short quotations from the participants are excerpts taken from the larger interview transcripts).
“We have lectures and tutorials once a week. The purpose is to ask questions and to clarify things we aren’t sure about in relation to the reading and the lecture. I wouldn’t normally do anything to prepare for a tutorial, not even doing the weekly reading.” (Pre-Service Teacher A)

“There is no real onus on us to prepare for the tutorial. And there is no expectation that students have to contribute to the tutorial. In RE, you know that the content of the tutorial is going to be based on the lecture, and you can participate if you want to.” (Pre-Service Teacher B)

“The purpose of the tutorial is to expand on the lecture and to address any questions we might have. We have a discussion about the lecture and the tutor clarifies things.” (Pre-Service Teacher D)

“I don’t do any preparation at all. I don’t study for them. I go to them and listen and participate where I can. The tutorial recaps on the lecture and reinforces the content. I sometimes go home from the tutorial thinking, ‘Wow, now I actually understand what was being said in the lecture.’” (Pre-Service Teacher C)

Pre-Service Teacher C also indicated a belief that the tutor should, ideally at least, spend far more time with individual students to help reinforce the content of the lecture topics. She stated:

“…initially in coming to uni I thought there would be more one-to-one with a tutor and a student, and you’d learn more – you’d clarify what you learned in the lecture, but it’s not really like that at all!”

Conception 2: The tutorials as consolidating the lecture with minimal onus on the student to prepare

Although similar to the first conception, pre-service teachers adopting this notion understood that they had some responsibility, albeit minimal, to prepare for the tutorial in which they were about to participate. The following comment typifies this understanding:

“After the lecture (on my day off) I look over the readings and any annotation I have made, and sometimes I write short summaries of the readings before coming to the tutorial.” (Pre-Service Teacher E)

Most of the pre-service teachers indicated that generally, a tutorial often included student presentations of one kind or another. Pre-service teachers who adopted this conception indicated that, while they did not necessarily prepare for each tutorial by attending to the required reading, they did prepare for the student presentation in which they were expected to participate, often begrudgingly as many felt that student presentations were used excessively in tutorials, and the activity had become tedious.

The following quotations are indicative of this idea:

“You go there [to the tutorial], you listen to a student presentation, you go home and if yours is up next week, you prepare for it. But many students don’t put much effort into them…they’re pointless.” (Pre-Service Teacher C)

“I generally don’t prepare for the tutorial. I tend to chill out and ask questions during it to clarify anything from the lecture I didn’t understand. But if my student presentation is coming up, I will get ready for it. I will read up on the topic of the presentation and maybe get materials ready. But the tutes are dominated by student presentations. We do them all the time, and most of us don’t really pay much attention because we are sick of them.” (Pre-Service Teacher G)

One particular pre-service teacher indicated in the interview that the student presentations often encroached upon the time that could be spent during the tutorial in expanding upon the lecture material. This student expressed some resentment about this, maintaining that:

“In RE I have wanted the tutorials to expand upon the lecture a lot more than they have, but they are dominated by presentations…People would be happier to be there if they thought they were learning more of the lecture content.” (Pre-Service Teacher D)
Conception 3: Tutorials as processing the lecture material with a view to highlighting classroom application

Pre-service teachers who adopted this conception understood the purpose of the tutorial to be more than consolidating material presented in the lecture. Rather, the purpose was viewed as being one in which the lecture material was further developed, processed, and considered carefully, specifically with a view to highlighting the application of the theoretical concepts of the lecture material to primary school classroom practice. This has parallels with one of Duarte’s (2007) conceptions of learning which described an awareness of learning as understanding and application. The following quotations from students are indicative of this conception:

“The purpose of the tutorial is putting the lecture material into practice. It looks at how you might actually use the idea of, say, Multiple Intelligences or Bloom’s Taxonomy in the classroom.” (Pre-Service Teacher B)

“The purpose should be to have students implementing ideas from the lecture into classroom practice. In some other subject areas, tutorials are so tedious and you cannot relate their content to the classroom situation. Tutors expect you to relate their content to a classroom situation, but you just can’t apply what has been presented. Tutorials need to be able to apply the lecture material to the classroom context.” (Pre-Service Teacher C)

Pre-Service Teacher C went on to say that she had acquired many of her learning and teaching ideas in RE through being able to discern the application of the lecture content during the tutorial. She stated that:

“A lot of my teaching ideas and skills have come RE by relating the theory presented in the lecture to the classroom. Tutorials in other subject areas do not do this.”

It is interesting to note here that both Pre-Service Teachers B and C quoted above were also quoted in relation to earlier conceptions – Pre-Service Teacher B in relation to conception 1 and Pre-Service Teacher C in relation to conception 2. However, with some further probing through the researcher’s questions during the interview, both of these participants were able to develop and articulate their thinking. This suggests that both of these pre-service teachers who adopted this particular conception also possessed an awareness of the previous two conceptions.

Conception 4: Tutorials as integrating aspects of course material rather than leaving them as discrete lecture topics, and connecting these with classroom application

There were only two pre-service teachers who adopted this particular conception. They indicated an understanding of the purpose of the tutorial to be one which brings together and integrates the various aspects of material presented in both previous lectures and tutorials, rather than leaving these as discrete and isolated lecture topics. Further, these pre-services teachers suggested that the aim in doing this was to highlight the application of such material for teaching in the primary classroom context. The notion of considering discrete study topics and being able to integrate these into a coherent study path reflects Biggs’ (2003) conception of deep approaches to learning, whereby knowledge is functional rather than declarative, and students focus at a high conceptual level, which requires that a well-structured knowledge base. The two pre-service teachers who adopted this conception indicated that they were able to work conceptually rather than with unrelated details, and their intention in the tutorial was to engage in particular tasks in a meaningful and purposeful way. The following quotations are indicative of this conception:

“The purpose of the tutorial is to bring together the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning in order to process ideas from the lecture…it should try to integrate course material, and enable students to make connections between the theory and their own experiences of teaching RE in primary school classrooms.” (Pre-Service Teacher F)

“The tutorials should enable us to make connections between the different parts of the course. It should allow us to engage with activities that bear some resemblance to what happens in classrooms…these should come from the ideas that have been introduced in the lectures.” (Pre-Service Teacher H)
Conception 5: Tutorials as critical analysis of the lecture material and discerning implications for the classroom context

There was only one pre-service teacher who appeared to adopt this particular conception. This participant suggested that the purpose of the tutorial was to engage critically with the material presented in the lecture, and to explore the implications of this critical engagement for classroom practice. This pre-service teacher also indicated that, in order for this to happen, students need to come to tutorials having undertaken some preparation. This conception has parallels with the work of Ahlfeldt, Mehta and Sellnow (2005), who found that students engaged in higher levels of thinking when they are engaged in tasks which reflect the reality of their chosen profession – problem-based learning. This conception also reflects the work of Phillips and Bond (2004) and their investigation into undergraduate students’ experiences of critical thinking. The following quotation is indicative of this conception:

“The tutorial should engage us in a critical analysis of the lecture content and its implications for teaching. It should get us to think critically, but people don’t always contribute, as there doesn’t seem to be a real onus on students to prepare.” (Pre-Service Teacher E)

Discussion

Each of the five qualitatively different ways of understanding the role of the tutorial, that is, each of the five conceptions, reflect key aspects of the literature explored earlier in this paper. In particular, they reflect the approaches to learning proposed by Marton and Saljo (1976) from reproductive (quantitative) learning to comprehensive (qualitative) learning, and by Biggs (2003) in relation to surface and deep approaches to learning. The conceptions identified in this present study at the bottom of the hierarchy (Conceptions 1 and 2) reflect the surface and reproductive approaches, while those at the top of the hierarchy (Conceptions 4 and 5 particularly) reflect the deep and comprehensive approaches to learning. Figure 1 below is an attempt to represent the relationship of each of the five conceptions identified in this present research to these approaches.

In other words, the analysis of the interview transcripts of the pre-service teachers who participated in this research suggests that both surface and deep approaches/reproductive and comprehensive approaches to learning are drawn upon by pre-service teachers in religious education at ACU. However, it will be recalled that only two of the interviewed pre-service teachers adopted Conception 4, while only one adopted Conception 5, both of which would be considered to align with deep or comprehensive approaches to learning. The challenge herein lies in devising means by which to encourage pre-service teachers who typically employ surfaces approaches to learning in the tutorials (those who...
adopted Conceptions 1 and 2 only) to adopt deeper or more comprehensive approaches to their learning in their tutorials. While Biggs’ (2003) notion of conceptual alignment of the course more generally may provide one possible way forward, the ways in which the actual tutorials themselves are structured may need to be evaluated. For example, student presentations were found by many of the interviewed pre-service teachers to be tedious because they were encountering them in most tutorials in most subjects, and this may actually be encouraging surface approaches to learning. As the data in this study revealed, many pre-service teachers prepared for their tutorial in religious education only when they were directly involved in the presentation. Other ways in which to engage pre-service teachers in tutorials may need to be investigated.

The findings of Ahlfeldt, Mehta and Sellnow (2005) have relevance here. Although they advocate problem-based learning as one means by which to engage students in their learning, similar approaches could equally be employed. For example, pre-service teachers in each tutorial could be placed into smaller “Professional Action Learning Teams (PA-LTs)” (Healy, Hyde & Rymarz, 2004; see also Box, 2005) for the duration of the semester. In these PA-LTs pre-service teachers could be given a topic within the primary school religious education curriculum, based upon the lecture material presented each week to develop. In the Catholic primary school context, PA-LTs are an effective form of professional development where a group of teachers focus on real, work-based problems, helping and supporting each other through developing a common approach to solving a given problem (Healy, Hyde & Rymarz, 2004). PA-LTs in tutorials may then involve pre-service teachers investigating an issue such as assessment in religious education, or teaching about Sacraments in religious education. Based upon the material delivered in the lecture and upon course reading (which would be required to be read before the tutorial) pre-service teachers in their PA-LTs would be given a specific task to explore in relation to classroom/curriculum issues associated with the lecture material, such as:

- Planning elements of a staff meeting on assessment in religious education;
- Investigating concepts which could be included in Sacramental education for pre-school/kindergarten children;
- Planning a unit of work using diocesan religious education guidelines and the *multiple intelligences* framework, focusing on a particular Sacrament.

Similarly, the findings of Phillips and Bond (2004) have relevance here. In their research, they found that undergraduate students’ experience with critical thinking in university settings was often limited. These findings are echoed in this present research, in which only one pre-service teacher adopted Conception 5, which understood the role of the tutorial as involving criticality. In order to encourage deep approaches to learning on the part of the pre-service teachers, elements of critical thinking may need to be consciously incorporated into the structure of tutorials in religious education. This is not to suggest that tutorials in religious education currently do not involve opportunities for criticality. However, the skills involved in critical thinking may need to be more systematically introduced, taught and practised in the undergraduate units in religious education in the Bachelor of Education (Primary) course.

**Conclusion**

The research reported in this paper, although small and exploratory in nature, indicated that there is variation in the way that pre-service teachers experience and understand the role of tutorials in religious education at ACU. This variation existed specifically in terms of pre-service teachers’ experiences of tutorials in religious education, their understanding of the purpose of tutorials in religious education, and in their preparation for tutorials in religious education.

If an understanding of the variation in the ways in which these particular pre-service teachers conceived tutorials can be gleaned from this present research, and these can be related to the quality of their learning, then academics may be in a position to devise approaches in which pre-service teachers’ learning may be improved.
There are two tentative recommendations which can be posited in the light of this research. Firstly, tutorials in religious education need to be structured in ways which encourage deep rather than surface approaches to learning on the part of the pre-service teachers. Specifically this would entail a critical examination of the place of student presentations in tutorials, given the apparent excessive use of this strategy in tutorials in other courses and subjects. As indicated, one suggestion could be to divide the tutorial group into PA-LTs, which are then given a specific issue to address in the tutorial related to the lecture and course readings. Such a strategy may encourage deep approaches to learning since PA-LTs reflect the actual work of teachers in school situations, where there is a focus on real, work-based problems or issues, and of teachers (pre-service teachers in the case of tutorials) helping and supporting each other through developing a common approach to solving a given problem. This recommendation could also be applied to the structuring of tutorials in other higher education institutions, particularly those in Australia whose understanding of tutorials is similar to that of ACU.

Secondly, and given the small number of pre-service teachers who indicated the importance of criticality in tutorials, skills involved in critical thinking may need to be consciously and systematically incorporated into the structure of tutorials in religious education. This could be achieved over the course of a semester by, for example, requiring students to come to each tutorial having prepared two questions that arise for them as the result of engaging with the required reading for each week. Time in the tutorial would then be set aside for the exploration of these, possibly by using a think-pair-share strategy in which pre-service teachers firstly consider their questions individually, and then share their thinking with a partner, followed by an opportunity to share ideas with the tutorial group.

One of the limitations of this present study was its sample size. While it makes an initial contribution to the understanding of some ACU pre-service teachers’ conceptions of tutorials in their learning, the sample was limited to ten participants on the Melbourne campus. Further research is necessary, involving a larger sample of pre-service teachers across a number of campus locations in order to gain greater insight into the conceptions of tutorials held by pre-service teachers so that approaches may be devised which aim at improving student learning.

References


Permeation of religious identity: Some challenges for Canadian Catholic schools - Part 2

Richard Rymarz

Abstract

This paper is the second of a two part series which critically evaluates the notion that Catholic schools are permeated with a sense of Catholic identity. Building on the theoretical base established in part 1, this paper sets out some of the practical dimensions of permeation. As with part 1, this article focuses on Catholic schools in Canada with a particular stress on those in the province of Alberta. One of the most important aspects of permeation is the role of religious education in Catholic schools. If religious education in general is not given strong, ongoing and substantial support it is unlikely that claims of permeation of religious identity in Catholic schools can be sustained. A critical aspect of strong support of religious education is in curriculum development and in support of religious education teachers.

In the first part of this paper it was argued that a very common theme in Catholic educational discourse is the idea that Catholics schools should seek to provide an educational vision where the religious dimension is given prominence. This is not just in formal religious education classes but throughout the curriculum and in the wider life of schools. One way of expressing this idea is to argue that Catholic identity should permeate all that is done in the school. This idea is very influential, for instance, in Canadian Catholic schools. While permeation may be a worthwhile goal for Catholic schools to strive for, this must be seen within the context of a number of significant challenges that face Catholic schools today. These challenges include, most notably, the changing demographics of schools where many parents, students and teachers no longer exhibit high levels of religious commitment. This results in a loss of the critical mass needed for effective collaborative action which, in turn, makes the permeation ideal difficult to realise. In this paper three specific and practical examples are given which are fundamental to permeation of Catholic identity being realised. The focus for this paper is on how permeation can be realised through what occurs in the classrooms of Catholic schools.

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Permeation in the classroom: Some practical challenges

If we assume that sufficient attention has been paid to the human dimension, what can be done to realise permeation of Catholic identity in schools? This is a very broad question that cannot be comprehensively addressed here. In this paper three curricular issues will be raised, acknowledging that there are many other important dimensions that could be discussed such as recruitment policies, in-servicing of teachers and the role of school leadership. In framing a Catholic curriculum the major challenge is not a conceptual issue, rather it is the practical application of principles that shape the curriculum as teachers in the classroom deliver it. D’Orsa and D’Orsa (2012), for instance, have enunciated no less than twenty-two principles that they see as critical in shaping Catholic curriculum. This approach does not, however, lead to an obvious path forward in designing a school curriculum that is permeated with strong Catholic identity. This is primarily due to the fact that the field opened up by such a large number of principles is so expansive that it is of limited utility. In addition, there is a real danger in speaking of the Catholic curriculum in such broad terms that the primary importance of religious education as a defining principle of Catholic school identity could be compromised.

The place of religious education

Convey (2012) has identified that one of the key factors in forming Catholic identity in schools as described by US Catholic school teachers and administrators is a strong religious education program. If the goals of permeation are to be met, religious education (RE) must be seen as one of the critical defining features of Catholic schools. The esteemed place of religious education in Catholic schools is a feature of a range of theoretical approaches (Rummery, 1977; Groome, 1980; McDonough, 2009; Rossiter, 2011). Religious education is understood here to be a formal part of the curriculum where emphasis is placed on achieving cognitive goals (Lovat, 2009). Religious instruction is not derivative or ancillary to permeation but, in many ways, is the foundation on which it is established. In Canada there is a lack of empirical studies that examine how religious education is conducted in Catholic schools (Rymarz, 2013). Rymarz (2012b) argued that, in many instances, religious education appears to lack the prominence given to other subjects in school curriculums. If religious education is not strongly supported then a number of implications follow. Most importantly, a general ideology of permeation should never be seen as providing a substitute for a robust, high quality religious education program. The content covered in religious education cannot be adequately covered in other disciplines. Religious education, therefore, must have a permanent, supported, and high profile place in the curriculum of Catholic schools. This is in keeping with the notion that religious education in Catholic schools should be an academic discipline in keeping with the demands and standards of other subject disciplines. This idea is clearly spelled out in General Directory of Catechesis (CCC, 1997):

> It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigor as other disciplines. It must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge. It should not be an accessory alongside of these disciplines, but rather it should engage in a necessary interdisciplinary dialogue. (para. 73)

In order to be able to meet the demands of being a scholastic discipline, religious education cannot be devolved to other areas in the name of permeation. Indeed, the consequences of strong a religious education curriculum in schools would make the task of genuine permeation far easier. Students who have a strong grounding in religious education should be able to use this to inform topics and themes raised in other disciplines within the school (Shulman, 1986). For instance, in the study of literature, many classic texts such as the works of Shakespeare contain numerous references and allusions to both scripture and Christian doctrine. A well-grounded student is much better placed to appreciate and understand these works. This, however, is predicated on students receiving strong and ongoing instruction on, for instance, the nature, form and meaning of the Christian scriptures. Such a study is, of course, a staple of religious education programs in Catholic schools (Hyde & Rymarz, 2008).
In a school which strives to permeate strong Catholic identity the strength of religious education within that curriculum could be assessed by a number of indicators. Is, for example, a sufficient amount of time given to religious education in the curriculum? In a similar vein, are RE teachers required to meet the same professional standards as teachers in other disciplines with regard to qualifications, approaches to assessment and ongoing professional development? An especially important indicator is the formal religious education curriculum. Is the RE curriculum on a par with curricular documents in other areas?

Values and the curriculum

D’Orsa and D’Orsa (2012) note that one common approach to promoting religious identity in the curriculum of Catholic schools is to stress and teach values at various places across the curriculum. This approach is worthy of further examination. It rests on the assumption that Catholic schools promote a set of values that are distinctive to them. This distinctiveness is critical. If generic values, common to a wide variety of schools, were presented this could certainly be a positive element in the educational offerings of Catholic schools. Such values, however, would not be a significant factor in promoting permeation of Catholic identity. A detailed examination of whether a distinctive set of values that are unique, or at least predominate, in Catholic schools is beyond the scope of this paper. Some general comments, however, can be made about this proposition.

If values are seen as being of pivotal importance in marking permeation of Catholic identity in schools then there needs to be a deal of precision in the discussion about what these values are. The problem here is how to distinguish Catholic schools marked by certain values from other schools in the wider community. This difficulty seems to be particularly acute when there is strong empirical evidence that those who make up the Catholic school community do seem, by and large, to have similar values to those in the wider community once a range of demographic factors have been controlled for (Dixon 2005; Francis 2002). Indeed, this author is unaware of any study that shows that Catholics display different values than other groups once factors such as socio-economic background are taken into account. As discussed at some length in part one of this paper, if the moral community that is formed around Catholic schools parallels, in many instances, that of other school communities then one probable consequence of this is that it is unlikely that the values espoused by Catholic schools are much different from other schools.

The fact that schools reflect the values of the communities in which they are situated and that these values may overlap significantly for different community groups is not a negative thing. It may lead to a range of beneficial social outcomes such as a rise in community cohesion. The issue for Catholic schools, however, comes in placing too much emphasis on values as a marker of permeation of Catholic identity especially when these values may be relatively generic. The elusiveness of Catholic values is well captured by Greeley (1977) when he wrote:

Every generalization about values that begins with the word Catholic is likely to be misleading, if not erroneous, precisely because the generalization will mask substantial differences in values that exist among Catholic subpopulations. (p. 252)

For Catholic school leaders then, using promotion of values as a decisive factor in the permeation of Catholic identity in schools remains a problematic exercise. This is particularly evident in curriculum innovations that seek to promote so-called Catholic values as distinctive. Teaching about certain values throughout the curriculum, for example, may have some useful purpose but it remains to be seen whether such a program can be seen as playing a decisive role in permeation of Catholic identity in schools.

What does a permeated curriculum look like?

The idea that Catholic identity should permeate all facets of school life has an obvious point of reference in the general curriculum of Catholic schools. A critical question is what does a curriculum that is permeated with Catholic identity look like? This is intended to be a practical and pedagogical question. Catholic schools are much better served if they can point to tangible examples in curriculum documents and elsewhere that make manifest the goals of permeation
The permeation of religious identity should be reflected in auditable ways in the curriculum outlines of various subjects. Permeation: Living Eucharist in the Learning Community (PLELC) published by Edmonton Catholic Schools for instance, has a long section devoted to how other disciplines can be related to the religious dimension of Catholic schools. In the section on mathematics and science, PLELC (p. 33), quotes Pope John Paul II on the fallacy of creating a conflict between science and religion, relying on the theistic argument that truth cannot contradict itself. There is no substantial argument here with the philosophical underpinning of statements such as these. The real challenge lies in realising these goals in the curriculum by way of tangible outcomes (Hyde & Rymarz, 2007). PLELC does make some practical suggestions about how the religious dimension of science can be brought to the fore in the classroom. These are, however, of a rudimentary nature. For instance, in Grade Nine science the only suggested way of integrating Catholic identity into a class on environmental studies is to read Psalm 104, which praises creation (PLELC, p. 75).

Developing a curriculum in Catholic schools that reflects the best aspects of the permeation ideal is no easy task (O’Gorman, 1987). This is also the case in other areas where the goal is coordination and integration of subject content areas. Smith (2001) puts this well when he commented:

Many a high school principal has seen that there may be some merit for teachers of literature and history to collaborate on teaching the Renaissance period. The fusion does not occur automatically or accidentally. The teachers involved painstakingly create a syllabus with appropriate materials in order to accomplish such a unifying experience. (p. 53)

Some of the difficulties in taking an integrated approach to the general curriculum, such as a rigorous approach to assessment and setting appropriate educational outcomes, have direct relevance for integrating Catholic identity across the curriculum (Allen, 2003; Rhodes, 2010). In seeking to move to a more integrated curricular model, planners need to acknowledge that some content areas are more likely to be emphasised than others (Boning, 2007; Boyer, 1982). In a conventional curriculum the place of key disciplines, that is, those that are highly esteemed by parents and educational authorities are assured (Drake, 2007; Meinbach et al., 1995). Religious themes may not have the same prominence and if these are to be included across the curriculum then this needs to be properly planned and coordinated with some type of inbuilt evaluation mechanism. If the goals of permeation are to be realized then there must be an ongoing commitment to develop teacher expertise.

To take the example of science teaching, how can this be permeated by Catholic identity? This seems to rest on a number of principles. Firstly, science teachers must be given some specialist training to help them integrate a religious dimension into their teaching (Evans & Evans, 2008). Secondly, the interface between religion and science is largely philosophical and so a teacher with qualifications in a scientific discipline may not necessarily be able to explain concepts such as metaphysical truth (Ecklund, 2010). Finally, the science teacher may not fully understand Church teaching on controversial and difficult areas, such as the place of evolution in a Christian cosmology. These principles all point to the need for specialist training of teachers if permeation is to be realised.

As well as specialist teacher training, a science curriculum that incorporates a religious dimension would have built into it specific content areas that are reflective of an integrated approach to the curriculum. These may be incidental, such as a brief account of the life of a Christian scientist in an area that is being examined. It can also be more systematic such as a formal study of theories on the origins of the universe and which are and which are not compatible with a Christian worldview. Such a topic would be framed using conventional educational outcomes for assessment purposes. A final element in shaping a curriculum for Catholic schools that is permeated with Catholic identity is the development of resource material to assist teachers in their classroom pedagogy. Science teaching has been used as an example here but the point to be stressed is that incorporating a religious dimension into the study of diverse subject disciplines must be planned, supported and evaluated.
In any discussion of how the curriculum in Catholic school can be developed to be reflective of a permeated strong Catholic identity, due consideration must be given to the publically mandated curriculum. This is often a common document that regulates what schools, both public and denominationally affiliated, must cover to retain recognised status. It is very unlikely that any Catholic School District would advocate developing a permeated curriculum that deviated too much from the public curriculum, the chief reason being that if this was done then Catholic schools might lose their attraction to parents as the credibility of the education received in Catholic schools might be questioned. In light of this, one way forward for those interested in permeating a stronger Catholic identity across the curriculum is to work with government authorities, in the first instance, to try and offer a greater diversity in state sanctioned curricula. This would allow Catholic, and other schools, to make substantive but appropriate changes to curriculum documents that are reflective of their educational philosophy and at the same time ensure that these changes are within the overarching framework of what is considered to be educationally acceptable for government sponsorship.

One instance of such a proactive action in Canadian Catholic schools would be to work with government officials to produce a final high school level religion course that would enable students in Catholic schools to study religion at a cognitive level commensurate with other disciplines. This subject would be assessed in a rigorous fashion and thereby be credited in high school diplomas. In order for these courses to be valid it is imperative that they are seen by the regulating body to be of an equivalent level to what is offered in other areas. It is, therefore, imperative that this course not be developed by Catholic schools working in isolation but in partnership with those responsible for approving curriculum innovations.

**Conclusion**

Following on from the first part of this paper, here the notion of permeating Catholic identity throughout Catholic schools was addressed by a practical examination of how this might be realised in the curriculum of Catholic schools. Three practical challenges, in particular, focusing on the place of religious education and curriculum development in general were discussed. In light of this discussion two key issues emerge.

Firstly, in practice some schools or school districts may not be able to commit sufficient resources into ensuring the religious education is a strong, well supported discipline and that the religious dimension of all subject disciplines in the curriculum is planned, supported and evaluated. There may be a number of reasons for this, all of which may warrant further study. A careful analysis, however, of some schools could reveal that actual priorities, as evidenced by tangible support, lay in other more conventional areas only tangentially related to the religious dimension of education. In such cases it may be preferable to acknowledge the discrepancies between the rhetoric of those Catholic schools and the actuality. Although this paper has not addressed some of the larger conceptual issues about the appropriateness of the permeation model for Catholic schools a future discussion could directly address this issue. This is particularly important in the circumstances where many Catholic schools are not able to meet the high demands set out in a permeation model.

Secondly, if schools are prepared to commit themselves to strong religious education programs and an integrated curriculum what are the best ways that these commitments can be realised? There are a number of curricular models that could be appropriate and, depending on local conditions, a variety of strategies could be used that have as their aim a better and more integrated manifestation of Catholic identity. The key here is to see this as a practical and educational issue. Curriculum development does have a conceptual edge but its success is very dependent on what happens at the “coalface”. Ongoing commitment to curriculum development is essential if the goals of permeation are to be realised.

**References**


Kerygma, Koinonia, and Diakonia as a framework in handing on the faith to young people

Margaret Ghosn

Abstract

Within the framework of Thomas Groome’s (1980) *kerygma, koinonia and diakonia*, a study into handing on the faith is examined. The three avenues are reconsidered through the Church, parish community events and schools. Handing on the faith becomes a holistic approach which extends to catering to the spiritual, pastoral, cultural and social aspects of young people’s lives. By delivering faith filled opportunities such as rituals, reflective time, group discussions, social action and community building, it allows faith to get a hearing. Through these avenues, young people are introduced to the Jesus who invites, challenges and who speaks to the deepest recesses of their hearts.

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In Latin the term *evangelium* means “good news” and in Greek the term euanggelion is used. So in reference to handing on the faith, evangelists are first of all witnesses to the good news of Christ. Yet while 61% of the population identify with Christianity, only about 1.8 million Australians regularly attend church (McCrindle, 2013). Therefore handing on the faith among young people requires as Pope John Paul II (1983) commented, “a New Evangelization, one that is new in its ardour, new in its methods, and new in its means of expression” (p. 659). With a lack of interest in an institutional form of spirituality, the call to hand on the faith requires, in today’s context, the added evangelisation by parish communities and schools. As Astley (2002) notes in regards to the sources of influence on faith:

This first mode (of learning the faith) is a form of socially contextualized religious learning. Either the broader culture enculturates in us the language of faith or the church itself teaches it to us. It is not a learning project that the lone individual can pursue. (p. 24)

As the Church strives to hand on the faith, it has a threefold mission that can be summarised best under three traditional headings of *kerygma* (a word of God community), *koinonia* (a welcoming community), and *diakonia* (a community of welfare) (Groome, 1980, pp. 46-47). The following will apply this framework when considering handing on the faith to young people. Through participation in liturgies and sacraments (*kerygma*), communal experiences at grass roots level (*koinonia*) and schools activities around service (*diakonia*).

**The Church – a Kerygma role**

The Church is the worldwide community of believers. As *Lumen Gentium* (1964) states:

These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetical, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world . . . the ordinary circumstances of social and family life that, as it were, form the context of their existence. (para. 31)

The people of God are a community of people with passion and purpose, whose faith is nourished by the Church, which exists for the Kingdom. So the kerygmatic role of the Church is the mission of preaching in word and celebrating in sacrament the message and memory of the risen Christ to its faithful members.

If the Church has the evangelisation role of preaching the Word, then its primary focus should be on providing experiences for young people to fall in love with the Jesus of the Scriptures, as the two disciples experienced (Lk 24:13-35). From there, handing on the faith becomes a practice of bringing the good news of hope to others in building the kingdom of God. Taking a closer look at Scripture, the two disciples growth in faith came through:

1. Spending time with Jesus (v29)
2. Conversing with Jesus (vv17-27)
3. When the scriptures were opened to their understanding (v27)
4. Time given to theological reflection (v15)
5. When they shared the bread (v30)
6. When their hearts burned within them (v32)
7. They became disciples with a mission, “That same hour they got up and rushed to Jerusalem . . . and they told what had happened on the road” (Lk 24:33, 35).

Focus is an encounter with a loving Jesus through the reading and hearing of the Scriptures and one’s own theological reflection. Then what follows is passing on that faith, as Pope John Paul II (2000) wrote, “Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him” (para. 40). In its kerygmatic role, the Church must firstly break open the Word to young people, as “The force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her children, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life” (*Dei Verbum*, 1964, para. 21).
However in the current Australian context, Church attendance is very low with reasons including: worship services were boring or unfulfilling (42%), problems with Church beliefs and the moral stances (35%), bad experiences, lack of motivation, time and access. Young people have a preference for less traditional worship with mainstream Churches failing to engage their young parishioners (Powell, 2006).

So how can the *kerygmatic* role be fulfilled among Generations Y and Z? The answer lies with the Church engaging today’s means of communication in order to break open the Word. As Pope Benedict (2013) correctly observed:

> unless the Good News is made known also in the digital world, it may be absent in the experience of many people for whom this existential space is important. ... The ability to employ the new languages is required, not just to keep up with the times, but precisely in order to enable the infinite richness of the Gospel to find forms of expression capable of reaching the minds and hearts of all. In the digital environment the written word is often accompanied by images and sounds. Effective communication, as in the parables of Jesus, must involve the imagination and the affectivity of those we wish to invite to an encounter with the mystery of God’s love. (para. 5 & 6)

So as bearers of the Word in today’s technologically saturated society, the Church is called to find a balance between online communication and face to face relational ministry. Ministerial websites need to be kept active and updated with opportunities for young people to be interactive through prayer spaces or blogs which are participatory and conversational. The use of social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter can also raise awareness of the faith. Catholic iPhone apps, diocesan websites, Catholic Radio, e-newsletters and other means can be used to carry and proclaim the Word. Such technology can link Generations Y and Z back to the Church and to faith through their discerning of Christ in Scriptures.

Yet _kerygma_ requires not only effectively communicating the Living Word but faith is also deepened through participation in the rituals, particularly the celebration of Sacraments. Concerning worship at different levels Hughes (2007) wrote, “worship that expresses what we feel must be in the language of the heart” (p. 196). Furthermore according to Whittaker (2006), “While worship does not remove the devastation of what youth are experiencing, it surrounds them with people who have common interest and faith — people who can attest to God’s goodness through all times and situations” (p. 33).

Prayer and participation in liturgical worship deepens young people’s faith and relationship with Jesus. Therefore opportunities for youth to actively engage in sacramental celebrations are paramount for their development as disciples of Jesus. The powerful effect of imagery and ritual in the Church’s _kerygmatic_ role can intentionally and personally invite young people into the life of faith. Through creative celebration of Scripture and Sacraments, Generations Y and Z can come to deeper faith as the disciples on the road to Emmaus did in their encounter with the Christ.

**Grass roots level - Koinonia**

_Koinonia_ is the task of becoming a community of authentic fellowship, a community of faith, hope and love. In postmodern Australia with its emphasis on individualism Partridge (2002, pp. 251-255) has argued that there still remained the significance of a person’s sense of belonging to a community with shared values and goals, in which their ideas could be taken seriously, in which beliefs were verified by others and in which religiously significant experiences were shared and evoked. Handing on the faith therefore is about experiencing and enlivening the other into life-long commitment and values, expressed through community engagement. Two effective examples that take place in Western Sydney based parishes for the youth and which involve the Church moving out of its local boundaries are detailed here.

In young people there is the longing for something more, a need for purpose, a desire to be loved and valued. Handing on faith is to tap into this need and invite young people to experience Jesus who is very real. In a study by Hughes (2007, p. 87), a group of Australian youth in a Catholic school, were asked what was the most fun they ever had. They unanimously responded it was a retreat which had focused on relationships and had helped them express
themselves to each other. In that, they had glimpsed something of the sacredness of the other and the spirituality of close friendships. Hughes concluded that there were opportunities for churches to be involved in the networking of young people and would do well in offering a range of activities through which young people could connect with one another. So handing on the faith at grass roots level is about placing emphasis on koinonia, in forming a community of faith filled people.

So how are retreats a way to hand on faith to young people? An annual parish Lenten weekend retreat or silent retreat caters to spiritual and pastoral needs. So why would Generations Y and Z want to take time out of their very busy and entertaining schedules to participate in a weekend Church run retreat? Aside from being invited by young people who have experienced it and encouraged their friends to come along, young people are looking for events and opportunities that provide meaning and answers to those existential questions that have provoked generations before. “The retreat provides a special opportunity for young people to experience firsthand some of the traditional religious spirituality that can be made more accessible to them in a favourable community setting” (Tullio & Rossiter, 2010, p. 73).

A retreat is not a black and white, catechist style approach, where the Church can assume that what it dictates should not be questioned or broached as it is the ultimate authority. Nor is it about pompous piety as young people can and do discern between sincere acts of compassion and mere outward public displays. When young people search and question, they also need to see the teaching of Jesus modelled, and they need to be heard and taken seriously, so as to be open to a response that touches their lives. Kessler (2000) claims there are seven “gateways” to the soul of these young people: yearning for deep connection; longing for silence and solitude; search for meaning and purpose; hunger for joy and delight; creative drive; urge for transcendence; and the need for initiation.

A retreat enters into these gateways. In the great outdoors, away from all burdens and guilt, temptations and noise, young people can clearly hear themselves and are ready to listen. Surrounded by solitude and nature, they have time to share their faith with other young people who share the same values. Discussion in small groups allows for spiritual growth, education and community building as “they spring from the need to live the Church's life more intensely, or from the desire and quest for a more human dimension . . . their aim may be to bring together, for the purpose of listening to and meditating on the Word, for the sacraments and the bond of the agape, groups of people who are linked by age, culture, civil state or social situation” (Pope Paul VI, 1975, para. 58). Retreats provide the much needed space and time for young people to explore deeper their lives, faith and direction, through the support of the gathered community who share the same values.

According to Engebretson (2003, p. 19), a central task for those who work with the young is the creation of spiritual experiences that will help them to articulate their questions, to share them in a supportive environment, and, with an eye on the wisdom of religious traditions, to pursue them together with experienced leaders and with their peers. With leaders who are theologically sound, scripturally articulate, attentive and loving, young people can deepen their relationship with God. Why? Simply because young people do want to discover a God greater than themselves for they are in a transition period, with its hurts and uncertainties, and they need a God who does love unconditionally, is ever present and gently healing. In these times, faith is readily accepted and embraced. It can even be life transforming!

Then there are the social and cultural needs of the young that a community must be prepared to cater for if faith is to be handed on and applied in daily life situations. Koinonia is the invitation to community that is available in all of life’s situations. As Hughes (2007) notes, “young people are trying, each in their individualistic way, to put their lives together – their relationships, study, work; the world of fun and excitement, of chill-out times, and sometimes of confusion and hurt” (p. 196).

So it is Easter Monday and 700 young people gather at Bankstown Basketball stadium to compete against each other. This all began in 2005 when young Maronite people voiced their concern that they were not meeting and interacting with youth from other Maronite parishes and that there should be an attempt to break the ice and to come to know each other and be a living community. It was a way to unite the Maronite parishes in friendly competitive rivalry.
It all happens through volunteer work and is an initiative of the Youth Diocesan Committee. It is a six month preparation and up to 50 young people volunteer their services on sports day to set up, register players and ensure smooth running.

There is something for everyone. The events include touch footy, volleyball, basketball and soccer and teams include male teams, female teams and unisex teams. Families are invited to come along while their children are entertained with jumping castles, face painting and boot camp. There is a raffle with sports prizes donated. Lunch is provided and each parish rotates its turn in catering.

There is the opportunity to play sport, to prepare the lunch for the hungry masses, to ref a game, to sell raffle tickets, popcorn and drinks, to help with registration, to keep game scores, to apply first aid or physiotherapy to the injured, to entertain the littlies or to simply be a spectator and cheer on your parish.

The Maronite Bishop makes his appearance for the Opening prayer, group photo, a chat with the young people and to endorse this special occasion. Priests and Religious also make appearances throughout the day to be there among the young.

Parish competes against parish and more importantly, and in the spirit of the event, youth from other parishes may choose to play for smaller parishes that are short on players for their teams. It is a sign of good sports man/woman ship. The parish to score the most points on the day, is declared the winner!

It is a church run event that is about inviting young people (many who probably don’t attend Mass), to celebrate community spirit, enjoying life as Jesus taught, “I have come to give your life and life to its fullest” (Jn 10:10). Other interstate Maronite parishes have also organised their own sports events for youth with one example being the Melbourne and Adelaide Maronite parishes annual sports day where they compete in a friendly AFL competition. At Sunday Mass the event is recalled and celebrated once more.

This is handing on the living faith, by tearing down boundaries and living out the call to be community at grass roots level. It is to be with one another in life, sharing hospitality, befriending one another, while helping the smaller parishes feel empowered. It is a public display that people of faith can live out their Christian values with great joy, together as a community in parishes or on the sporting field.

The Church exists, not for its own sake, but for the sake of God’s reign which is breaking into our world in many ways and many places, far beyond the boundaries of the institutional Church. There are practices that exist outside the institutional Church that are effective in handing on the faith. Our task, according to Connolly (2006, p. 5), is to proclaim, seek, uncover, encourage, celebrate and build on the Spirit’s presence and activity in the world. The parish versus parish sports day is one such example.

**Handing on the faith in schools - Diakonia**

The metapurpose as Christian religious educators according to Groome (1980, p. 35) is to lead people out to the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Catholic education therefore appropriates its tradition by making a reflection on faith a subject area in the curriculum. Catholic schools become a public community of learners, and an ecclesial community of believers. As learners, Catholic students are encouraged by the community to cultivate their intellectual and aesthetic potentialities; as believers, they are inspired to grow in faith in the presence of Jesus Christ (McGowan et al., 1996, p. 14).

As an ecclesial community, the Catholic school emphasises its close association and partnership with the local parish, and, consequently, links itself to the church operating throughout the world. But it also emphasises its way of being a Catholic faith community within itself and encourages, in an educational way, the mission of God’s reign in Jesus Christ (McGowan, 1996, p. 20).
Given that according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics in the decade 1999 to 2009, the number of students attending Catholic schools grew by 11 per cent, and the numbers attending other schools grew by 41 per cent with most of these being Christian schools (Hughes, 2010, pp. 69-70), it follows that religious educators in classrooms have an important role in handing on the faith. As role models, Pope Paul VI (1975) reminds teachers and all evangelists, “the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life” (para. 41).

According to Bishop Michael Putney (2008, p. 4) the three core assertions which would play a part in establishing a Catholic curriculum framework from which to hand on the faith include:

- Learning and living are linked in the curriculum in the context of a catholic understanding of purpose, meaning and destiny;
- Curriculum forms the whole person in the context of a Catholic understanding of the inherent dignity of a person created in the image and likeness of God; and
- Curriculum prepares students for global responsibilities in the context of a Catholic understanding of justice, peace and ecological sustainability.

Catholic Education is concerned not only with a growth in knowledge, but growth in humanity also. This growth in humanity occurs when students are architects of their own moral, cultural and spiritual growth through the integration of the great patrimony they have received from Christ, into a synthesis of faith, culture and life (Putney, 2008, p. 6).

Here *diakonia* which calls Christians to the mission of loving service to all comes into play. Ways in which the framework of *diakonia* can be carried out in schools to ensure the handing on and a commitment to faith in service include:

- addressing the intellectual, moral and spiritual dimensions of students
- addressing factors including poverty, discrimination and special needs
- nurture spirituality and provide a more intentional faith situation through sacred space, prayer, Eucharist and rituals, reflection and retreat days that offer opportunities for listening and reflecting, sharing and affirming
- offer ethical guidance and values
- develop a social justice consciousness through engagement with the wider community including St Vincent de Paul, aged care facilities, blood donations and charity fundraisers
- engage their families
- build community spirit

In interviews with Victorian students a large majority indicated they had developed their understanding and appreciation of the role and importance of religion in people’s lives and a good majority indicated their knowledge of the faith tradition had increased, although this knowledge appeared not to have increased faith development or promoted an interest in social justice (de Souza, 2009, pp. 48-59). Yet groundwork is done in schools and the seed of faith can be planted.

There are abundant opportunities to hand on the faith through the framework of *diakonia* in which schools can serve others from its faith based values. Social justice groups are often established, students are encouraged to make sandwiches and visit shelters for homeless people, visit refugee centres, aged care facilities and children’s hospitals, are engaged in fundraising and charity collections, participate in bandaged bear day, pink ribbon day to further breast cancer awareness, bandanna day, daffodil day, jeans for genes and blood donations. There are the Vinnies winter appeal and Vinnies Christmas hampers. Tamberino (2005, pp. 130-131) also adds participation at lobby nights as well as support and outreach to troubled youth by other youth. Young people may travel to developing countries in immersion experience and spend time living among the people, assisting with day-to-day tasks while discovering themselves and Jesus. Organisations such as *Caritas* help young people by providing ideas, resources and channels to assist those that need it most.
Attempts at broadening the possibilities for young people to experience the faith in Churches and schools includes the document endorsed by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, titled *Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry* which was released in July 2009. The document, providing a framework for Catholic Youth Ministry, presented eight focus areas of: Prayer and worship; Evangelisation; Catechesis; Pastoral care; Community life; Justice and service; Leadership development and Advocacy. These can be used as avenues through which to hand on the faith to Generations Y and Z, through experience of ritual and sacraments and though social justice concerns and service.

The school is part of a faith community where young people learn about truths and the belief system belonging to their religion. From faith knowledge they determine appropriate behaviour in different situations and are then encouraged to live this out through *diakonia*, being of loving service to the wider community.

**Conclusion**

In handing on the faith through the frameworks of *kerygma, koinonia*, and *diakonia*, churches, parish communities and schools, have a vital responsibility. As evangelists the call is to provide young people with support, guidance and compassionate care while directing them to love of Jesus through Scripture. Encouraging them then to theologically reflect and deepen their spirituality, can be done through participation in church liturgies and rituals, Bible discussions, retreats, through classroom prayer and pastoral practice. From there emerges ministry undertaken by a community of young people that includes social engagement and justice action.

The Church today is to be one of mobility as Jesus was, alive and full of life, found at prayer and in celebration of the sacraments, but also found in sporting stadiums, in the great outdoors, found serving, helping and volunteering, conversing and praying with and for young people. If young people can discover in the gathered Church community on Sundays, in local communities and in school classrooms, Christians who live their faith out with joy, with passion and depth, then young people will be more receptive to the faith. If the Church can as a whole community with Generations Y and Z, step up and step out, to comfort and heal, laugh and celebrate, with hope and love, then faith will be passionately embraced and lived out by young people who will then hand it on.

**References**


