



Catholic Identity in our schools in 21st Century

Philomena Billington: Deputy Director – Catholic Identity

Overview of Presentation:

- How do we understand Catholic identity?
- Context – putting the story pieces
- Brief summary of the Research Project & Research Instruments & implications
- How do we continue to respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ today in our schools, parishes and dioceses?

What is Catholic Identity?

What words come into your mind when you hear the word 'identity'?

How do you understand Catholic identity?

What does it look like in 2010?

What are the challenges & opportunities for Catholic schools

Why did I choose Catholic education for my child/ren?

Key stakeholders – parents, schools & Church

What is the purpose of Catholic Schools? (Church Documents)

The Catholic school participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out... It is a true and proper ecclesial entity by reason of its educational activity, in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony ... By reason of its identity, therefore, the Catholic school is a place of ecclesial experience, which is moulded in the Christian community... In a very special way the Catholic school affords the opportunity to meet young people in an environment which favours their Christian formation. (The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium, #11-12)

QCEC Catholic Schooling in Rural & Remote Areas 2010

In Summary:

(Catholic Schools on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997)

- Catholic school ...is a school for all, with special attention to those who are weakest.(15)
- The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school".(6)
- Catholic schools are at once places of evangelization, of complete formation, of inculturation, of apprenticeship in a lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds“ (10)

- ***The Catholic school at the service of society***
- 16. The school cannot be considered separately from other educational institutions and administered as an entity apart, but must be related to the world of politics, economy, culture and society as a whole. For her part the Catholic school must be firmly resolved to take the new cultural situation in her stride and, by her refusal to accept unquestioningly educational projects which are merely partial, be an example and stimulus for other educational institutions, in the forefront of ecclesial community's concern for education.

- ***Serving the ‘common good’***
- It fulfils a service of public usefulness and, although clearly and decidedly configured in the perspective of the Catholic faith, is not reserved to Catholics only, but is open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational project.(16)

- Catholic schools, moreover, like state schools, fulfil a public role, for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the sort of education they wish for them.(17)

- Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs ...promotion of parents' associations, in order to clarify with their indispensable collaboration that personalised approach which is needed for an educational project to be efficacious (20)

“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.” John 10:10

THE CECV ENCHANCING CATHOLIC SCHOOL IDENTITY RESEARCH PROJECT

- What is the distinctive nature of Catholic schools ?
- How is it measured?

The CECV Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (2006)



*How does the research project inform our diocesan and our school processes?
What type of Catholic school are we?
What type of Catholic school do we want to become?*

The goal is: To enhance the Catholic identity of Catholic schools in Victoria

There are implications for people who **work** in schools?

There are implications for people who **choose** Catholic schools?

- *Who are these people?*
- *What is their attitude to religion?*
- *How do they understand the purpose of their Catholic school within the institutional Church?*
- *How do they understand the relationship between their school and society?*
- *How is their school responding to the Australian educational agenda?*

***The research is based on a
HERMENEUTICAL-COMMUNICATIVE MODEL***

- *Understanding identity in a hermeneutical (interpretive) and communicative way ...context is a pluralist social & cultural composition... 'present day people & youth have not left the religious realm behind... have entered the realm of individual choice & personal pottering, rather independent of the institution and authority of the Church' (Maex,2003)*
- *Today society is covered by a 'more complex religious landscape' (Mullens, 2002)*

CONTEXT

" People understand God depending upon the particular historical and social context in which they live"

Jean Luis Segundo SJ (Liberation Theologian)

The insights of the research are presented with a particular focus on Catholicism in the 'First World'/'Western World'. The research from Catholic University Leuven (KUL) is strongly influenced by the European context – the CECV Project is

providing a comparison both culturally & in relation to the Catholic Church in Australia.

*... a growing marginalisation of the Christian faith as a **reference point** * and source of light for an effective and convincing interpretation of existence.*

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium #1

** **Previously would have been the centre of life***

“the gradually progressing secularisation, pluralisation and detraditionalisation of our culture, outside the school and also inside the school.”

From presentation by prof. Didier Pollefeyt – KU Leuven

CHANGE IN RELIGIOUS IDENTITY - AUSTRALIA

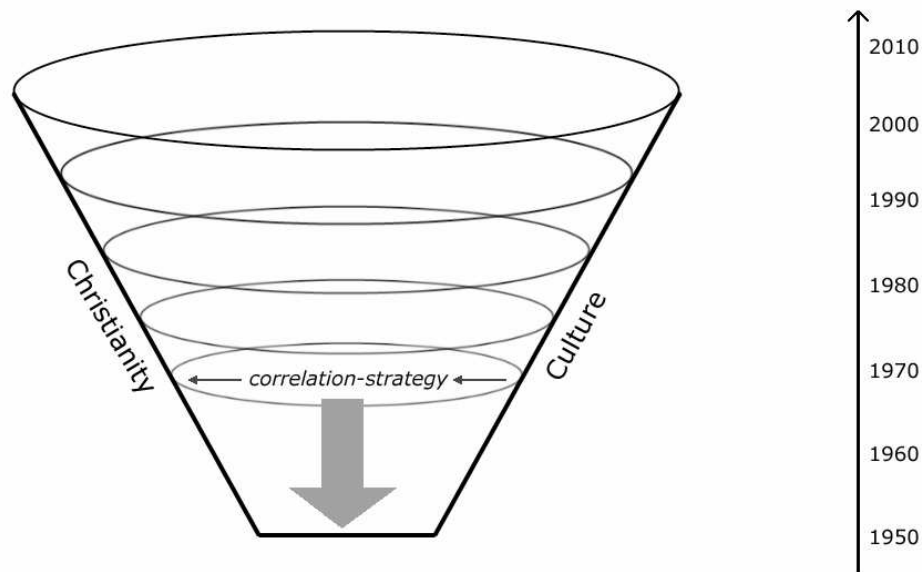
Religious ID	1947	2006
<i>Christian</i>	88%	64%
<i>Other</i>	0.5%	5.6%
<i>No Religion</i>	0.3%	19%
<i>Not Stated</i>	10.9%	11.5%

Gary Bouma, Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the twenty-first century Cambridge University Press 2006

TODAY

- *Young people have to choose their own story*
 - *Who am I?*
 - *Who do I want to be?*
 - *Who am I called to be?*
- *Schools today need to answer these questions?*
 - *Who are we?*
 - *Who do we want to be?*
 - *Who are we called to be?*

A Secular Culture



- Current context is one of increasing divergence between Christianity and modern culture.

Post Traditional Society:

- 'individuals constantly engaging their world, thinking through the options in an autonomous way and making choices about how they will live'
(Giddens in Hughes, 2002)

- the pluralism of contemporary Australian culture allows people to explore what options best suit their personal situations

Within this Post Traditional Australian context research suggests:

- *religions are sets of resources from which to pick and choose*
- *religion is tied to organisations*
- *“no religion” does not mean rejection of religion and religious ideas*
- *Many prefer to talk about spirituality than religion*
- *Spirituality is personal and individual*

Underpinning Theology of Project

- Theology of Interruption – Boeve (2007)
- Proposes understanding of plurality rather than focusing on secularisation
- God as interrupter – not a rupture... to ***‘recontextualise’***
- To focus on plurality, difference & particularity rather than consensus, harmony & continuity
- Specific particularity of Christian faith – God interrupting human history in and through Jesus Christ...dialogue with contemporary context in midst of a plurality of narratives... must determine its own position in relation to the fundamental life options surrounding it

Goal:

“The goal of the project is to enable schools to learn to know their actual identity ... and to support them in their future development.”

(Developing the Identity of Catholic Schools : Final Report First Stage of Research, August, 2007, p 94)

Research focus:

- *the way in which Catholic identity is lived and shaped*
- *the preferred situation a school dreams of*
- *the potential present in the school to realise this dream*

(Developing the Identity of Catholic Schools : Final Report First Stage of Research, August, 2007, p 69)

Who is Surveyed?

- Students in Grades 5-6
- Students in Years 7-10
- Students in Years 11-12
- Teachers
- School Board
- Parents

Four Survey Instruments:

- **Post-Critical Belief Scale - Hutsebaut**
- **Melbourne Scale - Boeve**
- **Victoria Scale – Ter Horst & Hermans**
- **Doyle Questionnaire – developed for Australian Context**

As well:

- **Profile Questionnaire** – contains valuable information

The potential present in the School

- **Post Critical Belief Scale (PCB)** instrument based on research of *Professor Dirk Hutsebaut* will assist schools in profiling and measuring different attitudes towards religion that exist among their community members. The PCB identifies 4 such attitudes or ways of responding:
 - Literal Belief
 - External Critique
 - Relativism
 - Second Naivete – Post Critical Belief

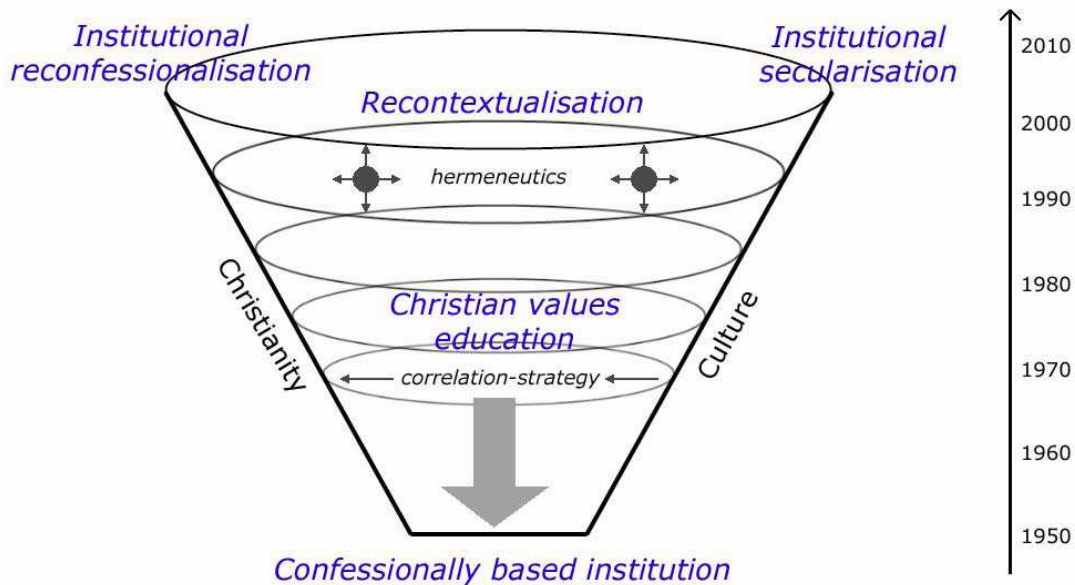
School identity measured on two levels:

- **Factual (Current Practice) :**
 - *What type of school do you have?*
- **Normative (Ideal School) :**
 - *What type of school would you like?*
- Melbourne Scale
- Victoria Scale
- Doyle Questionnaire

The Melbourne Scale: (Boeve)

How do Catholic schools respond to today's context?

-A closer look



Our origins are in a confessionally-based institutional church and we face the following options: (Boeve)

- Institutional Reconfessionalism - this may be an option for some schools
- Institutional Secularisation – moving gradually in a process of silently giving up the struggle
- Christian Values Approach – perhaps futile in the face of the influence of the internet and pluralism
- Stance of Recontextualisation – hermeneutic approach. An implication is the need to continue to retrain teachers to deal with this approach

There are detailed implications for each of these choices – Reflection on profiles presented.

VICTORIA SCALE (Ter Horst & Hermans)

One predominant characteristic

Monologue school

Most aligned with diversity & hermeneutics

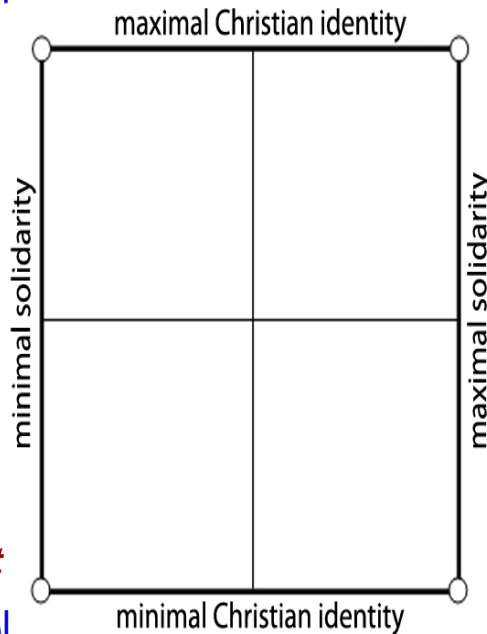
Dialogue school

Minimal identity present

Colourless school

Everybody accepted & respected but no identity

Colourful school



Doyle Questionnaire (Australian Context)

- *The Doyle Scale breaks open 4 areas:*
 1. *Social aspects of school identity*
 2. *Pedagogical aspects of school identity*
 3. *Socio-economic aspects of school identity*
 4. *Ecological aspects of school identity*
- **15 Items**
- **Both Factual** (how do school members see it today)?
- **And Normative** (how would they wish their 'ideal school' to be?Factual:

Reflections and Summary:

- *All Catholic schools have an identity, neutrality is impossible*
- *Identity is as implicit as explicit*
- *Identity is more a quality (how) than a quantity (how much)*
- *More aware of how we express our Catholic identity*
- *Motivation to shape Catholic identity*
- *A strong theoretical basis and information for reflection*
- *A means of Catholic school improvement*
- *A credible basis for discussion and conversation*
- *Positive response from clergy to the underpinning theology*
- *Challenges*
- *Leadership is critical*

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

- *Pastoral gap within some parishes – pastoral response no longer local due to diminishing clergy and structures – schools meeting pastoral needs of families*
- *Disconnect between some staff, parents and institutional Church*
- *People are belonging differently today (Girard)*
- *Importance of social justice, retreats etc for students & young staff*
- *Do we have to become more radical Gospel people?*
- *Importance of partnerships within and beyond Church – Catholic Mission, Caritas, St Vinnies & local community groups*

NEXT STEPS:

- *Refinement of Surveys – **Trial in May***
- *Development of Qualitative instruments – **smaller school communities***
- *Research and trials with survey interpretation, “practical theological instruments” and professional learning materials – **audit of current processes & intentionality***
- *Publication of Report – **August 2010***
- *Development of website for ongoing survey implementation*
- *Completion of project – August 2011*

Discussions:

- *What clarifying questions do you have?*
- *What potential benefits do you see in this project? What are the possibilities?*
- *What questions and issues does it raise for you?*
- *What type of Catholic schools do we need to be?*

Final Thoughts

We are still challenged with ‘interpreting the challenges of Vatican II’. The preface to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

‘the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts’...the Church seeks to carry forward the work of Christ...[who] entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgement, to serve and not to be served...to carry out such a task the Church has always had the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel (nn. 1,3,4)

What is the role of Catholic Schools?

Putting Flesh & Bones on God’s Love

“...remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence.”
Novo Millennio Ineunte (1999)