

Contents

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| What is Catholic Identity? | 3 |
| Jesus | 8 |
| Frontier | 12 |
| Liturgy and Prayer | 16 |
| Curriculum | 20 |
| Pedagogy | 25 |
| Staff Formation | 30 |
| Ecological Conversion | 34 |
| Family, Parish and School | 37 |
| Charity and Justice | 40 |
| Befriending Difference | 46 |
| Data and Planning | 49 |
| Doing Theology | 53 |

Introduction

Do you believe Catholic schools can proclaim the Gospel uniquely and powerfully in our nation? If you do, this book is written for you. If you are a principal, a staff member, a parent, a parish leader or someone in the community who believes in the potential of Catholic education, this book seeks to explore that potential from a number of vantage points. The religious identity question that has become critical for Catholic schools is a key driver for the book.

The Catholic school is an educational community where learning, culture, faith and life find a meeting place. The challenge of making this meeting place meaningful for students lies at the heart of the identity challenge faced by Catholic schools in our time. It is a challenge that is invigorating but demanding and becoming more sophisticated as each year unfolds.

Sometimes the approach taken in explorations of Catholic identity is to define 'Catholic' by referring to abstract principles or concepts. The phrase 'Catholic is as Catholic does' sums up the approach taken in this book. Instead of considering identity issues purely from a theoretical perspective, the book draws from living examples of school life. I am indebted here to Catholic Education in South Australia because this rich community of schools has provided the Catholic ferment out of which this book has matured. A picture of contemporary Catholic identity is built up, layer upon layer, over the chapters of the book, each of which focuses on a particular facet of the Catholic school. There are chapters which explore Catholic identity from vantage points as diverse as pastoral care, curriculum and pedagogy, disability, prayer and ecological sustainability.

Pope Francis has captured the imagination of Catholics and the wider international community with the warmth of his personality and the accessibility of his humanity. In his recent Apostolic Exhortation, Francis stated that he wanted a Church that 'is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security' (Evangelii Gaudium, # 49). Francis' statement is very relevant

for Catholic schools, and the fragments of school life presented in this book are offered as examples of the mission to be 'out on the streets' meeting the needs of the families and the children who have been entrusted to us. Faithfulness to this mission is the surest guide to constructing an authentic Catholic identity in our time.

While the operating environment for Catholic schools presents a myriad of challenges for those who lead them, it also presents a myriad of opportunities. This book seeks to share in the vigour and hope expressed by Francis when he acknowledged that every period presents its particular obstacles to the proclamation of the Gospel – 'we know that the Roman Empire was not conducive to the Gospel message, the struggle for justice, or the defence of human dignity. Every period of history is marked by the presence of human weakness, self-absorption, complacency and selfishness' (Evangelii Gaudium, # 263).

I have written this book on the premise that Catholic schools already provide a living witness to the Gospel, but there is nothing about their religious identity that can be taken for granted. Many of our staff, students and families will only experience the tradition as being meaningful if they are invited to make new points of connection with Catholic faith. If they are reconnected in this way, they will see themselves as part of the ongoing story as the tradition evolves from one generation to the next. Each era opens up new chapters that enhance and develop the tradition. Seeing yourself and your school as part of the story is central to being authentically Catholic.

Our schools fulfil their mission when those who lead them embrace the threads of faith, hope and love that are woven from the stories of school life such as those presented in this book. Pope Francis called us to 'try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, # 24). Everyone who leads a Catholic school has already taken many first steps and is deeply involved. There is, however, always another challenge that emerges when it comes to responding to the ongoing call of the Gospel. I hope the experience of reading this book opens up a challenge and a call to you as you engage with the examples and reflections in the text.

Although an academic approach to Catholic identity is not taken in this book, it does rest upon a firm foundation of research. Catholic cultural anthropologist Gerry Arbuckle's work has reinforced the conviction that story and narrative provide the basic building blocks for any person or group's identity (Arbuckle, 2013). Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy has also highlighted the ways in which narratives, symbols and metaphors shape and animate the identity formation process (Ricoeur, 1995). Catholic schools have a strong religious identity when those who belong to them draw sensitively from the treasures of the Catholic faith to create rich and formative spaces for their students.

Missiologists Jim and Therese D'Orsa make the case for us being in a 'liminal age' in their books published earlier in this Mission and Education series. Liminal experiences can occur at the personal or cultural level. For example, at the time of writing this text, my family is packing up our home in preparation for an interstate move. We are in a time of personal liminality as we move out of valued relationships and dismantle our home. Of course we will find a new home and build a new network of employment and social relationships, but we are 'in the middle' – in a frontier space – with our old home going and our new home not yet found. It is disturbing and challenging to be in a liminal space, and some of these challenges are discussed further in the chapter on Frontier. Members of cultures in liminal times can feel disturbed and unsure as many taken-for-granted assumptions are called into question in areas such as family, Church, and the wider world (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2013). This liminality is the result of extraordinary changes caused by globalisation and its attendant phenomena such as the pluralisation of society. It is also caused by the near collapse of the tight Catholic culture we Catholics experienced until recently in Australia. Catholic schools need strong and visionary leadership in this liminal age if their

communities are to 'make meaning' in a time when basic assumptions about life are changing. This book will join with Jim and Therese in their conclusion that school leaders can only make meaning in a Catholic context when they are able to 'do theology' with and in their school communities.

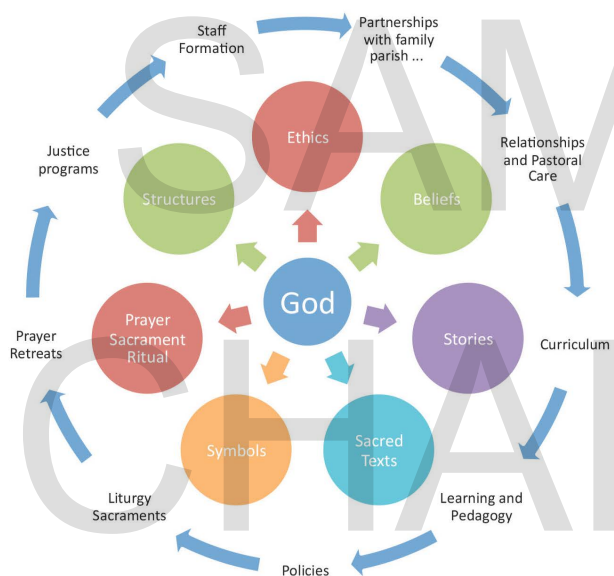
The examples of school life that are presented in this book were chosen because they are typical of the efforts being made by educators to provide their students with meaningful points of encounter with elements of our faith tradition. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has characterised our age as being shaped by an 'ethic of authenticity' where each individual must discover the point of their life themselves, rather than conforming to a model imposed externally from society or some religious or political authority (Taylor, 1991). Sociologist Philip Hughes found, in his report on a very significant study of the spirituality of young people in Australia, that young people 'put life together' themselves rather than following a predetermined way given to them by others (Hughes, 2007). In his reflections on Taylor's thought, James McEvoy points out that individuals only understand themselves through significant relationships and in the context of the communities to which they belong (McEvoy, 2009). Catholic schools are seen in these reflections as providing students with a community where they can make sense of their lives by engaging with rich and contemporary Catholic beliefs, values and practices.

The Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium has worked closely with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria to research the religious identity options being taken up in Catholic schools (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). It is clear from this research that students will only commit to beliefs when they have played an active role in understanding them. The Leuven research provides powerful insights for school leaders who wish to understand the religious identity options being exercised within their communities and the implications of those options for the mission of the school.

I invite you to join with me in reflecting on the Catholic identity of your community by engaging with the examples of school life presented in this book as well as the research that is woven in and around the examples, providing a theoretical framework for the narrative.

What is Catholic Identity?

If you were to draw a diagram of the Catholic identity of your school, would you come up with something like the one I have developed below? I have been intrigued by the responses to the diagram in the workshops where I have used it. For example, one colleague said that her school always places the student at the centre of their thinking, and yet in this diagram I have replaced the student with God. This comment led to a deep conversation about the relationship between Catholic identity, God and the students.



Reflection and action are essential

We will reflect further on the diagram as this chapter unfolds, but before going there I wanted to reflect on a bushwalk I recently experienced. I had been out with my wife walking in a very scenic part of the Mount Lofty Ranges when we came across a friend by chance and we began to walk with him. Our friend stopped periodically to show us the orchids that up until then we had been walking past without noticing. The intricacy and beauty of the world that we had been walking through without being aware of it was amazing once it was pointed out to us. Seeing and understanding what is happening in a Catholic school's identity can be a bit like that. You can walk around the school without noticing very much or you can attend to what is happening and take active steps to amplify religious opportunities and moments as they continually arise in the busy life that surrounds you.

It is a wonderful thing to behold the skill and sensitivity of leaders who have mastered the art of religious leadership. These leaders see Catholic faith as a treasure box filled with riches that students and staff can draw upon continuously in the life of the school. Skilled religious leaders know how to create an environment where staff and students draw deeply from the tradition to provide new points of access and meaning for the communities they lead.

Draw your own diagram

- ▲ Reflect on your experiences of your school. What is it about your story that seems significant?
- ▲ Consider how you could represent something from your story on a diagram or an image.
- ▲ Consider the differences between your diagram and the one above.
- ▲ Should God be at the centre of the diagram or should the student? Or is there a way in which this dilemma can be resolved by making them both central in some way?

God has been placed at the centre of my Catholic identity diagram because everything that happens in a Catholic school should draw its deepest meaning from God. While this is an easy sentence to write, putting it into practice in the life of the school is both sophisticated and challenging. Various elements of religious traditions are represented inside the diagram: Scriptures, sacraments, stories, symbols and beliefs. The religious identity of a Catholic school is built up daily by drawing effectively and sensitively from these elements as opportunities arise in the life of the school. The outer rim of the diagram represents typical opportunities for religious formation in a Catholic school. Moments in school life such as retreats, pastoral care, relationships, liturgy and the promotion of justice provide opportunities for the school community to experience Catholic faith as a living and meaningful reality in their lives.

activity

This activity is designed for a gathering of members of the school community, such as a staff meeting, a board meeting or a Religious Education classroom.

The image of God that people have in the school community powerfully shapes the school's Catholic identity. Gather a range of photos, writing, symbols, images, books, statues, etc., and ask people to pick one that they most identify with and then explain that affinity to a colleague, slowly bringing the sharing to a whole staff interaction. What commonalities and differences are there in the way in which staff perceive God?

While the outer rim of the diagram above defines what Catholic schools do, this activity only becomes authentic when the inner elements are seen as real, connected and important. Doing and being have to be held together and integrated in the life of a Catholic school. Reflection and action are both integral to the religious leadership that needs to be exercised continuously at all levels within the school community.

Religious leadership is storytelling

As was mentioned in the introduction, we are living in a 'liminal age' where many taken-for-granted assumptions from the past about family, culture and Church are being contested. The challenge that leaders of Catholic schools face in this liminal age is to help their communities 'make meaning' in a time when basic assumptions about life are changing.

Gerry Arbuckle is a Catholic priest whose anthropological insights help me to understand what effective religious leadership looks like in our liminal times. Arbuckle highlights the importance of storytelling in the process of identity formation for both individuals and institutions, and he says that this storytelling becomes particularly important in times of change when traditional meaning systems are breaking down and new ones need to be created.

Those who lead Catholic schools are storytellers who draw from the deep wells of Catholic faith to open up a narrative with their communities that is meaningful and life-giving given the local context and culture of the school. The school's Catholic narrative is developed from elements such as those represented in the inside circle of the diagram above: Scriptures, sacraments, stories, symbols and beliefs. For Catholics, God is mediated richly and deeply in such elements as they are experienced in an ecclesial community like a Catholic school. Effective religious leaders know how to weave these elements together into a story that makes sense to people and leads them into faith experiences that are meaningful and relevant for their lives.

In his analysis of Catholic identity, Arbuckle (2013) distinguished between myths and narrative. Myths are the deep founding stories handed down to us from the past that explain how the world is and how we relate ourselves to that world and all of the people in it. Those who study Scripture and Theology tap into the deep wells (or myths) of Catholic faith in a particularly explicit way. While myths are past stories, narratives are told by people in the present. Narratives create identity in the here and now by drawing on myths from the past and retelling them within the changing times of the present. Catholic liturgy can be understood as the source and summit of our faith because of the way in which it makes the ancient myths present to us in a particularly real and cogent way. Every religious leader needs to open up a narrative that is built up from elements of the tradition such as those represented

inside the diagram at the start of this chapter. While the deep myths and beliefs from our Catholic faith are unchanging throughout history, each community needs to develop its own narrative from those deep beliefs in ways that make sense, given the local context and culture. Religious symbols, liturgy, pastoral practice, Scripture and Catholic teaching all cohere into a meaning-filled narrative when skilled religious leadership is exercised.

reflection

- ▲ Can your religious leadership be understood as a story that you are sharing with your community as you weave Catholic elements together into a narrative that makes sense to your community?
- ▲ What are some of the features of the religious story that your community is telling itself and others?
- ▲ How effectively do you draw from the deep meaning structures (myths) of Catholic faith in the stories that you are telling with your community members today?
- ▲ Whose voices are not being heard in the Catholic story unfolding in your school?

Identity – stable and changing

There are many ways to understand the meaning of the word 'identity'. If you look in a dictionary you are likely to find something like 'the set of characteristics by which a person, group or thing is recognised'. I find it helpful to draw from the reflections of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur as I explore what identity means for a school. Ricoeur considered how identities are both stable and changing at the same time.

An individual or a group needs to have a stable set of characteristics if they are going to have an identity that is recognisable from one day to the next. If an individual looked one way today and completely different tomorrow then they would be unrecognisable – they would have no identity. So one thing we can say about personal identity is that it relies upon a set of stable features that can be recognised by those who know us. This is true not only of our physical characteristics but also of our character, our personality and our worldview.

If you were to describe someone you know, you would probably refer to the physical attributes or personality traits that stand out for you in that person. However, our identity is never fully captured by saying we have brown hair or a good sense of humour. A person or a group's identity is built up in many complex layers that cannot be reduced to a few simple labels.

The late Bishop Michael Putney gave a keynote address to a Conference where he counselled against defining Catholic identity too narrowly, using one's own experience as a yardstick or using one or other element as the defining feature of what it means to be Catholic. Catholic identity cannot be reduced to a series of dot points or simple slogans. The Catholic tradition of faith has grown over millions of lifetimes spanning a myriad of times, places and cultures. Paradoxically though, while recognising that Catholic identity is always larger than its local expressions, Catholic faith always and ultimately has to be lived as a commitment in the mind, heart and hands of each Catholic person, formed in a Catholic community that is located in a particular point in time and culture.

Changing identities

While identities are stable, they are not fixed. Change and maturation over time is inevitable. I heard my niece saying recently that it is 'lame' being 12 and that 13 is not a much better age in her view. She was looking forward to being 14. I hope she isn't disappointed. Sometimes those of us who are a little older than 14 can yearn for the physical attributes we had in earlier years, but time marches on nonetheless and we can either befriend what is happening to us or we can rail against the way we are.

Just as individuals have an identity that grows and develops, so too do groups. Groups survive by adapting to changes in their environments. Groups and institutions that fail to move with the times run the risk of becoming irrelevant or outmoded. Those who focus and strengthen a Catholic school's religious identity must move with the social and cultural currents of their time, even as they draw deeply from the ancient wells of the Tradition. Arbuckle points out that every group has a culture which 'tells' people how they should feel, think and act. As has been noted, this group culture has its roots in myths that are narrated in an ongoing way according to present context and culture. Culture provides people with an essential sense of purpose, order and belonging. In times of cultural change, members of the group easily



feel that they are in chaos and in danger of losing their identities. One of the challenges of leadership at such times is to lead people through the chaos and out the other side by drawing deeply from the cultural myths to tell new stories that make sense in the new times.

reflection

- ▲ Change is challenging. Is there an example in your community where you are holding on to what is authentic and meaningful even as you develop new expressions that open Catholic faith out with new points of connection and access?

What makes us Catholic?

Brainstorm with staff a variety of ways that your school demonstrates its Catholic identity. When this is done, ask the staff to identify from their brainstorm all the qualities, actions, values, etc., that would look equally at home in the brainstorm of the local state school down the road. Stress with staff that what they have chosen could well be examples of Catholic identity but may need to be more explicitly engaged with the tradition so that the Catholic dimension is foregrounded.

Ask whether there were items identified for the Catholic school that could not be easily part of a secular state school identity. What were these? Do these elements lead you to the heart of your school's Catholic identity?

Are there other elements of your identity list which are important but need further reflection before their connections with the tradition are apparent?