A new opportunity presents itself. It contains an invitation to be part of the living Christian story. Jesus Christ sent us out into the world to meet people in order to love them, to walk alongside them, to share their joy and their pain to proclaim the Scripture texts in word and practice – to share the Bread of Life. If we really do so, then the appeal will be irresistible.

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61 The Identity of a Catholic University in Post-Christian European Societies: Four Models


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Catholic schooling is challenged by many forces in a world that is both secularising and pluralising. In such an environment, where tradition may be only one voice among many, individuals more and more seek to make their own meaning from the many life options that they encounter.

Join with Professor Pollefeyt as he explores: Religious belief styles as the building blocks for Catholic School Identity and; Recontextualisation and the dangers of Values Education in a Christian Perspective.
Framing the identity of Catholic schools: empirical methodology for quantitative research on the Catholic identity of an education institute

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In this article, a new empirical methodology is presented aimed at framing the religious aspects of the identity structure of Catholic educational organisations. Under the auspices of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Australia, we developed three theoretical models into handy research instruments that allow us to quantify an organisation's confessional identity in a statistically responsible way: the Post-critical Belief Scale, the Melbourne Scale, and the Victoria Scale. After interpreting the results, it is possible to give recommendations concerning the policy steps aimed at a further development and enhancement of Catholic institutional identity. The normative framework of this research is the ideal of the recontextualisation of Catholic identity, based on dialogue with plurality and a symbolic understanding of religion. These empirical instruments are being integrated into an automated Web platform that will allow Catholic institutes to do autonomous research on the religious aspects of their collective identity.

Keywords: Catholic identity in diversity; empirical research; Catholic leadership and policy making; secularisation; pluralisation; detraditionalisation; post-critical belief; recontextualisation

Introduction: empirical research on Catholic school identity

In recent years, the Centre for Academic Teacher Training of the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) has been developing a new empirical methodology to frame the identity structure of Catholic educational organisations. This methodology allows us to investigate in detail the kind(s) of Catholic institutional identity and the level(s) of Catholicity present in an organisation, today and towards the future. To this end, we developed three theoretical models into multivariate attitude scales that allow us to quantify a Catholic organisation’s identity in a statistically responsible way. After interpreting the results, it is possible to give justified recommendations concerning the policy steps aimed at the further development and enhancement of Catholic institutional identity. These empirical instruments are applicable on three levels: they can be used by individuals, by groups, or by organisations as a whole. The instruments will be integrated into a completely automated Web platform with which, in the long term, educational institutes will be able to do autonomous empirical research on their Catholic identity.

This empirical methodology has been developed in the framework of the Australian research project ‘Measuring and Enhancing Catholic School Identity’, carried out by Goedele Baeke (2006–2007) and Jan Bouwens (2007–2011), promoted by Didier Pollefeyt. This five-year project, carried out under the auspices of the Catholic Education Commission of the Australian federal state of Victoria, has been...
running at the Centre for Academic Teacher Training of the Leuven Faculty of Theology since August 2006. The project focuses on the religious identity of Catholic education institutes that face the challenge today of recontextualising their Catholic identity in a detraditionalising and pluralising culture, both in Australia and in Belgium.

How does such research work in practice? The researcher carefully defines a sample frame and selects a suitable group of participants. By filling out the questionnaires online, the respondents reveal various attitudes and opinions by evaluating a number of carefully chosen statements, measured on a seven-point Likert scale (from ‘I agree’ to ‘I disagree’). With the aid of statistical analyses we are able to disclose general tendencies and patterns of thinking applicable to the whole population. We describe these tendencies in terms of the typological models on which the scales are based and express approvals or disapprovals in the form of numerical scores. With these data we can perform even further analyses, such as the calculation of sub-group scores, associations between scale types and among scales, cross-tables with background variables, evolutions through time, comparisons to other populations, etc. As in all empirical research, a deselect random sample of sufficient volume is necessary to be able to draw meaningful conclusions about a population as a whole. Our tools measure the organisation’s identity at two levels. The factual level describes the way in which people perceive and interpret their organisation’s current identity (‘my school’). On the normative level, respondents indicate their personal ideal visions, the normative standpoint from which they perceive reality (‘my ideal school’). The comparison between both measurement levels yields valuable insights. We can determine to what extent one identifies with the current state of affairs, and in what direction one would like to see the organisation develop in the future. For each empirical instrument we generate a series of tables and graphs that render results in a complementary way: scale averages, histograms, box-and-whisker plots, percentage charts, linear correlations, etc. Next, the results are carefully described and interpreted. To this end, a good knowledge of the underlying typological models is indispensable. Finally, one can draw conclusions from the results on a policy level. The theoretical concepts, empirical methodology and statistical building blocks form a new language, as it were, with its own vocabulary, grammar and ways of speaking that allow us to talk about the identity of organisations in an innovative and revealing way.

In this article, we will briefly introduce the three attitude scales: the so-called Post-critical Belief Scale, the Melbourne Scale, and the Victoria Scale. Each time, the internal structure of the underlying typologies is presented schematically and briefly elucidated. Next, we describe in some detail the various ideal–typical school identity options used in our research (for a more extended description, see Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2009). We continue with a written interpretation of a basic example result taken from our Flemish educational context. We conclude with the presentation of the new website for empirical research on Catholic institutional identity.

A. The Post-critical Belief Scale
The Post-critical Belief Scale is an empirical instrument that was developed in the 1990s by the Leuven psychologist of religion Dirk Hutsebaut (Hutsebaut 1996). The questionnaire operationalises the typology by David M. Wulff (1991) on the four different ways that people deal with belief contents. These four cognitive belief styles or religious attitudes result from the combination of two dimensions. In Figure 1, the
A typology of cognitive belief styles

Orthodoxy or ‘literal belief’ stands for a literal affirmation of doctrinal belief contents. Theologically speaking, this religious attitude assumes a direct, immediate access to the transcendent reality. The literally believing human being stresses the possibility and the desirability to present God unmediated, to meet Him directly in words and rituals. He believes in a personal, immutable God and in fixed religious truth claims. Religious metaphors and truths of faith are objectified and interpreted literally. Biblical texts are mostly read literally and just accepted, and great value is attached to the Catholic tradition’s objective shape. In particular cases, literal faith goes together with a need for stability, certainty, security, and familiarity. The literally believing person is often uncertain and afraid of new, complicating problems and, therefore, desires absolute certainty on matters of faith. On each question of faith, one single, exact, certain, and unchangeable answer should be given. Authority, ecclesiastical hierarchy and obedience are of great importance. A subjective, critical faith interpretation is risky since interpretation results in uncertainty and doubt. One meritorious aspect of literal belief is the care for the ontological referent of the Christian faith: faith may not ‘become symbolised’ in such a way that belief in the objective existence of God would no longer be significant. However, in a pure form literal belief runs the risk of becoming a rigid, forced faith experience, often characterised by intolerance for alternative religious positions. At its worst, we can even speak of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism.
‘External critique’ or ‘literal disbelief’ stands for a literal rejection of the belief contents, in other words a direct critique on religion from an external point of view. Just like literal belief, this type starts from the immediate presence of the transcendent and from a literal interpretation of religious language, doctrines, and rites. But external critique draws the harsh conclusion that all this ‘religiousness’ must be nonsense, because the literal interpretation – reasonably speaking – is untenable. Bible texts are also read literally and subsequently rejected: many facts in the Bible are considered untenable and, moreover, they are mutually contradictory. External critique is an attitude of explicit disbelief that denies the existence of a transcendent reality. An external critic cannot imagine how it is possible to experience and envisage reality religiously. Literal disbelief is often framed in a modernistic, positivistic-scientific epistemology. External faith critics desire clarity and objective certainty, just as can be found in the positive sciences. They are afraid of the uncertainty in matters of faith and associate religion mostly with negative feelings. They emphasise freedom and personal autonomy, in opposition to the dependence associated with religious faith. They are stressed by the tension between human autonomy and the submission to God. Even though the use of critical reason certainly has its merits, external critique runs the risk of exaggerating unilaterally and of losing any symbolic awareness. To live this kind of lifestyle might be demanding and burdensome. In the end, they maintain what can be in some cases an empty and gloomy world view and this requires a fanaticism that frightens many people. At its worst, we can even speak of an intolerant anti-religious fundamentalism.

‘Relativism’ or ‘contingency awareness’ stands for a symbolic approach to religiosity, but without belief in a transcendent reality. Relativists are thoroughly aware of the symbolic and hermeneutical nature of religious faith. However, they hold no personal belief in God: relativists do not believe in the existence of a transcendent reality outside or beyond the human being, a reality to which we relate and in which religious faith grounds itself. The different religions are merely mutually interchangeable, human constructions. The one, true religion does not exist. Anyone’s way of believing is just one possibility among many others. Relativists emphasise the contingency and the relativity of the contents of religion. These are all different paths to the top(s) of the mountain without one path or one top being privileged. The relativist’s motto reads: ‘it’s all equal to me what someone believes; it all comes down to the same anyway’. All religions are ‘equally true’ and thus, actually, ‘equally untrue’; there exists no God and so finally religion comes down to nothing. Relativism is permeated by the historical contingency of all religiosity. What is said about God, doctrines, faith confessions, and morals is historically determined. Their content and form are only a reflection of the accidental historical context in which they came into being. The same is true for a believing person: what somebody believes depends on the accidental familial and cultural situation in which he or she grew up. Hence, religious contents cannot be objectified. They have no significance that reaches beyond the individual; they are merely subjective. Religion is not rejected resolutely by relativists (as it is by external critics) but it is put into perspective. There remains a positive interest in religion, sometimes even a sympathy or fascination for religion. Relativists cultivate a great openness and receptivity towards various philosophical and religious traditions, as long as no coercion is used. Relativism is often a (temporary?) position of non-commitment: one prefers not to commit oneself and one refrains from a positive choice for or against any religious
stance. One postpones the choice, keeps one’s options open. At its worst, relativism can lead to apathy, indifference, and a lack of solidarity.

Post-critical Belief stands for a symbolic affirmation of faith contents. It is characterised by faith in a transcendent God and in a religious interpretation of reality in which the transcendent is not considered literally present but is represented symbolically. God is the radical ‘other’ to whom we relate through a symbolical representation, through the interpretation of a sign that refers to the transcendent. People relate to the transcendent reality through mediations only: through stories, rituals, traditions, institutions, churches, ministries, communities, social organisations, and so forth. Faith is acquired through the active, creative, and interpretative handling of these mediations. According to Post-critical Belief, to believe is a continuous process of symbol-interpretation; the revelation of new layers of significance in the symbolic relationship with God. To believe is only possible and meaningful after interpretation. Here, critical reason plays an important role, so that we don’t believe in nonsense against our better judgement. Biblical texts and other religious writings can only be understood and believed in after interpretation. The Bible is written in a specific historical context and employs (sometimes obsolete) mythological, symbolic, and religious language in which the story of God with human beings is told. To read the Bible, then, requires interpretation, deciphering, translation: the post-critical believer tries to distinguish the mythological images from the religious message for us, alive in the here and now. The term ‘post-critical faith’ refers to a well-considered faith in God despite critical reasons not to believe. After a renewed interpretation, religious contents become meaningful again. Destructive criticism on the literal understanding of faith is surmounted by a renewed faith understanding that lasts despite the ongoing possibility of rational critique. Post-critical faith is a continuous ‘searching for’ religious significance and meaning without ever finding a final, absolute, established, and certain answer. Symbolic believers live with the existential tension between uncertainty and trust. They feel called to question constantly the religious contents and personal convictions from which they live. They are prepared for reinterpretation, are open to change, and are receptive of complex faith questions that feed the hermeneutical process. Since they are searching themselves, post-critical believers are sympathetic to the spiritual search of others even though these people live from different worldviews than themselves. They have an essential openness and receptivity vis-à-vis other religious perspectives and practices. Because of the hermeneutical nuances and the continuous ‘searching for’, Post-critical Belief is a complex and vulnerable faith position. We sometimes have difficulty with an existential confidence in faith in the first person, without a clear, established and immediately comprehensible meaning structure. Moreover, Post-critical Belief is under pressure both from literal belief (which denounces it as relativism and a watering down of literal faith understanding) as well as from external critique and relativism (which both suspect it of being disguised literal belief). At its worst, this belief style can slide into a ‘religious’ attitude that has a very general and unspecified content without a clear point of reference, in which any interpretation remains possible.

We openly acknowledge that the Post-critical Belief type is the faith style promoted at the Centre for Academic Teacher Training of our Faculty of Theology (Lombaerts and Pollefeyt 2004). Based on theological arguments and on empirical research results, we defend that a symbolic style of faith is the most fruitful for the development of the identity of Catholic schools in a pluralising society, today and tomorrow (Pollefeyt
To promote a Post-critical Belief attitude among youth is the intention of the current course curriculum of religious education in Flemish schools, as well.

**Approaches to measuring cognitive belief styles**

This typology was developed by Hutsebaut into an empirical instrument called the Post-critical Belief Scale (Duriez et al. 2000, 2007). It involves a multivariate questionnaire with 33 items on a seven-point scale which can be filled out by individuals or groups. For respondents under 18 years of age, we created a simpler ‘teenage version’. After statistical analysis, we get a view of how the four belief styles are supported or rejected, as well as insight into their mutual relations. Obviously, it is not the intention to label people. The four belief styles are not mutually exclusive; they do not need to exclude each other in practice. One and the same person can show features of several faith attitudes, depending on the subject, the point in time, or the situation. Equally, tendencies of several belief styles can be present at the same time in one population. When we want to research an institution’s Catholic identity, an insight into the faith attitudes of its members is very illuminating. It describes and explains not only the current religious identity of the organisation, but throws light on the potential to evolve in the future in a certain direction as well.

Figure 2 is an example graph of the scale averages of the Post-critical Belief Scale, obtained from a sample of 852 respondents. The vertical line is scaled according to the seven-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire. The white horizontal line at point 4 indicates the turning point from rejection (< 4) to approval (> 4). It is immediately clear that Post-critical Belief is the most prominent faith attitude here (5.45). This main tendency is followed by an equally clear positive score for relativism (4.92). A majority of the respondents deal with belief contents in a symbolic-hermeneutical

![Figure 2. Scale averages of the Post-critical Belief Scale.](image)

Note: The white horizontal line at no. 4 indicates the turning point from rejection (< 4) to approval (> 4).
way, but there is no unanimity about the transcendent-believing interpretation. A
debate seems to be taking place about the desirability of a personal faith in God amidst
a plurality of philosophical positions, whereby, in general, the symbolic-believing
attitude is most appreciated. Furthermore, among these respondents, there is a clear
unanimity to reject a literal dealing with religious faith (2.42). A literal-disbelieving
attitude is also rejected among all respondents (3.44). However, this rejection is not
that strong. In this sample, there is a minority tendency which positions itself
externally critically vis-à-vis faith, whereas a small majority takes a doubting or rather
rejecting position.

Suppose this sample comes from a Catholic school context. How can these
Post-critical Belief results be interpreted and what recommendations for this school,
starting from a normative preference for a symbolic-believing attitude? If one wants to
make the Catholic identity work, the widespread appreciation of Post-critical Belief
definitely sounds promising. It is also positive that a symbolic-hermeneutical attitude
towards religion is generally accepted, and that a multiplicity of philosophies of life is
appreciated. However, the high score for relativism or contingency awareness may
threaten the Catholic school identity because it strongly tones down its particularity.
It should be recommended that post-critical believers exemplify in word and deed that a
Catholic faith attitude by no means contradicts the recognition of religious and
philosophical multiplicity or an authentic appreciation of other-minded people
(Pollefeyt et al. 2004). From the idea that a dogmatic, literal-believing interaction
with the Catholic tradition would be unfruitful for the identity of Catholic schools in
our contemporary pluralising culture, we can rejoice in the rejection of literal belief.
However, an all too strong rejection of traditional faith contents is unfortunate as well,
because symbolic-believing people also entrust themselves to the reality and truth of
the triune God who reveals himself in the Christian tradition. Without an ontological
referent, the symbol remains empty and meaningless. It is the closed, totalising
attitude of literal belief that causes danger, not the traditional faith contents to which
one relates in a symbolic-hermeneutical way. The greatest threat for a school’s Catholic
identity lies in the minority tendency for external critique. We recommend further
research on this tendency (e.g. through stratification in respondent groups) and invite
adherers of external critique to at least take a symbolic-hermeneutical attitude vis-à-vis
religion. To this end, one should promote imagination and hermeneutical skills, for
instance through contact with literature or art, or by stimulating the dialog between
different religions and philosophies of life.

B. The Melbourne Scale

Up until the 1950s, the confessional identity of schools from the Catholic network
in Flanders was guaranteed. Since then, we have seen that our cultural context,
including the educational field, has increasingly secularised, detraditionalised and
more recently also pluralised. The Catholic identity of schools is under pressure
(Boeve 2002, 2006, 2007). The gap between culture and Catholic faith becomes larger
and larger. The challenge for Catholic schools consists, therefore, of bridging the gap
time and again and of communicating the Catholic faith to youngsters who grow up in
contemporary culture (Pollefeyt 2004). Against the background of this analysis, the
systematic theologian Lieven Boeve, the present dean of the Faculty of Theology, has
developed a typology of identity options which Catholic schools can adopt to give
shape to their identity in a changing cultural context (Boeve 2006).
A typology of theological identity options in a pluralising cultural context

The traditional confessional identity of the Catholic education system has not yet completely eroded. The confessional school type indicates to what extent a traditional-Catholic school identity is still continued today, despite the tension between culture and Catholicism. It indicates how far a Catholic school sticks to the traditional elements of its confessional nature, as a leftover of cultural Christianity. An ‘old style’ confessional school identity is simply continued out of habit, from the desire to remain recognisably ‘Catholic’, as an expression of a passive, awaiting attitude, or also just to not to have to deal with it.

As the gap between the Catholic faith and culture became wider from the 1960s onwards, Catholic schools started to use a new method to bridge the gap, called ‘values education in a Christian perspective’. This school type aims at a compromise between culture and Catholic tradition in an attempt to maintain a Catholic school identity that ‘keeps up with the times’ and with which anybody can reconcile. More specifically, one tries to link a generally shared awareness of ‘a good life’ to the Catholic faith as the fulfillment of this intuition. For instance, one might start with the experience of love between two human beings, give a Catholic explanation to it, and arrive at the love of God for all people. Ethics especially functions as mediator between culture and Catholic faith; Catholic inspiration is translated into an education in Christian values and norms that, so it is thought, are universally recognisable. In this way, one hopes to continue to address a pluralising student population on faith. It is expected that students can recognise themselves (again) in the Catholic faith by this Christian values education that grounds, deepens, and brings to completion these values and norms. Values education uses a secularisation paradigm: the school population consists of Catholic believers and ‘not-any-more’ Catholics, and the aim is to bring back into the Church as many ‘astray’ and ‘anonymous’ Catholics as possible. Despite the inductive didactical approach, this remains in fact a strategy with confessionalising intentions. This type of school stimulates civic responsibility and supports social welfare projects, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, volunteer work, and so forth. The school community consists of Catholics and people who positively value the Catholic faith. Since the Christian inspiration is presented as ‘doing good’, this school can also appeal to post-Christians, other-believers and other-minded people. This type of school is thus assured of a broad basis.

Figure 3. The Melbourne Scale.
Even though the belief in the universal communicability of the salvific message is typically Catholic and this strategy did function well for many years, it implies some risks (Boeve 2004). After all, it starts with the presupposition that all school members, even though they are not Catholic believers, remain addressable for the Catholic message always and in an evident way. For a long time this was indeed the case. But the more culture de-traditionalises and pluralises, and the more culture and Catholicism drift apart, the harder it gets to (re)connect the two. When the gap becomes too wide, this strategy will malfunction. If present-day experiences are difficult to explain and categorise from a Catholic perspective, then the correlation movement is in danger of running aground halfway. If in the long term this ineffectiveness is linked to predictability (students see the attempt at correlation coming a long way off), then this strategy can end up being counter-productive. Furthermore, values education runs the risk of a ‘horizontalisation’ of Catholic teachings: those elements that are easy to link to present-day experience are selected spontaneously. Catholic faith is then reduced to just an ethical code, which, moreover, is broadly shared. Since all those involved should be able to recognise themselves in the compromise, it could be feared that personal particularity is erased and that an active dialogue between different life visions is curtailed. If the movement runs aground halfway without bringing up the Catholic faith explicitly, would that be specific enough for Catholic schools? Can one still rightly speak of a ‘Catholic school’ when God and Jesus Christ are not being talked about? In practice, this approach usually results in a post-Christian school environment in which it is good to sojourn but where little explicitly Catholic faith remains present. De facto, values education in a Christian perspective is an intermediate phase towards a secularisation of school identity. Often, it is rather an unconscious sliding of Catholic identity than an intentional strategy. Often, values education itself is an exponent of de-traditionalising and pluralising tendencies.

An obvious reaction to the secularisation of educational institutes is to promote actively the confessional Catholic identity again. Boeve calls this ‘institutional reconfessionalisation’. This school type wishes to make its Catholic identity stronger and more general again by means of an active strategy of reconfessionalisation. As an attempt to bring the school culture closer to Catholicism again, the Catholic nature of the school is explicitly and publicly profiled. It is taken for granted that a substantial part of the school population is practicing Catholic or should be, and the aim is faith formation for all students in a Catholic environment. The ties with the Church and the local parish are tightened. An active participation with the ecclesiastical community life is encouraged. Priests are actively present at school. Classes in religious education, pastoral care, celebrations of the Eucharist, sacraments, school prayer, first communion and confirmation preparations, etc. are considered essential components of school life.

In itself, a confessional Catholic school identity is of course a legitimate option in the midst of plurality: one aims to be one’s authentic self amid the multiplicity. It is certainly not the case that a reconfessionalising identity strategy automatically and necessarily would be promoted out of a closed, narrow-minded mentality (as would be the case in a ‘monologue school’, see later). Moreover, it is a service to those parents who wish an undivided Catholic education for their children. Yet, it is not unlikely that this school type adopts a critical-rejective stance against the secularised and pluralist culture. Then, the Catholic faith and the Catholic lifestyle are defended and promoted as a counter-story. The fact that students are possibly alienated from
the outside, non-Catholic world, is considered an unavoidable consequence rather than an objection. Despite the possible justifications, one can wonder if in present-day society there is sufficient support for this identity option. Maybe there is still room in Flanders for a handful of reconfessionalising schools?

The opposite reaction to the growing gap between culture and Christianity is to let go of the Catholic school identity. Boeve calls this ‘institutional secularisation’. This school type parallels the cultural context: just as the Catholic faith gradually disappears in culture, this happens at school as well. The Catholic nature and the preferential option for Catholicism erode away slowly but surely until nothing is left in daily school life. Catholic signs and symbols disappear, rituals no longer take place, and references to religion vanish from everyday discourse. Over the course of time, the school’s original Catholic background and inspiration hardly play any role anymore. This gradual erosion is often more an implicit process than a conscious and guided option. The presence of Christian values education, which for a long time has often been employed as a compromise model, can disguise this hidden secularisation process for quite some time. However, when the tension between Christianity and culture becomes insurmountable in the end, the decision is made to adopt the secularisation process on an organisational and institutional level. At a certain moment, voices are raised to call the school no longer ‘a Catholic school’ officially, and to strike off the ‘C’ from the school’s name. Also, people desire to replace mandatory, Catholic religious education with a broad, comparative, philosophical formation, with Catholic religion as an optional course. The school population of such a secularised school is characterised by philosophical and religious diversity without a preferential option for the Catholic faith. Everyone has the right to be himself or herself and is called to respect and show tolerance towards others (see also the ‘colourful school’ and the ‘colourless school’ later).

The fifth and last identity type is called ‘recontextualisation’ of Catholic school identity, also known as ‘identity construction in a pluralist perspective’. This school type is deliberately in search of a renewed Catholic profile in and through conversation with plurality. It tries to understand the Catholic faith re-interpreted in a contemporary cultural context. On the one hand plurality is recognised and valued as such; on the other hand the focus on the Catholic identity is maintained. After all, the evangelical message remains relevant for people of today and tomorrow. But the changing cultural context should be integrated into ‘being Catholic’ (recontextualisation) so that it remains recognisable, credible, and meaningful for contemporary people (tradition development). The question, then, is how to live a Catholic life and how to build a Catholic school in the middle of contemporary culture. It is important to understand that recontextualisation of Catholic school identity starts from a pluralisation paradigm. De facto, Catholicism is one option among a multiplicity of philosophical and religious positions. Catholics believe that God, in His own way, is near to all people in their search for value and meaning. This plurality is not only formally recognised, but also appreciated as a positive challenge and a chance to enrich the own Catholic identity. Openness to and dialogue with (also non-Catholic) otherness is encouraged without aiming at a greatest common divisor. Multiplicity is played out; multi-vocality needs to resound. Recontextualisation is not substantiated by an attitude of consensus (as in values education) but is propelled by dissimilarity. Young people are taught to relate to other religions and philosophies of life from a personal (whether or not Catholic) profile. In dialogue with otherness one learns to know oneself, and how to take up responsibility for personal choices. Show your individuality in tension with
dissimilarities – precisely out of respect for the other. In doing so, the Catholic faith is treated as the preferential perspective. The conversation between religious and philosophical visions is reflected upon from a preferential option for Catholicism. From its own power and depth, the voice of Catholicism resonates amid the multiplicity of voices. So it is not the intention that all students become Catholic believers per se, but that they let themselves be challenged and enriched by the offer of the Catholic narrative. A recontextualising school environment challenges people to give shape to their personal identity in conversation with others, against the background of a dialogue and sometimes also a confrontation with the Catholic tradition (see later, the ‘dialogue school’). The basis for this is shaped by at least a significant minority of Catholics who are recognisable as such and who want to enter into dialogue explicitly. Next to them there is a diverse school population that opens up to what Catholicism has to offer.

**Approaches to measuring theological identity options**

This typology has been developed into an empirical instrument called the Melbourne Scale (Figure 3). We developed a multivariate questionnaire with a factual and a normative measurement level (except for the confessional school, which is only measured at a factual level). For respondents under 18, we created a shorter and simpler ‘teenage version’. The theoretical identity options of the Melbourne Scale were empirically tested both in Flanders and in Australia, and retrieved in practice as latent thinking patterns. The result is an empirical instrument that provides us with a nuanced in-depth image of the various tendencies and their mutual relations both now and in the future regarding the complex dynamics of the Catholic institutional identity.

Figure 4 is an example graph of the scale averages of the Melbourne Scale on the factual (F) and the normative (N) levels. We notice that the traditional confessionality of this school is still recognised, but that it is obviously under pressure (F, 3.82). In general, the respondents recognise that the Catholic confessionality is disappearing. We see this trend in the secularisation scores as well. Even though the school is experienced as not being secularised at this time (F, 2.78), the resistance against secularisation is crumbling (N, 3.12). The scores on the factual level for the three Catholic school types are all positive. One can see a school that practices Christian values education (F, 5.36) and that parallel to that tries to recontextualise its Catholic identity (F, 5.25). Next to that, the current practice shows a small tendency to reconfessionalisation (F, 4.37). On the normative level, the implosion of reconfessionalisation is striking (N, 3.02); the intention to make the school more traditionally Catholic again cannot count on any sympathy. On the other hand, the respondents do agree with values education, but its growth has nearly halted and as such it seems to have reached its high point (N, 5.43). The most plausible perspective for the future appears to be a further recontextualisation of the school (N, 5.66); the score rises significantly compared with the factual level and takes the lead over from values education.

Starting from a preference for identity formation in a pluralist perspective, how should these results be interpreted and which recommendations should be made to an organisation with these empirical results? The high score for the recontextualising school type, which moreover is the main tendency at the normative level, is encouraging in this perspective. Together with the high score for values education,
this indicates a desire for a Catholic school identity that is open to contemporary experiences. Furthermore, a certain appreciation for the pluralist culture is acceptable, even its apparently non-Catholic aspects. But this school has to take care that resistance against secularisation does not crumble too much among certain groups (particularly among students, as differentiations show). Moreover, it is worthwhile warning against the continuation of values education when the confessional structures are in the process of disappearing. Latent confessionality is the ’gas tank’, as it were, of values education. When the tank runs empty, the correlation strategy might sputter and values education can just undermine the Catholic identity. Attempts to make this school more traditionally Catholic do not have a future perspective either. In view of the manifest rejection of reconfessionalisation on the normative level, pushing through this identity option could even harm the school’s Catholic identity. Not only is it useless to impose top-down an identity for which there exists no support among school members, it would also increase the fear for a curtailing Catholic preferential perspective. Tendencies towards external critique and relativism would turn against all sorts of Catholic identity, even against the more open types like values education and recontextualisation. We summarise that the people of this school are generally attached to their institution’s Catholic identity, but on the condition that the latter takes an open and communicative stand towards contemporary cultural developments. One distances oneself from the ‘old style’ Catholic identity, but still wields a preferential option for the Catholic narrative. It should be hoped that this school leaves behind the hidden reconfessionalising agenda of values education, recognises and values plurality even more, and, being a Catholic school, openly enters into dialogue with plurality in search of a recognisable Catholic identity amidst a religious and philosophical multiplicity as a service to the personal development of all.
C. The Victoria Scale

The Victoria Scale (Figure 5) is an empirical instrument inspired by a typology of the Dutch researchers Wim ter Horst (1995) and Chris Hermans (Hermans and Van Vuygt 1997) on the pedagogical basic options of Catholic schools in a pluralising cultural context. Just like the Post-critical Belief Scale, the Victoria Scale is constructed of two dimensions. The vertical line refers to an organisation’s Christian identity: the measure in which its members live out of a generally shared, Catholic inspiration. The horizontal line concerns the solidarity with people from sub-cultures other than the Catholic one: the measure of openness to and receptivity of other life visions and life attitudes. Every confessional organisation faces the task of making pedagogical and organisational choices concerning its Catholic identity, in combination with its solidarity with otherness. Putting together these two dimensions results in the so-called ‘identity square’. On the angles we find four ideal-typical strategies that schools can adopt to give shape to their pedagogical responsibility vis-a-vis their faith education in a multicultural society.

A typology of pedagogical identity options in a pluralising cultural context

The ‘monologue school’ is typified by a combination of maximal Christian identity with minimal solidarity. It concerns a traditional Catholic school of, aimed at, and run by Catholics. This school puts a strong emphasis on its Catholic identity. It promotes a traditionalist, non-emancipatory form of Catholicism in which the Catholic faith is interpreted as a ‘closed story’ with a resolute truth claim. The Catholic confession and praxis of the majority of the school members is taken for granted and, if necessary, is realised through an active recruitment policy. This school stresses safety within its own Catholic circle. In fact, its education is a service to its own sub-cultural group. However, this school deliberately does not choose receptivity of other religions and philosophies of life. There is little solidarity with the non-Catholic external world, which is considered a threat to the Catholic specificity. This school offers its members a sense of certainty, security, and safety. However, this risks fostering a tendency toward isolation and unworldliness. This school type can therefore be described as a ‘shelter’ or walled ‘Catholic ghetto’.

The ‘colourless school’ is typified by a combination of a minimal Christian identity with minimal solidarity. It concerns a secularised and pluralist school environment where contacts among individuals are non-committal. The attention for
a specific Catholic ethos has been gradually watered down in this type of school to the extent even that it has taken up a secularistic standpoint: philosophy of life and religion have no place in the public sphere. The school takes a ‘neutral’ standpoint, in the sense that philosophies of life cannot be imposed or steered from above. The school limits its task to the provision of sound education, but considers religious formation not as its responsibility. The school shows great openness and tolerance for all kinds of philosophies of life and religions, but this openness is not framed in a common religious project. It is not up to the collective to care for the individual’s mental welfare. Life-reflection and giving meaning is a personal matter, for which every individual is personally responsible in freedom. Connected to individualistic and liberalistic tendencies in society, the focus lies on the individual rather than on the school community. The school is composed of individuals and small groups of people with little mutual solidarity or community spirit. The colourless school limits itself to a minimalistic ethics based on the no-damage principle: the focus lies on personal freedom on the condition that one does not hinder others’ freedom. Even though many encounters and exchanges take place, contacts with others remain superficial and free from obligation or mutual commitment. People live quasi-non-committal next to each other; the prevalent mentality is one of *laisser faire, laisser passer*. Although this school is very accessible, pluralistic and open, there is little authentic engagement or care for others and little pedagogical security. The risk is that formal tolerance and respect for personal freedom slide down into a culture of non-commitment and indifference.

The ‘colourful school’ is typified by a combination of minimal Christian identity with maximal solidarity. It concerns a secularised and pluralist school environment where one takes a very social, committed, and solidary position. This school type is characterised by a rich and visible diversity and this internal plurality is taken into account seriously. The school spends a lot of effort on its pedagogical responsibility and the care for the spiritual well-being of others. Authentic attention and interest is shown for others’ differences. Encounters and exchanges testify to depth and mutual solidarity. There is sincere involvement and care for one another’s well-being. ‘One for all, all for one’ is the motto. It is a community of doers and caregivers who put themselves in service for people in need. The school actively engages in social projects and volunteer work. However, few school members are still concerned about the school’s Catholic character. Little or no room is available for the proclamation of the Gospel and for pastoral education at school. Catholicism as a preferential option above other views is rejected. After all, the colourful school thinks that every (in)doctrinal direction should be avoided as much as possible. It puts itself in a neutral-pluralist position: the dialogue between different views should be encouraged but without any preference for one particular perspective. The school board devotes itself to giving the many religious and philosophical views of its members every chance to flourish, but it will not take any preferential option itself. For it is feared that a preferential option for the Catholic faith (or any other view) would undermine the solidarity with other-minded people and that it would form a hindrance for living together in plurality. A preferential option can lead to alienation, exclusion, and even aversion. To value the other as other implies to respect for others’ personal freedom. To impose one or other ‘truth’ collectively would lead to the suppression of the individual’s ‘personal truth’. Of course, Catholic believers can be present at this school. They enjoy the same openness, freedom of speech, chances to grow, and appreciation that is offered to other-minded people. But despite the edifying ethos of
involvement and solidarity, in which Catholics can find themselves as well, the colourful school cannot be called a Catholic school.

The ‘dialogue school’, finally, is typified by a combination of maximal Christian identity with maximal solidarity. It concerns a Catholic school in the middle of cultural and religious plurality in which both Catholics and other-believers can develop themselves maximally (Moyaert and Pollefeyt 2004). A dialogue school explicitly chooses to emphasise its Catholic inspiration and individuality through and thanks to a hermeneutical-communicative dialogue with the multicultural society. The multiplicity of voices, views, and perspectives, is recognised as a positive contribution to an open Catholic school environment. Receptivity and openness to what is different is a chance to re-profile the Catholic faith amidst contemporary plurality (recontextualisation). A preferential option for the Catholic message sets the tone for this dialogue. The conversation among philosophical views is reflected from a preferential option for Catholicism. In the midst of plurality, one is looking to be a Catholic; from being a Catholic, one lives in plurality. It is this open relation to the other/Other that typifies a typical Catholic life attitude (Pollefeyt 2007, 2008). Just like for Catholic believers, the intense conversation enriches the other-minded people at school too. Not only by what the Catholic faith has to offer to them, even though they do not believe themselves. But also because, through dialogue, they get to know themselves better, become more distinctly aware of their own philosophical choices, learning to take responsibility for them, and so deepen their identity (identity formation in a pluralist perspective). The pluralisation process challenges the Catholic school to be at the service of the personal formation of all youngsters, regardless of their cultural or religious background. The dialogue school takes its responsibility for all, also on the level of personal development. Starting from its Catholic individuality and through a dialogue with different life views, it wants to be a guide for the philosophical and religious growth of all students. As such, Catholic school identity and solidarity with otherness are not only perfectly combinable, but they both come to full flourishing when combined.

Approaches to measuring pedagogical identity options

This typology was developed into an empirical instrument called the Victoria Scale. We developed a multivariate questionnaire with a factual and a normative measurement level. Just like with the Melbourne Scale, we created a shorter and more simple ‘teenage version’ for respondents under 18 years of age. After empirical research, the theoretical identity options were retrieved in practice as latent thinking patterns. Because of its focus on the pedagogical dealing with multi-culturality and multi-religiosity, the Victoria Scale is a meaningful addition to the Melbourne Scale. Moreover, the Victoria Scale splits up the ‘institutional secularisation’ type into two distinguished types that handle philosophical and religious multiplicity differently: the colourless and the colourful school.

Figure 6 is an example graph of the scale averages of the Victoria Scale on the factual (F) and the normative (N) levels. It is immediately obvious that the respondents consider this school a dialogue school (F, 5.33) and that a desire can be felt to strengthen this pedagogy in the future (N, 5.73). Next to this main current, there is a second, smaller tendency that is also backed by a majority of the respondents: the colourful school. Already in the facts, the respondents recognise this solidary, but non-Catholic approach (F, 4.35) and its adherents still increase when one
thinks of an ideal school environment (N, 4.68). What this school is definitely not and never (again) will be is a monologue school. It is striking how great the distance is between the measure of absence one perceives on average (F, 3.22) and the resistance one feels for this type (N, 2.42). Also the colourless school type is not applicable to this school environment (F, 3.23), even though the resistance against this individualistic school environment slightly decreases among all respondents (N, 3.41).

The empirical research website

Our empirical methodology and measuring instruments are integrated in a comprehensive, completely automated online research platform with which individuals, groups, and schools can carry out empirical research on their Catholic identity single-handedly (Figure 7). You can reach this website in development by surfing to http://www.schoolidentity.net/.

Research group managers will be able to register a research group, for instance a primary or secondary school, a group of schools, a group of students, a university faculty, a teacher education programme, and even a Catholic youth movement, a care institution or a social justice organization. One is free to choose which empirical instruments to use so that customised research can be undertaken. Next, the respondents are invited to fill out the questionnaires online. Immediately after filling out the questionnaires, each respondent can see his/her personal results in the form of automatically generated tables and graphs. After the inquiry, the system runs a statistical analysis and the research group manager can view the entire group’s results, comment on the results online, and export them in the form of a research report. Detailed instruction pages support the practical organisation of the research, and interactive interpretation manuals help to interpret and assess the results.
As well as the execution of quantitative empirical research based on questionnaires, the research website will also offer facilities to perform additional qualitative research in the form of interviews and document analyses. Research group managers can select interview questions, enter interview transcriptions, and analyse these online. Also, they can build a document portfolio in which they can collect and analyse various documents regarding the religious identity of their organisation. All these research results are then integrated into a comprehensive identity profile. Finally, it is possible to generate a full research report and download it as a MS Word document. Extensive instruction pages lead the lay researcher through the research process step by step.

Next to this empirical section, the Web platform also contains online, interactive practical-theological instruments that can be applied to work purposefully on further development and enhancement of the organisation’s Catholic identity. These educative instruments are usable in many contexts and situations, use a variety of work forms, and are aimed at different target groups: staff members; people responsible for education; identity counsellors; religious education teachers; students in teacher training programmes; regular students; and any interested individual. The instruments contain didactical materials in which various impulses are used such as texts, narratives, pictures, drawings, cartoons, artworks, short movies, film excerpts, and so on. On the basis of an interactive selection diagram, instruments can be selected in view of specific objectives. The website will guide the entire process step by step: from empirical research to the practical-theological development of the Catholic identity of an institute.
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References


The Lustre of Life

Hermeneutic-communicative concept of religious education

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In this contribution I intend to focus on the Christian image of man that provides the basis of the hermeneutic-communicative model of Roman Catholic education. Roman Catholic religion as a subject is confessional by nature and in orientation because the religious educator’s point of departure is not from a type of neutral anthropology (one that does not exist anyway), but is clearly coloured by a very specific image of man that comes from the Jewish and Christian tradition. In the Genesis story we read that man is the image of God. This is a strange statement, because in the Hebrew bible it is clearly stated that it is forbidden to make images of God. How can God create man in His image and likeness, while at the same time we are forbidden to identify and worship images of God? This paradoxical question can only be answered by accepting that there is a reality hidden in man that also cannot be depicted or defined or placed in human or scientific categories such as we have in biology, psychology or sociology. Put simply, there is more to discern in man than is visible. The ‘lustre’ of human beings is always more than their genes, the colour of their skin, their gender, character, origins, occupation, social standing, nation, people or religion. A human being by definition escapes being characterised by any of these aspects (traditionally people spoke of human beings as being bearers of a ‘soul’). This is something we all experience when we have and raise children: they always are and will always turn out different from what we try to plan and bring about through our own desires and care. It is something they always manage to escape to some extent (though usually not completely). This, in a positive sense, means that a human being is a ‘life-filled’ ‘image of God’, is receptive and has the ability to be creative in the development of his or her own life. It means that not everything about being human is or can be predetermined. This is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian inspired anthropology that underlies the hermeneutic-communicative model of religious education.

In this paper we identify the nature of man as a ‘fragile hermeneutical space’. The essence of a human being consists of a radical openness to reality, an essential indeterminateness, an ability to transcend his or her own reality. Unlike with animals that do contain traces of the divine creator, God is not expressed in the face of a person through the physical features but rather through what is revealed in those features as facial expression, as radical ungraspability and indeterminacy. This means that people have an inbuilt receptiveness to meaning (the "lustre" of life): we discover and we ascribe meaning and we are also capable of recognizing and acknowledging others as people in search of meaning, longing for meaning and absorbers of
meaning. One of the tasks of religious education is to allow children and young people to discover this hermeneutical space within themselves and others: to discover the highs and lows of life, beauty and comfort, pain and suffering, mystery and the incomprehensible, the forgiving nature and hard edge of reality, but also: our frail, vulnerable and excluded fellow human beings, the fragility of nature. The intention of Catholic religion as a subject is to explore this hermeneutical space and open it up even more in children and young people so that they can read reality with philosophical spectacles and discover that nothing is normal, obvious or simple. This anthropology assumes that every human being, without exception, religious or non-religious, Christian or otherwise, is characterized by this openness and that, by way of this openness, this indeterminacy, the given of existence, everyone has to sort out his or her own thinking, and that everyone can create, discover and exchange sense, nonsense, meaning and orientation within this openness. It is through this shared openness that all people are also structurally linked as relational beings. To sum up: one of the principal objectives of Catholic religion as a subject is to awaken ideological reflection in all the students by allowing them to discover this hermeneutical space, no matter what they do with it in their further lives.

We call this space a fragile hermeneutical space because this openness to reality makes us particularly vulnerable. These days there are many players in the market for meaning, ideology and politics that give interpretation and shape to this space. There is no longer an overarching philosophical system that offers a completely conclusive and satisfying answer to all the questions and possibilities, temptations and threats that crop up within the hermeneutical space. Reality – also our own inner reality - is radically marked by a form of polyphony, by a multiplicity of voices, by plurality. The hermeneutical space is fragile because it is exposed, even to fundamentalism and fanaticism. Fundamentalism presents a false promise of stability and security, often at the expense of others and oneself. Likewise relativism and nihilism are constantly lurking, making everything the same, containing nothing that is absolute. Phenomena such as a complete absence of standards and norms and senseless violence can be extreme manifestations of this. They both also threaten to destroy one’s own space and that of others. Fundamentally the hermeneutical space is always fragile because cutting across all that is understood and ‘words of life’, life continues to present itself in challenging and innovative ways in people’s experiences of joy and pain. This can sometimes be in the form of real ground-breaking experiences that force (young) people to listen differently to words of life. But even in less extreme cases, the hermeneutical space of human beings is fragile and manipulable. Since all the great stories are ‘cases’, there is the pitfall that the liberal market economy that is a strong operating force makes itself at home in human desire and quietly manifests itself as the only valid important story for man and society: the story of human existence is reduced to an endless chain of production and consumption. People respond to the meanings created by the economy which often take over and fill the hermeneutical space with a desire for economic goods and the social status attached to these. Young people often do not realize how this whole process is being driven by the blind law of profit maximization and lose sight of how this process creates victims, both fellow human beings and the ecological system. The rapid
succession of economic crises and the recent flare-ups of violence in major cities also increasingly expose this ideology as a false bringer of good fortune.

This analysis gives rise to a second important objective for Catholic religion as a subject, namely, to make students aware of the plurality of views of life, philosophies, ideologies and religions that characterize today’s reality - both for the individual and the community - and to try to influence our interpretation of reality. An analysis like this can, on the one hand, open many horizons within our own hermeneutical space, but, on the other hand, it can also be deconstructive, particularly in the degree in which the ideologies manipulate and close one’s own hermeneutical space or that of others and even destroy it. In this sense, religion as a subject also keeps performing a critical role in the classroom, church and society. It not only confirms the prevailing plurality, but also calls it into question. In this sense, religion as a subject can never be relativistic and the religious educator never neutral. Not everything is the same. Whoever or whatever threatens one’s hermeneutical space or that of others and of creation, will be questioned by the teacher of religion in the name of the image of God in every human being. This also means that there is no room for religious indoctrination in the subject of religion, nor for racism or other violations of human rights. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges of the subject is the historical legacy of the religions themselves and the fact that their language, their structure and their history are often more likely to close than open up the hermeneutical space, to surround it with scepticism rather than open it up; to obscure than liberate. In this "fragile" area, in particular, it is a challenge to give the "lustre" of experiencing and living that occurs in the lives of young people themselves a diffident place in the hermeneutic-communicative approach.

Ultimately the subject of religion needs to create a context in which each student is invited to look at life in a personal way. We can call this the third important objective of Roman Catholic religion as a subject. The basic premise is that the hermeneutical space of each person is already filled or occupied in a particular way. No one is neutral. Everyone has already been touched by life. We are all different. We have all already made choices. We are not completely autonomous creatures. Many choices have already been made for us, even before we were born. This is also true of religious elements which we have integrated or rejected in a certain way. We are always already thrown into life and affected by reality, both in a positive and a negative way. Everyone carries truth within, but nobody can lay claim to having the full truth. No one is without evil. Perhaps the latter is also the true meaning of the theological concept of original sin. Nobody has the perfect answer to every question. No one can escape responsibility for others or take perfect responsibility. No one is totally free or starts with a clean slate. A hermeneutical approach aims to invite students to find their own philosophical assumptions
and feelings, to make them aware of complementary and alternative possibilities and to invite them to allow the internal and external diversity to develop into a polyphonic identity that is as integrated as possible, though the development never stops. The aim of the subject these days is not for all the students to become or turn into Christians or Catholics. However it is true that the intention is that the students should be invited to come to philosophical self-enlightenment and maturity in complete freedom and to teach them to deal with ideological differences and diversity in themselves and in society.

The search for one's own identity or profoundest individuality involves much more than and even something fundamentally different from a rational or purely autonomous choice. After all, we cannot choose our identity. Our identity has been largely preformed and involves visible but also invisible loyalties concerning which we actually did not have a choice and which in fact leave us no choice, but which do to a significant extent create and shape and provide the basis of our identity. Our identity has been largely coloured for us by the fears and dreams of our parents, the structure and type of life of the family we come from and the place that we gained in it, the schools we visited, the friends we have or have not made, the books that we did or did not read, the poetry and the music we have heard, the bad things and suffering that happened to us, the people we met by chance, the cultural environment, traditions, the spirit of the age, and so on. We can to some extent develop an awareness of our situation and also of what is subjective, irrational or suprarational in it and we can actively take on, adjust, enrich, intensify or even rationalize or reject our situation in life.

In the subject of religion this process of becoming aware always takes place in a process of communication. Students bring different ideological perspectives, which they have often assumed from a kind of initially naive position, into what happens in the classroom. Years ago that would in many cases have been a Catholic perspective, but these days, it is no longer a Catholic or Christian perspective. The subject of religion will recognize, give explicit attention to and value these ideological and religious differences. It is precisely in the confrontation with differences that a more conscious philosophical choice, a "second naive position", can be developed. This happens especially when the teacher is confronted in the lesson with hermeneutical junction points or interpretation conflicts concerning central life issues among the students. It is the teacher's responsibility to moderate the philosophical discussion around this and to offer insights from his own Christianity. This is a delicate task, for students also sometimes feel deeply connected, attached and loyal to certain opinions, values, symbols, traditions, etc. Communication on hermeneutical junction points is different from an intellectual exercise or choosing a standpoint from a supermarket of beliefs. It is a matter of
discovering our own intertwinedness with reality and to allow oneself to be touched by new and different viewpoints: intellectual, but often also social, aesthetic and spiritual viewpoints. An 'affinity' with the interior of life as it can be observed in our own lives and the lives of others. In this sense, the subject of religion also has an important social role and responsibility. It makes students more competent and makes them sensitive to the ideological, inter-life philosophical and interreligious dialogue where everyone can be or can find him or herself. It is important that everyone is allowed to speak from his or her own ideological position and is not forced into a neutral or indifferent position before he or she is allowed to say something. People only grow in philosophical competence when they have also been invited, challenged and valued to speak from their own perspective. People do not learn how to be philosophically engaged if they are compelled to put their own view between brackets or have not even explored it. In a positive sense, this means that the subject of Roman Catholic religion makes room for all philosophies and religions as long as they continue to acknowledge the openness and therefore the fundamental freedom of others.

What is it that makes the topic of this subject Roman Catholic religion rather than philosophy of life or search for meaning? The point of departure of the hermeneutic-communicative model itself is already not neutral, but has been coloured ideologically by the Jewish and Christian traditions. The principle that man is marked by the ability to transcend himself and to make create and perceive meaning is already coloured confessionally. One might also assume that the search for meaning itself is meaningless and that man is ultimately only a sophisticated chimpanzee that can be completely explained by the theory of evolution and infrahuman processes from biology, psychology and sociology. In that case truth, for example, becomes a pragmatic notion, goodness a regulating principle, beauty a subjective feeling. In addition, those with no faith or a different faith also have very authentic experiences of truth, goodness and beauty and they too can experience the self-transcending wealth of the hermeneutical space.

The hermeneutic-communicative model for the subject of Roman Catholic religion assumes that the hermeneutical space of the human being is not just open to the 'immanent transcendence', to experiences of truth, goodness and beauty, but is also characterized by a much more radical openness, particularly, an openness to the 'transcendent transcendence'. Ultimately it is this connection to the Transcendent that colours and directs everything. The organizers and very often the young people expect the Roman Catholic religion teacher to live steeped in this Transcendence and that this helps the teacher to clarify experience and to speak in witness. At the same time it is important to underline that this transcendence in the Christian tradition is also marked by immanence through the confession of a God who in history was incarnated as Jesus of Nazareth, who is Christ (see below).
In light of this analysis the relationship with God could be described as a break-through into the hermeneutical space of something radically different that connects, fills, anchors and unifies what I can not connect, fill, anchor and unify through my own efforts, but what I still have a deep longing for. For a believer to experience and meet God is like bathing in a light that comes from elsewhere, that creates unity and tenderness, makes one feel gratitude, brings peace, promises a future, but also instils a sense of responsibility and allows the world to be seen through different eyes. It is the responsibility of the subject of religion to show and create understanding of how people of faith can experience the hermeneutical space in this way and allow it to come into full bloom in words, stories, prayers and rituals, and at least ensure that this possibility is not blocked beforehand, even though it is often the case that religion and religious language can themselves be obstacles to such a transcendent experience of the hermeneutical space. I agree with Guido Van Heeswijck’s analysis that nowadays there is a taboo on this very Transcendence. However, I do not think an actively pluralistic subject can be a sort of philosophical course prerequisite to open students to the Transcendent because openness to the personal relationship with God cannot be derived from philosophy or comparative religion. Transcendence is always self-expression of a very specific confessional faith. The confession of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Jesus Christ is the confession of faith that the religion teacher will need to present for discussion in the classroom.

Regarding this point I would also like to formulate a reflection in connection with the concept of ‘mystagogical-communicative’ religious education that is sometimes put forward as an alternative to the ‘hermeneutic-communicative’ model. ‘Mystagogical’ religious education is spontaneously understood to mean the furthering of the handling of the mystery of (human) existence, and in doing so, the mystery of God. As such this term is not used correctly from a historical point of view. After all, in the Old Church "Mystagogy" was the most advanced form of catechesis for the most highly initiated. In the early church Mystagogy was the catechesis that was given to those who were recently baptized. The term also suggests that some sort of continuity exists between immersing oneself in the mystery of reality (hence perhaps 'mystagogy') and finding the God of the Christian tradition. God does not just reveal Himself in the depth and mystery of one’s own hermeneutical space, but comes to meet us from elsewhere. In order to be able to experience and meet God one must also first be initiated in a very specific set of stories, symbols, rituals, traditions, etc. that provide the means for the meeting with God in the hermeneutical space. ‘Philosophical education’ and ‘religious education’ can therefore not be regarded as the same, and one does not automatically give rise to the other. Justified criticism that religious education is often no longer religious education is,
in my view, due precisely to evident efforts to regard ‘religion’ and ‘philosophy of life’ as the same thing. The assumption here is that if life is reflected on deeply enough, God will be found. However, there is no continuous, straight or uninterrupted line between hermeneutical space and Christian faith and between a philosophy of life and religion, between mystery and mystagogy. It is therefore important that we are initiated first before we can become more profoundly Christian, just as in the Christian tradition of old when, after the evangelization, initiation catechesis was given first of all and only much later, after receiving the sacraments, mystagogical catechesis were offered. Such a mystagogical approach to religious education, as was well understood in history, is indeed rather ambitious for religious education these days, and there is a risk that use of this term could once again lead to confusion between religious education (compulsory for all) and catechesis (voluntary, for those who have already turned to Christ).

In other words, the experience of God is a very special way of dealing with the hermeneutical space. This transcendent God is not directly available just like that through the experience. He is therefore a very ‘fragile God’ Himself. He comes to us through a series of mediations provided to us through stories, rituals, tradition, community, etc. In Christianity, God cannot be encountered without mediation. If these means are not provided, the hermeneutical space cannot become transparent and be a medium for meeting God. This implies that at a time when Christianity, as a cultural and existential reality, has become less and less a part of the fixed horizon of Western culture, the contents of the Christian tradition must be made available more and more explicitly in religious education but in such a way that the presentation can also provide the means in this day and age, particularly if the means are actually experienced and expressed through testimony to the word.

Christians are convinced that it is precisely the revelation of God in Christ that offers a unique, irreplaceable, non-interchangeable, authentic and life-giving experience of the hermeneutical space in all dimensions of existence, not only for the individual but also for society. Christ is therefore the being whose existence has become the most transparent before God because He comes from God, is Himself the Son of God. This forms the core of the subject of Roman Catholic religion. Christianity revolves around Christ and His fragile love that shows the way right to the cross, and Roman Catholic religion as a subjects is only ‘Roman Catholic’ if and in so far as the Catholic tradition is offered and presented as a living tradition and celebrating community that facilitates the relationship with God within the hermeneutical space in a very particular way and therefore makes it possible.

That brings me to the fourth major objective of Roman Catholic religion as a subject, which is to offer the wealth of the Christian tradition as a particular mediation structure of the relationship
with God in the hermeneutical space. Implicitly, this takes place throughout all the lessons, of course, since a religious educator does not look at man and reality from a neutral or non-confessional attitude. But perhaps the time has come to push this objective more explicitly to the fore, particularly in the professional training of expert teachers of religion. Religious educators must have something to say about the Christian tradition and the way they have integrated it in their own lives and the community. For students who are believers, this approach can have a mystagogical meaning in the true sense of the word, namely a further initiation into and deepening of religious faith. For some students this can be a first or renewed acquaintance with the Christian tradition.

The hermeneutic-communicative model also accepts and appreciates that in the case of some students the hermeneutical space is structured or oriented from a different philosophical or religious tradition, such as Islam or secular humanism. From these traditions, likewise, students can also speak and live authentically, even though they do not explicitly experience the God experienced by Christians as a guiding, life-giving and redemptive God. The Catholic anthropology should be able to accept and confirm that original sin has not completely destroyed or obscured the hermeneutical space of human beings, but that everyone is able to live morally and even in a religiously authentic way. For this reason the Church confirmed in the Second Vatican Council that it rejects nothing of what is true and holy in the various religions. "She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men" (NA 2). If religion as a subject invites and supports those with a different faith to become better Muslims or better humanists, the objective of the course has also been achieved for them.

The present curriculum, I believe, provides a fertile framework that is able, in this day and age, to meet the variety of expectations from church and society and is also able to create real added value for the individual and for society: 1. To make students more sensitive with regard to a philosophy of life, 2. to respect the plurality among the students to the very end, 3. to invite and support the student to philosophical self-enlightenment; 4. and to present the wealth of the Christian tradition in a witnessing and expert way as something that drives all the objectives. That is a service to young people, the church and society. For some the subject will give too much or too little attention to the plurality, for others too much or too little attention to the Christian tradition or too much or too little opportunity for reflection on one's own philosophical growth. The core of the subject, however, consists of engaging with the pluralistic context and the Christian tradition by means of the ears and the
mouths of the group of students. Whoever interrupts that dialogue will either be left with a pluralistic subject that cannot possibly do justice to the internal dynamics of ideologies themselves or with a catechesis that cannot possibly be made compulsory for everyone or a subject that involves navel-gazing among young people or a group of students that only have time for their own experiences.
Preliminary note to the English speaking reader

The text below is the approved English translation of the Dutch article, published in 2013:


Though made available for an international audience, originally this article was written by Flemish authors – for Flemish readers, as it deals with the specific educational landscape that exists in Flanders in 2013. We suggest that the international reader keeps in mind that the educational contexts abroad are likely to be different from the context presupposed in this text.

Dialogue as the Future.
A Catholic Answer to the 'Colourisation' of the Educational Landscape
Didier Pollefeyt & Jan Bouwens (KU Leuven), February 2013

Since 2007, the Centre for Academic Teacher Training of the Catholic University of Leuven’s Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies has developed a methodology to carry out quantitative and qualitative empirical research into Catholic school identity. One of the empirical instruments it has developed is the so-called Victoria Scale. This multivariate attitude scale converts the identity square of differing school types described by the Dutch researchers Wim ter Horst1 and Chris Hermans2 (Monologue School, Dialogue School, Colourful School and Colourless School) into a stable and manageable instrument that enables us to situate the identity of schools in an empirically reliable way. This attitude scale measures where a school currently stands with regard to its identity (factual measurement level), as well as where it wants to go in the future (normative measurement level). Up to now (February 2013), the Victoria Scale has been applied to 15,310 people in 67 Catholic educational institutions all across Flanders. The questionnaires were filled out by students in primary, secondary and tertiary education, teaching staff, school leadership figures, parents and by those responsible for dictating policy. In this brief contribution, we would like to reflect on a number of findings of this research with an eye towards making the Dialogue School a reality in Catholic schools in Flanders.

The difference between Dialogue Schools and Colourful Schools is clear in Flemish Catholic schools

For the Flemish research participants, it is clear that the Dialogue School is distinct from the Colourful School. The research has shown that, conceptually speaking, people can clearly distinguish between the categories of the Dialogue School and the Colourful School. An item typical of the Dialogue School is: “My ‘ideal school’ believes that the Catholic faith offers a meaningful and valuable message that everyone should hear, albeit without the intent to make all the students Catholic”. An example

1 W. TER HORS'T, Wijs me de weg. Mogelijkheden voor een christelijke opvoeding in een post-christelijke samenleving, Kampen, Kok, 1995, p.63-75.
The expression of the Colourful School is: “I believe that it is more important to value the many fundamental life options and lifestyles at school (even the non-Christian ones) than to preserve a Catholic school identity.” The difference is clear: the Dialogue School expresses a clear preference for a particular position – namely the Catholic position – out of which to engage others in dialogue. By contrast, the Colourful School assumes a fundamental equivalence of all philosophical and religious positions. Both school types strive for maximal recognition, appreciation and support for plurality and ‘otherness’ at school, but while the Colourful School eliminates any and all expressions of preference, positing a formal equality of all substantial differences (i.e. relativism), the Dialogue School holds that one can only enter into true solidarity and dialogue with others in any meaningful way when we do so out of a perspective of Christian faith. In the typology of the identity square, the Dialogue School is an explicitly Catholic school, while the Colourful School no longer wishes to hold onto the Catholic identity of the school. A Colourful School is a non-Catholic school... or it is no longer a Catholic school. Based on the negative correlation between the Dialogue school and Colourful School on the ideal level (r = -0.24), it seems that research participants also understand this difference. Generally speaking, the more participants express a desire for a Dialogue School (thus giving it a high ideal score), the less they express a desire for the Colourful School (with a resultant low ideal score), and vice versa. Nevertheless, this does not mean that, in terms of actual practice, differing tendencies cannot simultaneously emerge. The Victoria Scale does not try to pigeonhole people or schools. On the contrary, different movements can occur at the same time, and it is therefore always important to investigate the internal connections between these varying tendencies.

**Adults prefer Dialogue Schools, but students no longer give majority support**

Generally speaking, one can say that there is very widespread support for the Dialogue School among adults in Flemish Catholic schools (school staff, parents and the school leadership). Over 84% are (strongly) in favour, 12% are indifferent, and less than 4% are outright opposed. Over 80% of the adults see this dialogue as already being realised. There is therefore room for growth on this point. In other words, given this broad support for the Dialogue School among adults in Catholic schools, policy makers do not have to be afraid to throw their full weight behind the Dialogue School model.

In the background, however, we clearly see the growth of a second tendency, although at this moment, it is more of a discussion among the adults. Roughly 50% of these same adults also make a choice for the Colourful School, while 28% express hesitation and 22% are outright opposed. We cannot speak of a switch between the Dialogue and Colourful Schools, but we can talk about a gradual shift in emphasis. If the Dialogue School should fail, it is clear which alternative would come forward.

Among the students, this transition has already taken place. They already show more support for the Colourful School (62.5%) than for the Dialogue School (50%). In addition, roughly 29% of the students express opposition towards the Dialogue School, even if this school type does not intend to make all of the students Catholic. It is interesting to see that on the factual level, while 80% of the adults believe dialogue is currently being realised at their workplace, a far smaller proportion of the students (just 56%) see this dialogue. Perhaps the adults are somewhat too optimistic and too quickly satisfied with the dialogue with the Catholic tradition currently taking place at their schools. For the students, meanwhile, the amount of dialogue they see is already more than enough. From a confessional
perspective, the Dialogue School is more demanding than the Colourful School, which gets by with the (valuable) principle of formal tolerance.

**The Colourful School quietly presents itself as an alternative to the Dialogue School**

Generally speaking, we therefore see a gradual, quiet shift from Dialogue Schools to Colourful Schools (i.e. secularisation) within Catholic schools in Flanders. Most of the adults would like to hold onto the Dialogue School model and even to further reinforce it, but (judging by the parallel emergence of the Colourful School) the Christian-religious foundation of openness and solidarity with others threatens to lose ground in favour of a more formal equivalence of philosophical and religious positions. Partly due to pressure coming from resistance shown by many students and some adults against an explicitly Catholic approach, the ‘path of least resistance’ frequently ends up being chosen. The result is a gradual yet clear evolution in the direction of the Colourful School. Many of the students (50%) still express an openness towards the Dialogue School and many others are undecided (22%), but the resistance towards the Colourful School (18%) is clearly weaker than the resistance towards the Dialogue School (29%). It is important for school leadership figures to learn the language with which they can reflect on and become conscious of the quiet transitions taking place in their schools, as well as to make certain choices out of this consciousness. This also presupposes a strong understanding of what a Dialogue School is.

**We distinguish two subtypes in the Dialogue School model**

In conducting large-scale empirical research in Australia, we have discovered two variants of the Dialogue School, which we respectively call the kerygmatic and recontextualising types. Due to the advanced secularisation of the Flemish context, we cannot trace these two subtypes in Flanders. Nevertheless, in the purely theoretical debate over the Dialogue School in Flanders, these two subtypes still play a role. While the discussion at the workplace primarily concerns the difference between the Colourful and Dialogue Schools, there is also a (pedagogical, philosophical and theological) debate taking place in the background over which type of Dialogue School is desirable. Both types have a certain plausibility and can offer credentials.

**Subtype 1: The kerygmatic type of Dialogue School**

Just like in the Catholic Monologue School, in the kerygmatic type of Dialogue School, the Catholic faith tradition represents a highly meaningful and valuable message that should be heard by everyone. Ultimately speaking, one is convinced that the truth offered by the Catholic faith is more fundamental and fulfilling than the ideas offered by other religions and philosophies. Why else should a school want to be a Catholic school? A Catholic school must therefore, in principle, give priority to the Catholic faith and Catholic practices, placing them over other religions and philosophies (i.e. apologetics). The (parents of the) students have after all consciously chosen to enrol themselves in a Catholic institution.

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3 In the framework of the research project Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (ECSIP), carried out in cooperation with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV), all 487 Catholic schools in the state of Victoria were systematically studied over the course of four years as an integral part of their evaluation procedure.
It is therefore reasonable to expect that all those involved will participate in the Catholic school project, even though it is possible that their levels of participation may vary. It is obvious that in a Catholic school, religion is by no means an individual, private matter that should play no role in the life of the school. Catholic schools must be engaged in the faith formation of the students, and students may not retreat into their individual, private spheres on this matter.

Unlike the Monologue School, however, the kerygmatic type of the Dialogue School does not go as far as to expect that all of the students are or will become Catholic. It is of fundamental importance that Christians must respect people with other convictions and lifestyles. The Christian faith itself has a fundamentally relational and dialogical character. Faith neither can nor may ever be imposed on others, whether by explicit or implicit coercion. Nevertheless, it is of course possible and even desirable to be enthusiastic about faith and Christ and to invite others to that same faith. Furthermore, the encounter and dialogue with others is an opportunity to witness to that belief in both word and deed. Standing in the midst of a pluralistic society with an attitude of tolerance, solidarity, friendship and love for all people is of course compatible with a Catholic educational project. At the same time, one holds onto one’s own Catholic convictions which one positively and optimistically communicates to others. In order for this to be possible, believers must search out new, creative ways to be Catholic in the midst of the present-day culture. They must find new ways to live as ‘authentic’ Catholics in the present society in such a way that the particularly Catholic faith can speak openly and freely in the midst of other voices. In this situation it is important to keep an open mind, always on the search for God in the world. It is necessary to have an open encounter and dialogue with other philosophical convictions, without, of course, taking in too many ‘un-Catholic’ influences.

In other words, the kerygmatic type of Dialogue School is primarily concerned with the search for a new ‘public relations strategy’ and not so much with recontextualisation or new, fundamental theological developments. The ‘Catholic package’ of faith convictions and truth claims, rites and rituals, moral and socio-political attitudes, distinctive prayers and music – or in other words, the traditional Catholic way of life – is more or less fixed and immutable. Generally speaking, it is not desirable to want to change the content or form of the Catholic belief in order to make it ‘conform’ or ‘resonate’ better with the constantly changing present-day cultural maelstrom. Catholic schools must therefore try to avoid clearly non-Catholic or anti-Catholic attitudes and practices, because these can undermine the mission of the Catholic school. The essence of Catholicism is to a large extent defined by the tradition and must be preserved and, if necessary, protected from other ideas. In this type of Dialogue School, everything comes down to proclaiming the plausibility, greater value and truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an honest way within an open dialogue with all who are prepared to enter into the discussion.

**Subtype 2: The recontextualising type of Dialogue School**

The recontextualising type of Dialogue School is no less gripped by the Catholic faith than the kerygmatic type, but it is more modest, careful, inquisitive, and less convinced of its a priori ‘being right’. If we want to authentically live out our Catholic faith from within a multicultural setting, we must hold an open, searching and interpretive attitude. The process of encounter and dialogue with

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4 We detect a significant correlation between the support for a Dialogue School model on the one hand and a Post-critical Belief on the other hand ($r=0.63$). It is clear that a symbolic-hermeneutical understanding of the faith tradition contributes significantly to an open, searching and tolerant Catholic school identity.
otherness is not just an opportunity for proclamation, but also – and more fundamentally – constitutive of one’s own religious understanding, because it is in this encounter and confrontation with the other that God reveals Himself. It is here that new layers of meaning are opened and faith is recontextualised. Dialogue becomes reciprocal, and both dialogue partners become vulnerable and receptive towards new meanings.

However, it is the theological (epistemological) conviction of this type of Dialogue School that the truth of Catholicism is not fixed and cannot a priori be known with certainty. The truth must rather be discovered and made true in lives actually lived through a continual process of interpretation. Believers are challenged to search for new insights into what it means to be Catholic in the midst of the present context, and to do so creatively, innovatively, and with an open mind. Recontextualising Dialogue Schools are constantly on the search for new ways to express and live the gospel. They are always looking for new ways to make it true today. When we do this, we stand with one foot in the Catholic tradition and the other in an unwritten future. The outcome of this search is uncertain, and it is possible that some valuable things from the past will disappear into the background. Nevertheless, we satisfy ourselves with new discoveries, and hope that the Holy Spirit accompanies us on our journey.

As the world evolves and changes, so do the idea of what it means to be Christian in this world and the way the original evangelical inspiration is given a concrete form. Catholic faith must change her profile and ‘re-contextualise’ herself as she enters each new era. This process of recontextualisation began already in the earliest days of Christianity, and it is now up to us to carry on this tradition in the 21st century. The Catholic tradition has always been developing and renewing itself in a great variety of ways, and it must keep doing this today. Whenever God walks besides us on this path, new revelations come forth, and the faith tradition further unfolds itself.

In order to bring about a Recontextualising Dialogue School, it is crucial to have active dialogue with people of other convictions and lifestyles. It is therefore important that many different philosophical and religious visions, practices and lifestyles can exist side-by-side in a Catholic school. It is precisely through recognising, respecting and truly valuing the differences between people that the school can rediscover her Catholic identity again. This receptivity towards ‘the other’ is fundamental. It is important to actually meet the other, and this means actually listening to what moves his or her spirit. It is only when we look the other in the eye that we can encounter the face of Christ. When we offer protection and hospitality to strangers, God can reveal Himself to us in new and unexpected ways.⁵

**Dialogue between Christianity and culture**

Both subtypes of the Dialogue School play a meaningful role in the present-day debate over Catholic school identity. In both Australia and Flanders, we offer a nuanced criticism of the kerygmatic variant of the Dialogue School while openly promoting the recontextualising variant, and we do this on both empirical and theological grounds.

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In the kerygmatic type of Dialogue School, dialogue tends to be used as an opportunity to promote the Catholic faith, and though this is done open-mindedly, it is also done unambiguously. The relationship between the dialogue partners is asymmetrical – one gives and the other receives, one speaks and the other responds, whether agreeing or disagreeing. The relationship with the tradition is protective and preserving. In Fowler’s terms, it’s about faith formation aiming at an initiation into the ‘conventional synthesis of belief’. By contrast, in the recontextualising type, dialogue is the context of a real encounter with difference. It is an encounter that transforms all of the partners involved in the dialogue. The relationship between the dialogue partners is symmetrical. One speaks while the other listens and vice versa. The relationship with the tradition aims at a dynamic renewal and the search for plausibility against the background of a changing context. In Fowler’s terms, it corresponds to a ‘subjunctive faith’ wherein the value and truth of one’s own faith convictions do not depend on the absence of value and truth in the other’s faith convictions. On the contrary, the encounter can even enrich and deepen one’s own faith convictions.

A recontextualising Dialogue School consciously and actively positions itself in the dialectical tension between continuity and discontinuity, between tradition and innovation. It is through this dynamic that the Catholic tradition can progress further and make itself worthy of belief. A one-sided emphasis on innovation can cause one to get lost in the ‘dialogue’. For all intents and purposes, the school actually becomes a Colourful School that no longer dares to speak out of Christian particularity. It becomes ‘active-pluralistic’ instead of Catholic. On the other hand, a one-sided emphasis on continuity can cause one to lose touch with the context, thereby also losing both plausibility and inspiring relevance. Such a school ends up becoming a Monologue School in the margins of society. Such Monologue Schools have almost no support in Flanders. Furthermore, one can question how compatible such a school is with the Catholic message itself or with the age-old dynamic of the Catholic tradition.

In between these two temptations (the Monologue School and the Colourful School), there is actually a vast field of possibilities that can be creatively unfurled. Perhaps this is where the future of Catholic education lies. Catholic schools and school communities should take options that determine their identities, each from out of their own history, tradition, context, school population and vision for the future. Parents and students should be able to choose from a plurality of Catholic schools, each with its own emphasis on and relationship with identity and diversity. The task of Catholic education will consist in bringing these schools into conversation with each other to challenge each other and learn from each other. It may perhaps also be necessary to ask whether it would be better for certain schools to honestly admit that they have become completely Colourless and can in all honesty no longer be called Catholic schools (which of course does not make them any worse as schools). Whenever schools make choices concerning these issues, it seems to us to be important for them to consider the following three important findings that have come out of our fundamental and empirical research.

There is a connection between Monologue Schools and Colourless Schools

When finding oneself within a context of secularisation and pluralisation, there is on the one hand the temptation to push kerygmatic dialogue so forcefully that the school’s identity shifts in the direction of

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a Monologue School. The more Dialogue Schools are eroded by unconscious and not-explicitly Colourful tendencies, the more the longing for ever clearer speech is fed. At this moment, a Monological Catholic pedagogical model receives support from just 3%, although an additional 15% of the adults are in doubt. Among the students, this minority tendency is somewhat stronger (10%), especially among the younger students.

Theoretically speaking, we would have expected a clearly negative correlation between Monological and Colourless tendencies. Remarkably, however, our research has shown that in reality, there is actually a small positive correlation between the two (r=0.09). As people observe more Monological features, they also see more Colourless features. (This correlation is much stronger in Australian schools, where Monological tendencies are also much higher.) This looks like a contradiction. How can a school be both Monological and Colourless? Qualitative research has helped us to understand why. Whenever a school begins to forcefully impose one particular fundamental life option, all the other options go ‘underground’. The discourse quietens down, and both the life options themselves and the engagement in these life options are forced into the private sphere. People no longer dare to lay their cards out on the table. Instead, they conform to the reigning discourse, albeit only formally. When they go home, however, they leave everything behind in the school, together with the chalk and the blackboard. The school therefore ends up becoming a Colourless environment.

There is a connection between Colourful Schools and Colourless Schools

We observe a second, very strong correlation between Colourful and Colourless Schools (r=0.47), and even on the more conceptual, normative level, the respondents do not see the difference between Colourful and Colourless Schools very clearly (r=0.64). Schools that opt for a Colourful identity model should know that Colourlessness lurks around the corner as a secondary and connected pattern, certainly in the long term. This empirical finding is not very difficult to explain. A school can appear to be Colourful, but if its source of inspiration dries up and is replaced by formal principles such as tolerance, respect, democracy, et cetera, Colourlessness can in the long run float up to the top. There isn’t anything concrete, particular or ‘warm’ that connects different people at the school to each other. Because different colours are no longer ‘allowed’ to make any difference at the school, they also cease to play any role of importance in the long run. Instead, procedures, professionalism and efficiency take the rudder.

Dialogue Schools should acknowledge their identity

The key question is of course how concrete of a form to give to the recontextualising type of the Dialogue School model, both today and in the future. Schools need to have a language and a conceptual framework in order to be able to adequately analyse their own situation. This is a necessary prerequisite for being able to effectively work on building up an identity. One must adequately understand and accept who one is, where one stands and how one evolves. Against the background of this analysis, schools must ask themselves where they want to go.

Indeed, to become a Dialogue School ultimately demands a decision. It ultimately depends on a decisive answer to the question of whether the Catholic narrative is worth the trouble and whether it will
continue to function as a privileged dialogue partner in an educational project. It concerns an exercise of the will – made in the first instance by the school board, the management and the staff – concerning the future of the philosophical and religious identity of the school. One doesn’t have to expect that this exercise of the will should come about through some sort of democratic majority and that it should be supported by everyone all the time. It should, however, be supported by the school board, the management and the other leaders of the school, from whom one can expect an unambiguous and active engagement in the religious education project of the school. From the teaching staff, one can at least expect loyalty and constructive cooperation in the Dialogue School. Even if not everyone supports the project, everyone can agree to contribute according to his/her individual identity and talents. In addition, a diversity of positions (critical ones as well) is, in principle, enriching. The decision to work on building up a Dialogue School manifests itself in big and small choices, actions and words in the daily life of the school. It expresses itself especially in the quality of the interpersonal relationships in the school. It also asks for a continuous renewal and re-profiling of the school as the context shifts.

We also cannot expect a Dialogue School model to materialise purely through the application of special techniques, procedures, mechanisms, strategies or wonderful little ‘tricks’. The decision to pursue the Dialogue School is based on an inner attitude fed by personal faith. It’s driven by a hope in the future and a trust in people, by the joy found in being allowed to work on God’s Kingdom, by the dream of a school community that lives by the gospel and by the conviction that a school becomes better – in all respects – when it strives for the Catholic Dialogue School model.

Of prime importance is to explicitly and actively make Christ Himself present, both in the heart of the school’s life and the hearts of the people of the school. Christ is the privileged reference point that refers to the tradition, and it is the people inside and outside the school who give form and content to the relation between Christ and tradition in an authentic way. Catholic spirituality is a core element of this. The Catholic tradition is a religion of mediations. It offers a great number of mediations that allow us to flexibly join ourselves, over and over, both to each other and to the God who speaks to us through the tradition, i.e. through texts, history, human experiences, scientific insights, moral values, narratives, symbols and rituals, traditions, offices, parishes and social organisations, theological and church teachings, art and architecture, meditation and prayer.

The Dialogue School model ‘automatically’ arises when two conditions come together. The first condition is met when a member of the school staff chooses to live, behave and witness as the best Catholic she/he can possibly be, out of a personally lived spirituality surrounded by the mediations through which God announces Himself. The second condition is met when the school staff member simultaneously presents him/herself in an open, unprejudiced, unbiased and vulnerable way to the students entrusted to him/her. The school staff member meets the students as they truly are, puts their interests first and walks side by side with them. The result of this interaction, cross-fertilisation and inner struggle is an authentic Dialogue School model where the Catholic faith is unavoidably and credibly recontextualised in the dynamics of encounter, friction, exchange and dialogue. The attraction of a real, radical and necessarily recontextualised Christian love of neighbour is indeed irresistible. However, neither of these conditions is self-evident. Where is God in the school? God is with us (always and everywhere) through a chain of mediations at expected and unexpected places and times, in ever new and unpredictable ways. Do we recognise God? What can we do in our schools and with ourselves in order to see God more clearly, especially in the face of the other who crosses our path?
It is striking how this dynamic between Catholicism and context plays out with more attention, emphasis, urgency, courage and creativity in other parts of the world than in Flanders. At the same time, we also hold that there is great support in Flanders to realise a Dialogue School model, and that almost nobody would resist a reinforcement of the Dialogical dynamic of a Catholic school. Opinions are somewhat more divided among the students, but in a Dialogue School, that isn’t necessarily a problem. On the contrary, Catholic Dialogue Schools seek to guide all students to a better future in which they can expand their humanity and realise their potential – whoever they are, wherever they come from and wherever they are going.

What does all this mean for the students in our Catholic teacher training programs? First of all, it is important for future teachers to learn to recognise and understand the difference between a Dialogue School and a Colourful School, between a Catholic and a pluralistic education project. It is particularly important for them to learn to recognise the specific logic of the preferential dialogue with the Christian tradition which is particular to the Dialogue School. The personal nature of one’s faith commitment should be the prime focus. Furthermore, it is important for future teachers to learn to find their own place within the Dialogical dynamic, as well as the possibilities and engagements that are tied to that place. In addition, there must be room for respect, openness, diversity, free choice and growth. There is a need for a strong learning environment in which students are challenged, stimulated and supported in their personal philosophical growth in dialogue and confrontation with a Catholic faith perspective. Research shows, moreover, that the broader and deeper the confrontation with the Catholic tradition is, the further and deeper students can also grow in the development of a symbolic-believing attitude. Students who cannot situate themselves in this faith perspective can have their own place within the Dialogue School model as well, which they ought to find and occupy for themselves. Indeed, our research findings show that students and teachers with a symbolic-hermeneutical but non-believing attitude can also make a positive contribution to a Catholic Dialogue School. Finally, it will come down to bringing all students in the educational program – both the believing and non-believing students – into dialogue with each other and the Catholic tradition, via the question of how each can contribute in his/her own way to the realisation of the Dialogue School of the future.
THE SHORTEST DEFINITION OF RELIGION:
INTERRUPTION\(^1\)
An Proposal for Doing Theology in Contemporary Europe

*Lieven Boeve, K.U.Leuven*\(^2\)

The transmission of the Christian tradition has lost its self-evidence in Europe. Culturally speaking, tradition has been interrupted; it is no longer unproblematically handed down from generation to generation. In my own region, the Roman-Catholic Flanders of former days is no more; Christians, and certainly those committed to the Church, form a minority in a society that is increasingly reaching de-traditionalisation. In this contribution I wish to defend the position that the ‘cultural interruption’ of the Christian tradition should not make Christians look back longingly to that lost ‘Christian age’. On the contrary, as with every historical context so too does our ‘postmodern’ context offer Christians the chance to reconsider and reformulate the identity, credibility and relevance of their faith. I shall argue that the dialogue with this context can make clear that, theologically speaking, the category of ‘interruption’ also stands at the very heart of Christian faith.

I will present this in five paragraphs. (1) I will first look to the situation of the Christian faith and its community in terms of contemporary culture. This first perspective serves, as it were, as an external perspective, the observer’s point of view. (2) Thereupon I sketch the great challenge our ‘postmodern’ culture presents to Christian faith and indicate how Christians can respond to this by means of their tradition. I will here particularly bring into the

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picture the increased awareness in our culture for diversity and otherness. After a connecting paragraph (3) I subsequently try to justify this answer theologically. (4) This results in an internal perspective: how can I, as participant in the Christian tradition, transmit it in a both critical and constructive way? So doing we attempt to arrive at a Christian identity apt to deal with the challenges of today’s contextual critical consciousness.

We thus commence with the many questions that Christians and non-Christians ask themselves on what it means to be a Christian and to belong, at least in Flanders, to the Roman-Catholic Church today.

1. The cultural interruption of Christian identity – an outer perspective

Flemish society is today undergoing a process of accelerated secularisation, perhaps better termed detraditionalisation. God belongs less and less to everyday life. Politics, commerce, law, education, medicine: each have their own institutions and specialists, their own logic and language, their own roles and relevance in society. The religious or Christian contribution to all this is of increasingly less significance – whether or not this is in fact desirable. Crucifixes are disappearing from the courthouse. The feast day of the king must now (also) be accompanied by a civil ceremony. The linking of church to civil marriage is currently under discussion as is the state-funded salary of clergy.

In addition to this, the traditional Christian pillar (a ideologically inspired complex of organisations and institutions dealing with education, care, health, youth, labour, leisure time, culture,...) is having difficulties with its Christian past and identity. Some of its organisations have dropped the ‘C’ or ‘K’ (‘Christelijk’ or ‘Katholiek’) from their names; for example NCMV, the Christian organisation for small enterprises has become UNIZO, an acronym without a reference to its Christian origin. Still further, organisations and institutions from the broad Christian framework are likely to follow suit. That such a thing is possible, and hardly keeps anyone from
losing sleep over it, is due to the internal secularisation – de-christianisation – of these organisations, as much of their members as of their structures. People are no longer Christians because they belong to these organisations. Quite the reverse, these organisations are having problems with their identity precisely because they are no longer comprised of Christians alone.³ A telling example: 75% of all Flemish pupils are enrolled for secondary education in Catholic schools, although less than 5% of them are still actively involved in daily Church life.

Indeed, the statistics demonstrate as much: these Christian organisations can generally count a major portion of the population among their members, while socially speaking the Christian faithful are slowly forming a minority. When people are asked to define themselves, 47.4% of Belgians consider themselves Catholic, 1.2% count themselves Protestant and 15.3% call themselves Christians but neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic.⁴ It is because of this that tending to pastoral needs in these organisations is no easy task. Not only are there scarcely any more pastoral leaders, but also few members still wait upon ‘the priest’s word’ or upon the obligatory Eucharistic celebration commencing the new work year.

But the most telling figures come naturally from the sharp falling away from attending Eucharistic celebration.: In 1967, 52% of Flemish people went to church weekly (42.9% for Belgium), in 1998 this figure was only 12.7% (Belgium 11.2%).⁵ When we only consider the younger generation, this number drops to 4%.⁶ We also witness a steady decrease in the number of baptisms and church weddings, two rites of passage that always used to do well. In 1967, 96.1% of children in Flanders were baptised, in 1998: 73%. The numbers for overall Belgium are more than 8% lower than this for 1998 (64.7%). The figures for the section of the population that still marries in the

³ In connection with this, see for instance my reflection on the identity of a ‘Catholic’ university in a detraditionalised Flanders: ‘Katholieke universiteit: vier denkpistes, in Ethische Perspectieven 10 (2001) 4, 250-258. An English version of this article will appear in Louvain Studies.


⁵ Cf. ibidem, p. 122-123. This is approximately one fifth of those who describe themselves as Catholic.

⁶ Cf. ibidem, p. 135.
Church: for Flanders 91.8% in 1967, 51.2% in 1998; for Belgium, 86.1% in 1967, 49.2% in 1998. Incidentally, not all who partake of the rituals are actually Church members. A number of non-Church members also participate in baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial because there are yet few alternatives outside the Church to celebrate the important moments of passage in life, or because they want to please their parents and/or grandparents. The Catholic rituals then serve to celebrate a non-Church type, undefined religiosity. “One considers them as a publicly available remedy which can be administered without any preceding special conditions. Their specific confessional nature is in this way neutralised.”

Another significant fact is Church involvement. Of the Belgians born after 1970 only 9% is more or less engaged in the Church community (2.1% key members and 6.9% medium). Of peers their age, 35.7% can be described as borderline Church-affiliated, and 29.2% of the first generation while 26.1% of the second is non Church-affiliated. Research shows, moreover, that “extremely few people who have become non Church-affiliated from home later [become] Church-affiliated, as opposed to many who grew up Church-affiliated at home becoming borderline and even non Church-affiliated.”

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7 Cf. *ibidem*, p. 123.
8 A survey in the second year of the Master’s Degrees in Sciences (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geology, Geography, and Informatics) at the K.U.Leuven delivered roughly similar figures for the academic years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 on the two following questions. To the question, “would you still marry, baptise and be buried in the Church, and why (not)?” roughly 70% answered affirmatively, and to the following question, “should the Church not be stricter in its policy and only allow people who really exercise their faith to partake of the sacraments and rituals?” only 30 to 40% answered positively, thus 60 to 70% responded negatively. When we compare the results to both questions with each other, we notice that a substantial portion of those who answered ‘yes’ to the first question, i.e. roughly 50%, are not prepared to make any commitment towards their Christian faith.
10 Cf. *ibidem*, p. 131.
11 *Ibidem*, p. 128. Dobbelare and Voyé wonder if this shift might not be more attributable to the increasing irreligiosity than to dissatisfaction with the institutional Church. Leaving the Church certainly has something to do with the latter. At the same time, however, the researchers state that “non-Church’ religiosity has difficulty surviving from one non-churchgoing generation to the next: the latter generations of non-churchgoers are increasingly less religious than the first.” They then also conclude: “In other words, religiosity has to be supported by plausibility structures and in Belgium there is but one such structure that is clearly visible. If one comes into conflict with the Catholic Church, falling away from the Church becomes the only alternative. [...] In the long run, however, and certainly after a few generations, it will clearly give rise to irreligiosity.” (p. 129-130).
At the same time our society has become internally pluralized. There is the perception that there are many forms for giving meaning to one’s life and coexistence, and there does not appear to be any that can legitimately claim primacy over the rest and so become the measuring standard for them all. For instance, specifically we have become – socially speaking and thus independent of one’s own individual choices in the matter – confronted with many forms of partner relationships, parenting and education, leisure activities, career enhancement, value preferences and fundamental life options. Concerning this last item there are not only – proportionally speaking – less Christians than before, but more importantly there is a diversity of fundamental life options going on around us. Besides Christians (divided into different denominations), there are atheists, agnostics, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, ex-Christians (or post-Christians12), the indifferent, individualists, people belonging to neo-religious movements (such as New Age), etc. This diversity is becoming increasingly visible and poses new and different challenges for Christian believers, over and above those of the ‘de-christianisation’ of society.

Both secularisation and pluralisation question in their own way the identity of Christians today. What does it mean to be Christian? What does it mean to belong to the Church? Furthermore, how is this identity to be preserved?

Should Christians adapt themselves to the current culture because non-Christians can no longer understand them? Do they have to search for a new language that still addresses people, above all the young? Does this run the risk that too much accommodation will cost Christianity its specificity? A good example of such accommodation is the discussion on whether Jesus can still hold a specific place in relation to Moses, Muhammad and Buddha. Are they not all of the same order? The price of such equation is the loss of the key element in Christian faith, namely that in Jesus Christ God is revealed in a way unparalleled to any other in history.

12 Having an already deeply secularised Christian affiliation, post-Christians retain at best only a very fragmentary commitment to faith and faith community, which expresses itself in merely occasional (and diminishing) attendance at rites of passage and a sparse and unintegrated knowledge of the Christian tradition – despite years of religious education and (possibly even) catechesis.
In the search for a self-identity Christians can also choose another option and set themselves against the current culture for its being Christian no longer. Christian identity is then tied to the resolute and uncompromising adherence to (the letter of) one’s own tradition and (exclusivity of) faith community. Other religious traditions also react in such a frequently traditionalist or fundamentalist manner over against (post-)modern culture from which they expect nothing good. The terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 in which the two World Trade Center towers were completely destroyed were an extreme outgrowth of this. In any event, here too we can ask ourselves if Christian identity has not finally been lost: after all, faith has always involved culture and society. Tradition is not something that is passed down unchanged through the centuries. Time and again church leaders, theologians and the faithful have, with varying success, responded to the signs of the times and shaped the life and teaching of their faith from the dialogue between culture and Christian faith.

Expressed more technically, the Christian faith only survives by means of recontextualisation. Its credibility is, after all, necessarily a contextual credibility as well. In principle, each development in the tradition of the Christian faith lies inextricably embedded in a specific historical context that intrinsically contributed to that development. The Christian faith does not exist disconnected from the context or culture in which Christians live but is in fact caught up in it. Ergo: if the context or culture changes then the Christian faith is challenged to shift accordingly. Recontextualisation, then, is also a continuing, never-ending task. After all, Christians take part, as do their contemporaries, in the prevailing context participating equally in its sensitivities, attitudes, views and ambiguities. This is where theology is embedded, charged with pondering the internal intelligibility and the external credibility of the Christian faith.

It is especially on the individual level that Christians also encounter dechristianisation and religious diversity. For the most part it still concerns confrontations with ex-Christians. We need only think of the grandparents

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13 It is mostly the emancipatory tendencies of modernity and not its scientific or technological advances that are rejected. What is more, many so-called traditionalist and fundamentalist groups are extremely active in the latter field and make full use of modern techniques, among others the media and the financial world.
complaining that the younger generations have become estranged from the Church, or contacts with colleagues at work or with parents in the school yard. Because leaving the Church often occurs quietly it sometimes takes a while before it is noticed, but that does not make it any less real. At the same time, Christians have contact with people of other faiths, more so than previously, not only through the media but also in daily reality, in the classrooms of the children, on the street, and at work. This is especially noticeable for instance when encountering Muslims during the period of Ramadan or the ceremonial offering.

All these encounters repeatedly confront Christians today – and certainly the young among them – with the question of why remain Christian? It is almost abnormal, or at least certainly exceptional, to continue being one. This also presents problems when raising children, in terms of what faith practices to keep as well as the transmission of the faith narratives. Can teenagers for example just simply inform without risk their friends and coaches that they cannot join in next Saturday’s soccer match because they will be altar servers at the Saturday afternoon mass? Is it obvious any more that one’s daughter’s friend is coming along to Church? Is it not naïve for a parent to live out and present children with examples of selfless engagement and forgiveness, as part of the praxis of following Jesus Christ? How can Christians explain the belief in the resurrection to children and adults in a context where culturally speaking very few points of contact remain? And above all, what does it mean for a Christian to believe in God at a time when many speak of a ‘God eclipse’?

This outer perspective teaches us that the Christian tradition and the identity of Christians, has been culturally interrupted. The Christian faith no longer passes unrestricted and unquestioned. For two generations now Christians have no longer been succeeding in carrying through the Christian tradition. This naturally brings much tragedy and incomprehension in its wake. Many priests for instance – who are themselves dwindling in drastic numbers – witness with heavy hearts their churches becoming emptier by the year and

\[14\] Research shows moreover that not a few of those who call themselves Christian choose rather reincarnation than resurrection in speaking about life after death.
their parishes dying; no longer are there sufficient numbers of young families to take the place of older generations. This, for example, is extremely conspicuous in the weeks following a holy communion: only a fraction of the children who on that occasion had for the first time received communion continue to partake at the weekend services. The current situation meets with much incomprehension, for instance over the failure of the Catholic education project as with religious education (whether it be in Catholic or state schools). Schools no longer instruct well-initiated Catholic intellectuals or artisans. In their classrooms religious educators meet only a few young people with just a passing familiarity with – leave aside initiation into – the Christian narrative. It is because of this that both Catholic education and religious education are undergoing a thorough reassessment of their own function in the current context.15

But the deep tragedy and incomprehension aside, perhaps this situation also provides opportunities to the Christian faith and its community. Here there should however be no misunderstanding. Christians should not just strive to form merely a minority in our Flemish society, as though wishing to be a sort of ‘holy remnant’ keeping the torch of faith burning in dark times. The suggestion that a minority Church will automatically become a better Church because it will then no longer be enmeshed with society and culture is not at all self-evident and is in fact even counter-productive. There is no guarantee that a smaller faith community would be a more Christian one. The chance of ghettoisation would only become greater as a result of this. Moreover, nothing guarantees the survival of the Christian faith in Europe any longer. When the last Christian passes – or falls – away, Christian faith and its communities will be well and truly over in Europe.

The situation is such, however, that a virtue can be made of necessity and the new situation be investigated as to possibilities for deepening Christian faith and its community in order to renew it and this way prepare for the

future – without, as said, the guarantee of survival. Each altered and new context issues a challenge towards recontextualisation. And, as said earlier, it is the task of theology to illuminate and map out on a reflexive level such a recontextualisation process.

2. Diversity, identity and the interruption of the encounter with the other

All the great ideologies, which for several years seemed to shape the social debate, today appear to share the same fate as the Christian narrative and equally have problems in transmitting that for which they stand. In a so-called postmodern frame of thought one refers to this as the end of the ‘grand narratives’.

These ‘grand narratives’ stand for the attempts on the part of the human being – since the Enlightenment – to bring nature and society under its complete control and shape it according to its wishes. According to Jean-François Lyotard we can differentiate two sorts of narratives. On the one hand there are the grand narratives of knowledge which seek through reason and technology to understand, rule and adapt the world to human needs. On the other we have the grand narratives of emancipation that are especially intent on the reform of society – examples of this are liberalism, socialism, communism, etc.\(^{16}\) Ideas basic to both are always: (1) an enormous confidence in human potentiality (especially human reason), coupled with a huge awareness of responsibility, and (2) a belief that reality – nature and society – is malleable, thus with human intervention it can be made to fit human needs.

The belief in progress resulting from all this nonetheless received a severe blow in the last century, especially the decades towards the end. The grand narratives not only could not carry out their promises, they very often lapsed into their antitheses. As a result, they had to contend with an irreversible

\(^{16}\) Cf. J.-F. Lyotard, La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir, Paris: Vrin, 1979. ‘Narrative’ here refers to a religious, philosophical or ideological complex or system, to the way in which people and communities perceive and ascribe meaning to themselves, society and the world.
loss of confidence. The most telling examples of this are Marxism’s failed social project and the disastrous ecological consequences of the unrestrained will to rule the world through science and technology. In both cases the urge to control conjured up, as it were, the uncontrollable. The absolute, all-embracing, self-satisfied hunger for power that uttered itself in the grand narratives has proven to be both counter-productive and the cause of many victims. The credibility of their pretensions and promises is shattered. This is the paradox of our postmodern time: precisely in a context exploding with knowledge and capability its boundaries have become all but too evident.

Postmodern thinkers have pointed out that the grand narratives did not pay attention to these boundaries, to the uncontrollable that escapes all attempts at controlling it. Said differently and more technically, they point out to us – and this is the key to postmodern critical consciousness – that the ‘other’ always and again forms the boundary to the ‘one’. Furthermore, only the ‘one’ that reckons with the ‘other’ at its boundary, who knows how to relate to it one way or another, who allows itself to be challenged by it – only that one can escape the pitfall of the grand narratives. After all, these narratives proved themselves especially to be ‘closed’ narratives, without openness or sensitivity for the other.

All grand narratives developed strategies so as not to reckon with the other either by including it on the one hand (reducing it to ‘more of the same’) or excluding it on the other. For Marxism as grand narrative the other was included as proletarian and thus revolutionary, or immediately excluded as bourgeois and thus counter-revolutionary. The ‘other’, the ‘others’ have become victims of the dictatorship of the proletariat, with the ‘gulag archipelago’ of Stalinism as its outgrowth. Another example is the positivism that science has made an absolute norm of: the ‘other’ is then only legitimate if it obeys scientific laws or – to the extent that – it can become the object of scientific research. In all other cases it is by definition irrational, untrustworthy, nonsense, out of date, superstition.

In the postmodern condition we have thus learnt that we are no masters of reality, or of our society, not even of our own identity. Our narratives are time and again confronted with an other-than-ourselves. They are in fact nothing more than specific attempts at dealing with life, coexistence and
reality and can never be absolutised into becoming the narrative. They are historically grown, contextually embedded, the fruit too of many coincidences. It is because of this that we have today become more sensitive towards the diversity of narratives. I already referred in my first paragraph to the increased awareness of the diversity of fundamental life options, and the confrontation that this carries with it for the identity of Christians – but equally for every other identity.

I now wish to put forward my reflection. It is precisely in diversity itself that today the other, other to oneself and thus its boundary, is to be seen. Because there are also other forms of parenting and education for instance, one’s own choices – one’s narrative, the way in which one makes sense of one’s choices and life – are both placed into perspective and questioned: one’s own narrative could also in principle have been different – and there is no one to pass an ultimate judgment on this. This awareness of diversity and otherness is at the same time also linked to a sharpened appreciation for that which is specific to oneself – with other words: the particularity of one’s own narrative. We are what we are precisely because of this specificity that distinguishes us from other narratives. Put this way, the recognition of diversity and the insurmountable character thereof does not necessarily lead to relativism. We are all players on the field of fundamental life options; no single position can elevate itself beyond this jostling with diversity as if it were not immediately already involved in it. We can, after all, never make an abstraction from our own position, in that, it always remains different to that of the other’s, because it remains our own. We cannot at the same time take in the other positions (a mix of positions would mean it is a new position). Relativism is merely one option among others and not an overarching perspective.

What then are the consequences for the identity of Christians? To summarise, the flip side of the loss in credibility of the ‘grand narratives’ is a renewed and heightened sensitivity for diversity and otherness. Our culture has apparently learned that according a basic respect for whoever holds a diverging opinion need not be in conflict with one’s own views. This is, for example, the reason why Roman Catholics would no longer call Protestants and adherents of other religions simply heretics or heathens. This sensitivity has not been easily achieved in our society – the agitation surrounding
asylum seekers and the rise of the extreme right demonstrates as much. Yet, all the same, what is different no longer immediately provokes a purely defensive reaction, but can now also challenge, even fascinate.

This sensitivity for diversity and otherness has also the inverse effect that Christians are conscious more strongly than before of their own position as Christians. They not only see now more clearly that other religions and fundamental life options can also contain worthy and authentic ways of living; they have, moreover, learned that their way of life is but one among many others. They are equal players on the field of many religions and fundamental life options with their own narratives, customs, traditions and communities. Following after Jesus Christ is their specific way of giving meaning to and organising their life. They also know that had they been born elsewhere, they may very well have belonged to another religion.

This does not mean that religions are simply exchangeable with one another, as though it no longer matters if one is a Christian, Buddhist or atheist. The difference between the Christian faith and Buddhism or atheism is precisely that the Christian faith is the faith of Christians, and that this will always be their point of departure in viewing reality, in this case, the diversity of religions. One’s own position cannot simply be placed within brackets. As with members of other fundamental life options, Christians too cannot retreat to a non-involved observer position. All are already participants; Christians know themselves because of their own fundamental life option that has been placed amidst the diversity thereof and it is because they are already Christians that the other religions and fundamental life options appear to them as different/other.

Just as people who ascribe to different fundamental life options and religions may have certain matters in common, it is often what they have in common with other fundamental life options that precisely constitutes the difference between them: Christian fasting is not simply a variant of Ramadan; the Buddhist mystical contemplation of nothingness is not the same as the Christian mysticism of love. The Old Testament to Christians is not the Bible of the Jews even though they share that tradition. The encounter with other religions and fundamental life options thus teaches
Christians something about themselves first, about their position on the religious playing field, about how to stand in the world and view it.\(^\text{17}\)

Otherness, however, also carries with it questioning, confrontation, sometimes even conflict, and it invites Christians to create an openness within their engagement with the Christian faith. They will thus increasingly have to learn to both hold on to the value and truth of their own faith position as well as make room for a necessary openness that allows for the encounter with the other.

In short, this is the opportunity that our current culture of diversity in fundamental life options offers to the Christian faith after secularisation. Even though the Christian tradition and identity have been interrupted, there is no reason to simply give in to cultural pessimism. In a time where belief is no longer evident and an explicit choice is demanded from the believer, Christians after all become more conscious of their own specific identity. As a faith community they stand in the footsteps of Jesus whom they confess as the Christ. Moreover, they stand charged with viewing their own way of life from the perspective of a diversity and otherness in fundamental life options. They have a double task: (a) to take their own narrative seriously (no relativism) and (b) to respect other religious positions (no fundamentalism). For the encounter with diversity and otherness interrupts our own faith narrative continuously, certainly when it has the tendency to close itself off and in this way make victims – the very first victim being the God in whom they profess to believe. On this last point ‘interruption’ becomes a theological category.

3. Crossing over

The dialogue with the current culture of diversity thus contains its opportunities. This seems to be the lesson too from practical experience, as

\(^{17}\) Another example: precisely what binds the three so-called prophetic religions (also called the religions of the book or religions of revelation), at the same time fundamentally distinguishes them (a) in the way that they perceive their ‘prophet’, Muhammad, Jesus or Moses respectively, (b) the role that their holy scriptures have within the religion (Koran, Bible or Torah), and (c) the way in which the revelation of God in history is understood.
a radio interview on 14 January 1999 for the Radio 1 morning show, Voor de dag, demonstrates. “A woman tells of an encounter the evening before. She is involved with Kerkwerk multicultureel samenleven (Church work on behalf of multicultural living) and was invited by a Moroccan community in Molenbeek to celebrate the ‘breaking of the fast’ with them. This community had the practice of always holding an open house every evening of Ramadan at sundown. The woman recounted that the conversation at table soon took on a profound sense of meaningfulness, certainly when religious themes such as the importance of ‘fasting’ and the relations between Muslims and Christians were being discussed. It struck this woman then that in these conversations, for example on fasting, it was precisely in the similarities between Islam and Christianity that the differences could be noticed at the same time. The outcome of this event was certainly not a relativising ‘it actually all boils down to the same thing in the end,’ but instead a respectful recognition of difference and self-worth. What is more, this woman then went on to describe how the Christians began to question themselves about the seriousness of their own faith: did they, for example, experience their own fasting authentically enough? Definitely an unexpected wake-up call, she concluded. Respect for the irreducible identity of one’s own Christian narrative and for the otherness of the different religions and fundamental life options can thus go together – what is more, the encounter made this woman consider her own identity and its importance precisely through its relation to another religion.

But can the Christian narrative enter into these opportunities? Can it allow itself to be interrupted by otherness, specifically other religions, fundamental life options, people and communities? Can it be an open narrative, a narrative that has learned to remain open for that which is other and thereby be challenged by it? Is not Jesus proclaimed as ‘the way, the truth and the life’? Are not Christians ultimately convinced of their truth claim because of their being called by God? Should they not be chiefly concerned with setting right those who think differently from them? Yet, if

they have the truth, does this mean that others cannot have the truth? But, if everyone has the truth, is this not as good as saying that no truth exists?

4. God interrupts our narratives – an inner perspective

Returning to the experience of the woman from the radio interview, it was an experience of a fruitful and productive interruption of her own Christian narrative by the narrative of an other. For Christians the path opens itself here to appreciate anew their own belief in a God who is both revealed in history and takes on the lot of history. As a theologian I formulate this path from an inner perspective, i.e. the perspective of a Christian who from my own tradition reflects upon the Christian faith in dialogue with the current context.

Are not such encounters the way in which God queries us Christians today? Through the confrontation with the other? Has God not always been the Other in our narratives, certainly when they threatened to close in upon themselves? Viewed from this perspective, is this not the message of the Old Testament? When Israel sits enslaved in Egypt, God through Moses breaks open this narrative of slavery and alienation. When the Jewish people shut themselves off from God, serve other gods, wreak injustice upon the poor and the stranger and allow their kings to become corrupt, then God sends prophets to pry open these closed narratives. The New Testament is similarly the narrative of the throwing open of closed narratives. In God’s name Jesus forgives whoever has come to be entangled in sin, he criticises those who reduce true religion to the dry observance of the law, or to the punctilious bringing of necessary sacrifices, or to the all too easy misuse of religion for political ends. Jesus asks us to be as children, as the poor, the outcast and the persecuted (for they are blessed), as the widow who can only afford to offer one mite. He invites us to follow in the footsteps of the father who embraces his youngest prodigal son (and not to share the incomprehension of the oldest son). He teaches us to see God in the poor, naked, sick, hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, in short, the vulnerable and injured other: “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food...?
[...] Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:37, 40).

The whole metaphor and dynamic of the Christian narrative appears to be permeated with the interruption of its own narrative, its own identity, with the confrontation with the Other, God. The important motifs such as calling, exodus, mount, wilderness, cross, resurrection, conversion, pilgrimage, etc. illustrate this. The Christian narrative simply may not become a closed narrative. For precisely then God will break it open again. Interruption becomes here a theological category. Naturally, this takes on its ultimate shape in the resurrection of Jesus crucified on the cross. Precisely at that moment God makes it clear that one who lives like this Jesus of Nazareth, professed as the Christ by his disciples, cannot be enclosed by death but instead now has a future beyond it. Both in words and deeds, but more importantly through his life story, Jesus Christ has become the paradigm of the ‘open narrative’. Following Jesus carries with it the challenge to seek out the other who interrupts our narrative.

Remarkably, Jesus of Nazareth himself had to learn this according to the witness of the Matthew and Mark gospels (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). These evangelists after all narrate the following incidents. When Jesus departs to the district of Tyre and Sidon, he meets along the way a Canaanite or Syrophoenician woman (thus a non-Jew) who asks him to cure her daughter who is possessed by a demon. Jesus’ first reaction is to reject her saying that he has been sent to the Jewish people (‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’) even, indeed, that it is not good to concern oneself with the others (‘it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs’). Whereupon the woman then says to him: ‘yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.’ At that moment even Jesus’ narrative is interrupted and he learns to open his own narrative even further so that there is room for the others as well. The woman’s faith allows God to become accessible beyond the borders of Israel.

The cultural interruption of the Christian narrative because of the surrounding de-traditionalisation offers Christians the chance to transform
their narrative into an open narrative (note that this does not signify the
guarantee that this specific narrative is in fact really open). An open –
interrupted – Christian narrative can then not only be culturally credible but
also theologically legitimate. Christians then live out their narrative by
virtue of the interruption that the encounter with the other brings about. In
other words, they profess that Jesus has revealed God as one who breaks
open their narratives in order that they too will be open narratives. The
dialogue with the current culture, the confrontation with the diversity of
religions and fundamental life options, offers them a key to authentically
interpret the specific nature of the Christian narrative for today. The current
cultural interruption of the Christian narrative turns into the opportunity for
appreciating that the interruption is integral to the Christian narrative and,
furthermore, that it is precisely there that God might be at work critiquing
narratives where they are closing in on themselves and indicating new ways
that lead to a deepening of the contemporary state of belief.

The title of this contribution, ‘The shortest definition of religion:
interruptation,’ is an intuition taken from Johan Baptist Metz. He wanted to
make clear by this statement that Christian faith can never slip unpunished
into a sort of bourgeois religion, seamlessly woven into the prevailing
culture and society. After all, such religion seeks an all but too easy
reconciliation thereby forgetting the tragic suffering that human existence is
confronted with. For Metz there can be no Christian faith without tension or
turmoil, without danger or menace. After all, Christians are bearers of the
subversive, dangerous memory of the suffering, death and resurrection of
Jesus Christ. That is why they actively seek out the boundaries of life and
coeexistence, moved as they are by the human histories of suffering that
compels them towards a preferential option for the poor, the suffering and
the oppressed. By its very nature, the Christian faith disrupts the histories of

19 See fn. 1. Johann Baptist Metz is one of the most renowned and influential theologians of
the second half of the twentieth century. For Metz’s theology, see further the collection of
excerpts and articles by Metz that traces the evolution of his ideas: Zum Begriff der neuen
Politischen Theologie, Mainz, 1997.
conqueror and vanquished and interrupts the ideologies of the powerful and the powerlessness of the victims.20

I have tried to show how Metz’s intuition can also be inspirational for a current theological reflection. I have used the category of ‘interruption’ in a double (even triple) sense and then too in the form of a paradox. I started with the ‘cultural interruption’ of the Christian tradition in our present-day society. For several decades now the transmission of this tradition has well nigh stopped flowing – what is more, many initiatives to spur its growth appear to work counter-productively. Despite (as many as) fifteen years of religious education and catechesis young adults of today are often only minimally and fragmentally initiated. The traditional channels and ways of transmitting tradition appear no longer to work. The relatively unproblematic initiation of yore has been interrupted. The Christian tradition and its community are facing a deep crisis that places their survival, albeit in Western Europe, at stake. But crises might also offer opportunities. It is at this point that I once again took up the term ‘interruption’, this time not merely as a cultural but also as theological category – as Metz did. I suggested that the fact that the Christian faith and its community no longer possess the quasi-monopoly on that which gives meaning in society and culture opens ways towards a rediscovery of that dangerous unrest pertaining to interruption. Faith in Jesus Christ then means precisely the unsettling of a comfortable existence. In this way the Christian narrative comes surprisingly close to what postmodern critical consciousness maintains: all grand identity-forming narratives (the Christian one included) reconcile too quickly and employ inclusion and exclusion mechanisms with respect to the other (if one so chooses, a third form of ‘interruption’). Given that they harbour a blind spot to the tragedy and victims ensuing from this they therefore need to be interrupted. For Christians, however, this occurs in the name of the God who in history has stood on the boundary of time. The paradox that I thus wanted to develop in this contribution is that the ‘cultural interruption’ of the Christian tradition can help in the rediscovery of that theological interruption which constitutes

20 For a detailed sketch and constructive critique of this theological position see among others my Postmoderne politieke theologie? Johann Baptist Metz in gesprek met het actuele kritische bewustzijn, in Tijdschrift voor Theologie 39 (1999) 244-264.
the kernel of Christian faith (and this while in dialogue with postmodern critical consciousness).

For Metz it is particularly the confrontation with suffering that forms the impetus behind his search for a ‘dangerous’ theology of interruption. This confrontation compels him – in keeping with his late modern (neo-Marxist) dialogue partners (such as Adorno, Benjamin and Horkheimer) – towards developing a hermeneutics of suspicion that turns itself against those narratives that reconcile and forget all too easily. Today, however, a second – postmodern – opportunity presents itself. Along with the cultural interruption of the Christian tradition, Christians have at the same time been confronted with (religious) diversity and otherness. Together, they both question Christian faith at its core. Here a theology of interruption tends rather to develop a hermeneutics of contingency, which aims to maintain the radical historical and specific, particular, character of the Christian tradition.

It is however my conviction that such a hermeneutics of contingency, when well understood, includes a hermeneutics of suspicion. I will briefly explain what I mean by this. Attention for the suffering and the oppressed has certainly defined the theological agenda, especially of modern theology, in the second half of the twentieth century. Political theologies were complemented by the addition of liberation theologies, feminist theologies, black theologies, etc. Each of these has been the result of a critical-productive dialogue with forms of late modern social critical consciousness. Whoever chooses to engage in the current dialogue with the postmodern context cannot ignore this theological lesson from the recent past. Otherwise, the rediscovery of one’s own identity and its boundaries in confrontation with the other slip once again all too easily into a closing-in of one’s own narrative. The other then quickly becomes the forgotten one, the one who too quickly becomes shut into or out of our narratives. A hermeneutics of contingency will therefore criticise both Christian narratives and other ideologies whenever their totalitarian aspirations leave out room for what is other and thereby come to victimise it.

21 Metz also alludes to this intuition in his later articles, after 1985, but does not really develop it further. See for instance his Unterwegs zu einer nachidealistischen Theologie, in J. Bauer (ed.), Entwürfe der Theologie, Graz/Vienna/Cologne, 1985, 203-233; and some of the contributions in Zum Begriff der neuen Politischen Theologie.
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The Identity of a Catholic University in Post-Christian European Societies: Four Models

Lieven Boeve

Abstract. — This article reflects on four possible strategies for responding to the growing secularization that is threatening Catholic universities both from without and within. These include the abandonment of all claims to Catholic identity, the reassertion of a distinctively confessional identity, the promotion of the university as a place where so-called Christian values, and humanitarianism in particular, are promoted, and the option to promote Catholic identity in all its particularity by means of an ongoing dialogue with the contemporary pluralistic context. Each of these options say something about both the university’s self-understanding and its perception of its relationship to the culture in which it finds itself. The fourth would seem to do more justice to the tradition, and offer more hope for the future of Catholic universities in an increasingly pluralistic and post-secular context.

Introduction

In this essay I will attempt the difficult task of reflecting upon the specificity of what it means to be a Catholic University in a detraditionalising and religiously pluralising Europe. This exercise is urgent, not only because of the omnipresent and accelerating institutional dechristianisation of the old continent, but also because of growing marketisation in the public and individual spheres, a process whereby the logic of economy threatens to pervade education in universities completely (and also research). In part 1, I will sketch the current context of marketisation and the antidote that Catholic universities, drawing on their spiritual and ethical sources, could offer in response. There is more to education than the production of agents in the economic processes of production and consumption, supply and demand, etc. At the same time I will present the other threat which seems to endanger the profile of Catholic Universities. That is, that the progressive detraditionalisation of the society in which Catholic universities function, does not halt at the front door of the universities, but is mirrored in the religious, ethical and philosophical views and attitudes of staff and students.
Ultimately this process of internal detraditionalisation seems to undermine any resistance to the threat of marketisation. The questions run as follows: how can internally secularising and pluralising Catholic institutions still resist the clutches of the market? What kind of Catholic identity is supporting these efforts? What kind is not? Are drastic measures needed? In Part 2, I will offer four ways in which a Catholic university can answer the challenge of external and internal secularisation, detraditionalisation and pluralisation. Finally, I will argue that the fourth model may offer what is needed to resist the threat of the market.

I. Marketisation and Detraditionalisation: Challenges for Catholic Education

At the European forum one is repeatedly confronted with the complaint that Europe — in other words, the European Union with all its candidate members — should not be reduced to a mere unified market with a shared monetary system. The economic logic of unification ought rather to be embedded in a broader dynamic of political, social, cultural and even spiritual growth. The term ‘embedded’ in this instance means ‘to put into perspective’, or better still, ‘bring into relation with’. Unification is providing Europe with a unique chance to grow into a space in which individuals (and peoples) have the capacity to realise their deepest potential in the widest sense of what it means to be a human person. This is what we call ‘the European dream’.

*The Marketisation of Europe*

In reality, however, this dream is far from evident. The logic of the market continues to be the powerful driving force behind the unification process, a driving force that is also making its mark in a variety of different domains. This is not unique to Europe, since it also has its place within the more all-embracing globalisation movement that is in turn connected to the so-called postmodern and post-ideological climate. In an insidious manner, the logic of economics has taken the place of the ‘master narratives’ or the ideologies that have tended to inspire modern Europe up to the present. In arenas such as political and social issues, problems with human rights and world peace, cultural creativity and productivity, the calculus of economics has acquired a decisive voice. Many in Europe look upon this evolution with some degree of sadness and are calling for a Europe that is concerned with the entire person and with society as a whole; a political, social, cultural and spiritual Europe.
It has been suggested in this regard that a spiritual Europe ought to be a place in which reflection can be honoured with respect to the deepest questions of religion and other fundamental life options concerning the meaning of human life and social existence, history and the world. Such reflection tends to go hand in hand with a number of particularly concrete concerns from our personal day to day lives (the meaning of life and death, for example, of long-term family relationships and even less-enduring encounters, etc.) and our social existence (such as economic development, the state of world peace after September 11th, 2001, etc.). All things considered, the most powerful source of resistance to all-embracing marketisation is to be found in the appeal for a spiritual Europe. The Catholic Church, among others, is convinced that it can offer direction in our response to these concerns and questions.

The tension between marketisation and the European dream is also evident in the world of education. Indeed, education as such has become a theme in the negotiations of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), in the context of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). It goes without saying that this has consequences for our perception of things. Education would appear to have become a service to be located within the dynamic of supply and demand, producer and consumer, costs and benefits. The rectors and administrators of a number of universities and institutes of higher education (brought together under the European University Association) recently protested against the unadulterated economic evaluation of the availability of education. In the struggle for

1. See e.g. texts of the former Chair of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, such as: Réunir l'Europe: Notre mission historique (Wallenberg Conference, Aspen Institute, November 14, 1999); published on the webpage of Groupement d'études et de recherches Notre Europe: http://www.notre-europe.asso.fr/Richets/Disours/1199.pdf; and even more explicitly: Esprit évangelique et construction européenne (Conference in the Cathedral of Strasbourg, 07.12.1999); published on the webpage of Groupement d'études et de recherches Notre Europe: http://www.notre-europe.asso.fr/Richets/Disours/1199.pdf.

2. See e.g. Pope John Paul II's post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Exsultet in Europa (d.d. 28.06.2003), written with reference to the Second Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/ apost_exhortations). See also the recent book of then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, Values in a Time of Upheaval (New York: Crossroad, 2005).

3. See the World Trade Organisation's webpage on the current negotiations as regards 'educational services': http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/elserv_e/education_e/education_e.htm

4. More information on the website of the EUA: GATS (WTO) and the implications for higher education in Europe (http://www.unige.ch/eua): "In September 2001, EUA signed a Joint Declaration with North American partners [...]. It stated that: - Higher education is a public good and must continue to be regulated by legitimate public authorities.
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Europe, an appropriate evaluation of education is of crucial importance since the large-scale diffusion of knowledge and attitudes has its primary source in the educational establishments. An educational system that is only concerned with the production of ready-made, market-oriented graduates would probably leave the European dream in tatters. The reverse, however, is also true. Education has the potential to play an important role in taking the necessary steps towards the ultimate fulfilment of the European dream by stimulating a broader perspective on the human person, society and the world, and by introducing young people to a set of values which go beyond the purely material. In order to achieve this goal, education can avail itself of the richness of Europe's humanistic and religious traditions that have their roots in a multiplicity of civilisations and historical periods. Likewise, the lessons learned by 'trial and error' in both past and present Europe are of great significance. In the midst of diversity, they give form to what can be called a rich, plural and multilayered European identity.

Catholic education clearly has a contribution to make in this process. In the first instance of course, and in line with every other educational institution, Catholic education is primarily concerned with the more general task of forming children and young people in the best possible way. At the same time, however, Catholic education is aware of the demands introduced by its faith engagement. The Christian inheritance thus provides the additional foundation for its educational project. In addition to—and in the midst of—its general educational responsibilities, the spiritual dimension becomes a focal point. Does Catholic education have the capacity to succeed in such an endeavour? What, indeed, is the specific contribution of the Catholic university to the dream of a spiritual Europe?

The Detraditionalisation of Europe

Stemming the advancing tide of economic logic is clearly among the most important tasks in this regard, both within the educational system and outside it. As we have said, the promotion of a broad for-

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- The GATS regime should not be applied indiscriminately to higher education without a clear understanding of its nature as a mix of public and commercial activities.
- The GATS could stifle the national development of higher education in developing countries.
- Given the internationalisation efforts of universities, there is a need to monitor and evaluate quality. These rules, however, must not emanate from the WTO but from the higher education sector itself.
mation of young people, one which includes the spiritual dimension, is of great significance. Reference to a fundamental Christian reflection on what it means to be human and to have a social existence, on history and the world, and on the engagement of men and women in the promotion of a fuller life both as individuals and as a society, are of primary importance. For the Catholic University, however, this task is hampered by an all-embracing process of detraditionalisation that is slowly but surely spreading throughout Europe as a whole. While religious sentiments may or may not have disappeared, and in some instances may even be enjoying something of a renaissance (a suggestion many sociologists would call into question), nevertheless the traditional, institutional religions have lost significant ground and in many places, at least among the younger generations, this has been reduced to a critical minimum. Affiliations with classical churches have diminished while new religious movements have emerged. As a result, many men and women have sought to fulfil their 'religious' needs on what one might call the new religious market. In many instances, the Catholic Church has found itself reduced to the role of one player among many in such a market. This has given rise to a number of curious paradoxes. I will take the situation in Flanders as an example in this regard since it is the one with which I am most familiar. It will also provide the background for the remainder of this article.

While more or less three quarters of young people in Flanders between the ages of 12 and 18 still attend Catholic schools, and more than half of the older ones are students at Catholic universities and high-schools, more and more Flemish people consider themselves as not really belonging to the Church in spite of the fact that they have been baptised. Research has shown that 54% of Flemish Catholics consider themselves to be on the margins of the Church, only calling upon its services at transitional moments in their lives. The figures concerning Sunday mass attendance are even more harrowing: only 4% of the youngest generation attend Sunday mass on a regular basis (the oldest generation 34%). Even for the traditional rites of passage that have tended to enjoy reasonable success in Flanders (some argue that this is due to a lack of real alternatives) the trend is far from positive. In 1967, for example, statistics show that 96% of children were baptised; in 1999, the percentage had dropped to 73 (for Belgium as a whole 64%). The figures for Church marriages have fallen from 92% in 1967 to 51% in 1999. In terms of absolute figures, the Church has become a minority in what was once a traditionally Catholic country. If actual Christian engagement is anything to go by (certainly with respect to the younger generations), the figures can
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hardly be described as encouraging; only 15% of Catholics can be considered ‘engaged’ believers.\(^5\)

In concrete terms, this means that the Catholic schools, including the Catholic universities, which still tend to attract a large group of young people, have been forced to undergo an internal process of secularisation, or better still pluralisation, on account of the all-embracing detraditionalisation with which they have been confronted. Here too Catholics, and in particular those Catholics who consider themselves engaged believers, have become a minority. It is not without reason that the Catholic education system, together with many other Catholic organisations that in the past have shaped the Catholic ‘pillar’ in Flemish society (next to smaller socialist and liberal-atheist pillars),\(^6\) has been struggling for many years with its own identity. The foundations upon which these social pillars have been resting have succumbed to serious erosion. It is not surprising, therefore, that with the absence of Christian Democrats in the Belgian government – for the first time in decades – certain organisations have scrapped the ‘C’ (for Christian or Catholic) from their name. This identifying title had evidently become a hollow phrase without substance.

It is for this reason that the question of the contribution of Catholic universities in providing Europe with a potential to resist its marketisation, cannot be answered without an examination of the way in which Catholic education has the potential to fulfil such a task. What, for that matter, is a Catholic university? Do such institutions still have a future? Do they still have meaning in a detraditionalised Europe? How should they present themselves as in the service of Europe on behalf of the Church?

\(^5\) These statistics can be found in Karel Dobbelare, Mark Elchardus, et al., Verloren schijnheid: De Belgen en hun waarden, overtuigingen en houdingen (Tielt: Lannoo, 2000).

\(^6\) In Flanders, as well as in the Netherlands, Austria, etc., the Church reacted to the modernisation process by constructing an enormous Catholic web of organisations, services, unions and facilities that structured the lives of its own members – often the majority of the inhabitants – from birth to death and accorded them meaning. Hereby the logic of functional differentiation was respected while at the same time the Catholic religious horizon remained in place. This resulted in a very extensive network of Catholic pre-school centres, schools, hospitals and homes for the elderly, cultural, sports, trade, political, socio-economic unions and organisations. For an account of ‘pillarisation’, see Karel Dobbelare, Godsdienst en kerk in een gecentraliseerde samenleving, ed. Rudi Laermans (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1998) 85-167 (Part 2: ‘Over secularisatie en verzorging’); see also his “Secularisation, Pillarisation, Religious Involvement and Religious Change in the Low Countries,” World Catholicism in Transition, ed. T. Gannon (New York: MacMillan, 1988) 80-113.
II. Reconceiving the Identity of Catholic Universities: Four Options

Introductory Remarks

Let me begin by briefly outlining two limitations of the exercise in which I will engage. First, the four options that I am about to sketch are related to the context with which I am most familiar: Flanders. I am acutely aware that the educational landscape and the place of the Catholic Church in Flanders may differ significantly from other regions and countries and from the situation of the Church and the Christian faith as a whole. Broadly considered, however, Europe as a whole tends to have been affected by the trend towards detraditionalisation, often referred to in the past as secularisation. Secondly, as will soon become evident, the four options upon which I am about to elaborate might be better described as conceptual ideals rather than concrete alternatives. Each takes its point of departure from a specific analysis of an actual situation and endeavours to propose an appropriate profile for a Catholic university in contemporary Europe. Taking both these limitations into consideration, I remain convinced that, mutatis mutandis, the four options provide the basis for a reflection on the (re)configuration of the Catholic identity of schools and universities in many contexts. In other words, I trust that the analyses and ideas I will offer concerning the Flemish context will provide points of comparison and stimulate further reflection, even though they may not be immediately applicable in every situation and context.

For the sake of clarity, it might be wise to briefly return to my outline of the situation of Catholic education in Flanders. First of all, we are dealing with educational institutions that find themselves confronted with an accelerated secularising and detraditionalising society in which they are still able to maintain their market share — at first sight in spite of secularisation. On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that these institutions are engaged in secularisation and pluralisation from within, from the perspective of staff and students and even with respect to university governance. Nevertheless, the substantial market share remains intact and this would be in part due to the aura of quality and professionalism associated with Catholic education. In this arena Catholic

institutions operate efficiently and in a client-oriented manner as well as taking care to ally themselves to non (or non practising) Christians. Many a time, however, this aura of quality also seems to imply another dimension that is far less evident, one which quite possibly has to do with the perception of an often implicit, underlying (personalistic) value-orientation that associates itself with Christian organisations. Whether the internal secularisation also affects (or has already affected) this continuing perception of value-orientation nowadays, is not obvious at this moment. Alternative educational systems, or so-called 'neutral' public education, have not profited to any significant extent from progressive detraditionalisation and its consequences for the Church. Finally, these organisations remain concerned in the debates between the advocates and opponents of (Catholic) pillarisation. Here it is not always clear whether recent pleas for de-pillarisation are not in fact disguised attempts to ban religions and worldviews from the public life. The formation of governments without the Christian Democrats has meanwhile placed this issue at the top of the agenda. Moreover similar pleas take advantage of the growing call for the rationalisation of institutions, people and resources. To an increasing degree a detraditionalised society hardly appears to divide people on the basis of different fundamental life options. Why then not drastically restructure society by eliminating the ideological divisions in the organisation of public life (health care, education, cultural, social and economic organisations, etc.)?

Each of the four options outlined here will propose elements of a response, both at the analytical and the normative levels, to the question concerning the fundamental profile being practised in the actual context, on the one hand, and the desired fundamental profile on the other.

The first two options would appear to be the most drastic: institutional secularisation versus institutional reconfessionalisation. In the first instance, the 'C' is officially dropped and the Catholic background and inspiration no longer plays an explicit role for the internal organisation, education, research and other services rendered. For example, the 'Catholic University of Leuven' then becomes 'University of Leuven', an institution in which Christians still may participate – but not necessarily so. On the other end of the spectrum an active repurposing of the university as 'Catholic' is envisaged. This implies among other things the acknowledgement that an explicit and encompassing 'Catholic' identity of the university is in fact its raison d'être and the formation of Catholic intellectuals its chief aim. This naturally has consequences for the recruitment

8. For this concept, see note 6.
of staff members and students. Although it is often feared that such reconfessionalisation would result in a ghetto-university, this need not necessarily be the case.

The remaining two options represent a qualified relationship between the Christian faith and culture: they either endeavour to establish a broad-based basic platform for Catholic education inspired by so-called Christian values or seek to establish a new profile for the Christian faith in a university in which a plurality of fundamental life options among students and staff is both recognised and respected. As regards the first of these two strategies: this option favours 'sensitivity to and education of values from a Christian perspective' and is still being taken on a large scale in Flemish Christian public organisations. What is being sought after is a project that is still linked to Christian values – a kind of Christian humanism – in which non-believers can also engage. In fact, this option strives for an as large as possible consensus between belief and culture (which because of advancing detraditionalisation is becoming increasingly more generalised, less specifically Christian). As regards the second strategy mentioned, a shared consensus inspired by Christianity no longer constitutes the point of departure for establishing the profile of the Catholic university, but rather the recognition of both internal and external plurality at the level of fundamental life options on the one hand and the specific character of the Christian faith in such a context on the other.

In other words, an effort is made to provide the Christian faith with a recognisable presence in the midst of plurality based on the conviction that it continues to offer meaning in a relevant way, even in the context of plurality. Students and personnel, whatever their convictions may be, are thus challenged to reflect on their fundamental life options in dialogue and/or confrontation with the Christian faith tradition.

For a proper understanding it is also necessary to remark in advance that now and then a distinction needs to be made, firstly, between what is institutionally held as the desired profile and what is actually practised by this institution, and secondly, what is intended institutionally and what is practised by individuals or groups from this institution. Further, these options are formulated as ideal-types, and function as models to engender further reflection, rather than accurately describing existing institutions, even if it remains true that these models can be repeatedly illustrated with concrete examples.

Finally, each option takes, grosso modo, a particular stand with respect to five variables – giving responses to five questions: (a) What is the desired fundamental profile at the institutional level? What influence does this have on the educational project? (b) What basic supports are
present and/or necessary for the establishment of such a profile and who is to maintain them? (c) What motives legitimate the acquired profile both from the cultural perspective and from that of the believer and theology? (d) What strategies should be followed in order to realise the establishment of this profile? What measures and signs, both in internally (ad intra) and with respect to society at large (ad extra), might help in this regard? At last (e): what are the primary difficulties that might tend to hamper the realisation of such an option today?

1. Institutional secularisation

_Catholic universities transform themselves into pluralistic educational institutions in which the Christian faith has its place among other fundamental life options, and thus no longer enjoys any primacy or privilege._

(a) Our first option is to allow for _institutitional secularisation_ as a consequence of the secularisation and pluralisation process at work in society at large and within the Flemish Catholic university in particular. The establishment of such a profile tends to result in a neutral or neutral-pluralistic institution, an institution in which Christians are present although not necessarily so. Explicit reference to the Christian tradition out of which a particular institution has evolved (for example in the name it adopts) is then abandoned. This is comparable to the path which the former explicitly Christian organisation of small enterprises (NCMV), now the union of self-employed entrepreneurs (UNIZO), has taken; as well as the French-speaking Belgian Christian Democrats in changing their name into 'Centre Démocratique Humaniste'. Given the transformations at work in society as a whole, such a process of institutional secularisation would be far from unusual. One can expect that more organisations from the former Christian pillar will go in the same direction.

As a matter of fact, such a development would simply constitute an adaptation of the university’s profile to reality, at least in such instances where the process of detraditionalisation is tangible at every level and has clearly had its effect on the necessary support systems of the Catholic university as such. This need not constitute an immediate problem for Christians. As is the case in other non-confessional organisations, the Christian faith can, in principle, have a role to play where Christians are sufficient in number and where they become involved in discussions concerning the direction the organisation desires to follow. An evident advantage of institutional secularisation is the fact that an organisation’s _raison d’être_ is no longer subject to frequent confrontation with mechanisms intent on limiting its scope. The latter consist of those who stubbornly
desire to uphold the strictly Catholic profile of the organisation (even though the support systems no longer exist) as well as those who take offence at such a profile because it reminds them of a period in which the Catholic Church had a monopoly in matters concerning personal fundamental life options.

(b) It is important, however, that we avoid potential misunderstandings in this regard. A neutral or pluralistic organisation, or in our case a no longer explicitly Christian organisation, continues to maintain a profile at the level of fundamental life options. Indeed, a distinction has to be made between the conscious refusal to uphold any profile (neutrality) on the one hand and the explicit acceptance of internal plurality (pluralism) on the other. Both are radically divergent fundamental options. Pluralistic organisations maintain, in principle, openness for debate on matters of faith and other fundamental life options and are expected to stimulate the establishment of a culture in which such debate can take place. Christians in such circumstances are free to introduce explicitly their particular perspective. In the case of explicit neutrality, however, the debate in question is silenced and neither Christians nor non-Christians have the freedom to make a difference. Neutrality in such instances is often far from neutral. Where it is claimed, there are often unexpressed fundamental life options at its foundations, stemming from positivistic motivations and/or naïve Enlightenment thinking. Neutrality, it would seem, is then only one among many of the fundamental life options, a participant in the debate rather than an uninvolved observer maintaining the capability to watch from a distance and judge independently.

(c) From the cultural perspective, such a movement can be motivated by insisting that the secularisation process has thus been effected at the institutional level: the logic of detraditionalisation is realised at the societal level. For Christians, however, this manoeuvre can also be motivated at the theological level. Institutions that are no longer de facto in the majority Christian, and in which many of those involved no longer confess themselves either explicitly or implicitly to be members of the Catholic Church, might be better advised to avoid the reference to Christian or Catholic in their identifying title. To neglect to change titles would be to encourage confusion with respect to the specificity of the Christian faith and to hinder the renewal of the profile and promotion of the faith and the church in a plural society and culture. In such a university a new, no longer exclusively Christian education project can head in a resolutely pluralistic direction (even taking into account its Christian roots if it chooses). Students then are formed as broad-trained intellectuals and experts, who are ready to participate actively in the contemporary
culture and society of radical plurality and difference as regards people's fundamental life options and religious affiliations.

(d) To follow this option is to recognise ad intra an already existing neglect and blurring of identity and to relieve the internal pressure from detrivialisation. A number of symbols are likely to vanish in the process – the 'C', the official Eucharistic celebration at the beginning of the year and on the Patron's feast, and any general obligations regarding religious education. Probably the disciplines of religious studies and world religions would be more extensively developed at the faculty of theology and religious studies, or, next to a Catholic faculty, faculties of other denominations or religions would be added. Christians are nevertheless set free to organise themselves as Christians in a voluntary manner within the pluralistic institution. The option for Catholic religious education side by side with courses dealing with other fundamental life options might attract an interested public etc. The advantages ad extra are legion: the inheritance of the politics of 'pillarisation' is abandoned; religion is no longer a stumbling block in discussions concerning the rationalisation of the educational landscape or the recruitment of personnel and students. It would also facilitate the actions of the university in the political arena, e.g. to get supplementary funding.

(e) The question remains, however, as to whether the achievement of a genuinely pluralistic university is not a matter of biting off more than one can chew in the current Flemish context. Present day Flanders would still appear to be caught up in processes of identity blurring rather than in processes in which specifying one's identity and establishing a degree of respect for plurality and otherness at the level of fundamental life options is valued as crucial for the future of society. Moreover – and partly as a consequence of increasing marketisation – the space liberated by detrivialisation for the play of multiple fundamental life options faces the danger of being unobtrusively filled by a sort of libertarian ideology of individual freedom. Anything goes – what is considered true, good and beautiful is actually arbitrary and dependent on individual preference. The demand for such an absolutised freedom limits every form of social regulation and stands open to being devoured by the process of marketisation. Freedom thus becomes the freedom of the consumer, dictated by supply and demand, by marketing and purchasing power.

2. Institutional Reconfessionalisation

_Catholic education aims at the explicit expression of its Catholic identity and organises its educational system for Catholics and by Catholics._
(a) The option for institutional secularisation, which is the adaptation of one's profile to the reality of detraditionalisation, is not, however, the only plausible procedure. Equally conceivable, if at first sight more difficult to realise, is the option for institutional reconfessionalisation. A reconfessionalised Catholic university presents itself as an educational establishment intended for the formation of Catholic students. Its formation project is formulated and legitimised on the basis of its strong association with the Christian faith and the Catholic faith community in Flanders. In France, a country where detraditionalisation and pluralisation are more distinctly noticeable, such confessional institutions exist and are relatively successful (consider, for instance, the Institut Catholique in Paris).

(b) Concerning the necessary basis, reconfessionalisation presumes that a substantial number of the students and personnel practise their Catholic faith and are actively engaged in the Catholic faith community. Given the fact of widespread secularisation, such universities will no longer be likely to enjoy the status of majority institutions. Nevertheless, if developments analogous to those in France persist here as well, they are not likely to fade away altogether. The Catholic profile of such an institution can vary from highly conservative and defensive to open and communicative. While the fear that such institutions will necessarily form closed ghettos is generally unfounded (and probably a residue of modern criticism of religion and Church) it remains a risk, nevertheless, and calls for a degree of ongoing caution. Catholic intellectuals, however, need not be viewed as narrow-minded cultural misfits. Rooted in a self-conscious familiarity with their own traditions and perspectives and embedded in the current plural context, they have the capacity to participate actively in society and culture and thus contribute to the formation of plurality as such. The same critical-loyal attitude is also to be expected of them within the Church. Catholic intellectuals stand at the forefront of the unrelenting recontextualisation movement towards which Christian faith is challenged. After all, faith is not about a collection of other-worldly truths. As truth-to-live-by, Christian faith has time and again to be recontextualised due to changes in the surrounding contexts in which it is involved. Indeed recontextualisation is an ongoing task driven by the unceasing dialogue that exists between Christian truth claims and culture and society. Because of this there is a legitimate diversity also within Catholic belief and community life.

(c) While the feasibility of reconfessionalisation in the current Flemish context would appear to be a matter of dispute, the plausibility of it is not. Open reconfessionalisation can be legitimised on both cultural
and theological grounds. At the cultural level, there is no need to assume that the de-pillage of education will lead to overall 'sameness'. It can also facilitate legitimate plurality in terms of educational projects. This second option, therefore, can also be seen as a consequence of the logic of social detraditionalisation. From the theological perspective, it is a foregone conclusion that a Catholic educational project would be impossible without a substantial and active bond with the Christian faith and the Catholic faith community. Faith is not something one possesses, it is a dynamic reality made concrete in one's life, experienced in community and celebrated ritually.

(d) A project supported from within, in which the specificity of the Christian faith is given its proper place, calls for appropriate management, especially with respect to the recruitment of personnel. Side by side with quality and efficiency, religious matters will also have a significant role to play in the policies of such management. Identity is clearly more than the application of a label or the insistence on a particular name. Furthermore, reconfessionalisation demands that the institution ascribes to an unambiguous and public Christian identity via, among other things, an educational project that explicitly facilitates spirituality and faith formation in addition to its more classical educational objectives. In the external forum, reconfessionalisation has the right to appeal to a — at least in Belgium — constitutionally guaranteed 'freedom of education'.

(e) It goes without saying, however, that a (high) price will have to be paid in this regard. Fundamental life options thus acquire a more explicit role than ever before as an argument in the discussion surrounding the educational landscape. Whether society as such is ready to provide the necessary means for such a project — in Belgium all education is state-funded — remains open to question.

3. The modern Catholic educational project

Teaching values from a Christian perspective — a university for all those who share the Christian values

(a) Options one and two stand in significant contrast to option three. The profile subscribed to in the third option is that of the teaching of values from a Christian perspective. This option has tended to enjoy a degree of priority in the many organisations and institutes of the Flemish Catholic pillar in the last decades. Catholic schools and universities had become increasingly aware that both their public and their personnel had undergone a significant degree of secularisation, even though
they may have belonged to the Christian tradition that was ultimately responsible for guiding them through individual, family, social and cultural existence. Riding the waves of both external and internal secularisation, this option reformulates the Catholic teaching project into a conglomerate of so-called Christian values that have the potential to appeal to both non-Christians and post-Christians. The various identity profiles, charters, mission statements, brochures and congresses stemming from the 70's and 80's and surviving in some cases up to the present day are a good illustration of this tendency. In each instance, those responsible endeavoured to establish a still binding common basis that was then elaborated in Christian terms. The world of ethics tended to be the primary source in this regard. Christian inspiration was identified with the tradition of Christian values. To be a Christian was to be at the service of humanity as a whole, to be active in one's solidarity with the weak, the wounded, and the persecuted. While this was occasionally placed in the context of vague religious sentiment, it was rarely founded in a personal option for and explicit relationship with God. It remains a question as to whether one can presume that many such values were also practised and passed on in non-Catholic institutions staffed by dynamic and motivated personnel. According to those who support the second option (as well as the fourth) such a determination of a university's profile has led inevitably to an insidious secularisation of the Christian faith via ethics. For the supporters of the first option, both Christians and non-Christians, it has led to a concealed ideologisation.

(b) In broader terms, such determination of a university's profile endeavoured to achieve the best consensus possible between the prevailing culture and the Christian faith. It was presumed, in support of this procedure, that a substantial number of the institution's members considered the so-called Christian values to be at the very least important.

(c) From the cultural perspective this third option was motivated as follows. If one takes secularisation seriously, the Christian faith can only continue to have any kind of binding force if it is translated into a general and communicable core of values that even non-Christians recognise as worthwhile. The dynamic of secularisation itself is clearly recognisable

here: the Christian faith is stripped of its mythological framework and presented in its human significance. Theologically speaking, it was argued that ethics formed the best point of contact in building a bridge (correlation) between the Christian faith and the prevailing culture. In addition, it was maintained that one could not distinguish between that which is ‘genuinely Christian’ and that which is ‘genuinely human’. Christians in modern society work together with non-Christians towards greater humanity. From the perspective of the other options, however, it is not always clear whether modern society is recuperating the Christian faith or the other way round.

(d) This option was strategically important — and indeed successful — because it placed the plausibility and relevance of the Christian faith in the foreground. Coexistence between modern culture and the Christian faith was made possible both internally and externally. Christians and Christian organisations, moreover, were considered capable of playing a part in the formation of the aspirations of modernity. In other words, a Catholic university had the capacity to produce ethically formed and responsible subjects who could take on the role of pioneers in modern society. The Catholic university was thus far from ‘dangerous’ in terms of one’s fundamental life options.

(e) Recent history has revealed, however, that such a search for the lowest common denominator has tended to overemphasise ethics and detach it de facto from the life of faith as a whole that ultimately has its roots in a commonly experienced relationship with the God of Jesus Christ. At the very least, many aspects and practices of the faith tended to be relativised and even functionalised. Many today are conscious of the fact that the ‘Christian elaboration’ of ‘Christian values’ without the spirituality of the believer is merely a reduplication of that which can be communicated and transmitted without a Christian label. The very specificity of the Christian faith as such is ultimately the first victim. As long as there was a sufficient overlap between Christian faith and modern culture such a strategy remained convincing, at least for some. This overlap, however, has been wiped out by the process of detraditionalisation. Today, those who too easily presume that the ‘Christian faith’ and ‘prevailing culture’ are part of the same continuum are likely not to take the plurality of ‘fundamental life options’ and religions, and the specific position of the Christian faith therein, seriously.¹⁰

4. Catholic universities at the service of identity formation in a plural context

Identity formation in a plural context, for Christians and non-Christians alike, based on the recognition of an internal and external plurality of fundamental life options and religious, and in dialogue with the Christian faith, which has become more conscious of its own particularity and seeks to profile itself again in this context of plurality.

(a) It is not so simple for the fourth option to find acceptance on a conceptual level. The balances striven for within it are so delicate that distortion or misrepresentation occurs easily. Nonetheless, this option is quite possibly the most fruitful, certainly in current circumstances (even if options one and two are by principle equally plausible). In line with the fourth option, the Catholic university retains its specific signature while recognising the increasing pluralisation and detraditionalisation at work among its students and personnel. As a service to society on behalf of the Catholic Church it takes this altered situation seriously and reconrds its fundamental mission.

This option aims at a renewed Christian profile in a context of religious and non-religious plurality. It presumes (a) the internal detraditionalisation and pluralisation of its students and personnel, and (b) the specific identity of the Christian faith in the midst of such plurality. It no longer presumes the postulation of a broadly Christian and culturally plausible consensus.

The service of the Catholic university to both Church and society consists in the provision of a training ground for fundamental reflection in dialogue or confrontation with the Christian faith. Via its educational programmes, the university teaches its students, both Christian and non-Christian, to reflect on their own fundamental life options and to live side by side with religious and philosophical diversity. In so doing it prepares those in its charge for active participation in a pluralistic, multi- or intercultural society. It considers this to be its social vocation (and also, as we shall see, its theological project). Such a goal, however, does not only imply the formal recognition of plurality, it also implies the adoption of a specific position within this given plurality. This is expressed, for example, in the determination of the primary preconditions for dialogue and confrontation that are acquired through negotiation and dialogue itself rather than as presumed universal principles. The university engages itself in the societal debate, in an analogous manner, multi-voiced if need be, through its research and the services it renders. This option no longer presumes the postulation of continuity between culture and faith. It is aware, rather, of plurality and difference (discontinuity).
This vision of the relationship between plural society and the Christian faith, for the first time, formed the explicit background for the reorganisation of the Roman Catholic religious education programme in secondary schools (1998-2000) in Flanders. One of the primary aims of the reform insists that pupils should be enabled "to account for their own fundamental life option (a) based on an insight into the plurality of fundamental life options characteristic of human speaking, thinking and action and (b) rooted in a dialogue with the meaning offered by the Christian faith in such a context." Religious education is thus a service to the achievement of full humanity of the pupils, both Christian and non-Christian. For the Christians among them, this clearly includes a compelling invitation to accept the challenge to deepen and reflectively clarify their own faith in dialogue with others, thereby themselves developing further the Christian narrative tradition in a contextually embedded manner. Non-Christians are challenged in such a dialogue to examine and reflect upon their own particular profile. The recognition of specificity and difference prevents them from reducing these to indifferent sameness in a broader, all-embracing consensus, and constitutes the specific avenue along which the very process of reflection is conducted.

(b) Such a Catholic project evidently presupposes the presence of a recognisable group of self-aware Christians who are willing to enter into the debate concerning fundamental life options. It likewise calls for the increased visibility of religious plurality. The participants in the debate are not measured in the first instance along the axis between extreme 'churched Christians' and 'secularised not-yet or no-longer Christians' but are located in an arena in which Muslims, Jews, atheists, agnostics, new age adepts etc. also have a place, even though the post-Christian group might still tend to be the largest. This latter group, which stems from an extremely secularised Christian background, only maintains a fragmentary association with the faith and the faith community, expressed, for example, in their occasional (and decreasing) participation in Christian rites of passage and their poor and unintegrated knowledge of the


12. The first condition for this of course is that the Christian faith confronts itself as well with the plurality and learns to understand itself precisely in relation to the plurality of fundamental life options (only when the Christian narrative portrays itself – theologically – to be in a ready state to deal with diversity, it is a living path for today). This is the main idea of my monograph mentioned previously, Interrupting Tradition.
Christian tradition — in spite of years of religious education and (where appropriate) catechesis.

(c) First of all, this fourth option can be motivated on cultural grounds. In a plural context, the preparation of young people for reflection in matters related to religion and other fundamental life options is indispensable. In this broad plural arena, the Christian faith is, structurally speaking, only one option among many. Our society needs people who are able to deal with religious and cultural diversity, who do not consider otherness to be a threat but tend rather to see it as an opportunity for reflection and ultimate enrichment. From the theological perspective, the initial awareness emerges that the confrontation/dialogue with otherness will lead the Christian faith today into a confrontation with its own identity and force it to reconsider its attitude towards the other. The process of theological reflection no longer takes the postulation of continuity between faith and culture as its point of departure but rather the difference between the two. The actual context is thus no longer analysed exclusively in terms of secularisation but primarily in terms of pluralisation. The bridge established by the dialogue with culture is no longer intended to form an all-embracing consensus. Rather, it presents the unique contribution(s) that Christians have to offer with respect to identity formation, society and culture. At the same time, Christians today are becoming more and more aware of the fact that the option for Christian faith is no longer supported by a general Christian cultural sensibility, but that it demands a specific and personal engagement, explained as a response to a prior awareness of being called by the God of Jesus Christ.

(d) The implementation of such a strategy implies — ad intra — that both the recognition of plurality and the Christian identity are given a better profile. Of primary importance in this regard is the avoidance of the trap into which option three has the tendency to fall, namely the facile presupposition of a consensus elaborated as Christian that binds the entire university together. This provides the advantage that both Christians and non-Christians have the freedom to manifest themselves explicitly as such within the university context and enter into dialogue with one another rooted in their own strengths and insights. Christians are thus enabled to speak freely once again on the basis of their own identity, in the knowledge that what they say does not necessarily bind non-Christians. And of course the reverse is of equal importance.

The university thus remains ‘Catholic’ because it is, in the first instance, a Christian service — on behalf of the Church — to society, even though Christians may no longer be in the majority. The social project
maintained by such a service is recognised and financially supported by the society. This implies that society as such is conscious of the value of a project that is not rooted in a perspective of neutrality but one that takes an informed and active plurality at the level of fundamental life options as its point of departure.

It is possible that this fourth option is the only one capable of legitimising a Flemish majority Catholic university worthy of its name. Options one and two remain the only other alternatives, option three in my opinion no longer appearing plausible in this regard. The Catholic university, under option four, becomes a training ground for the Christian faith and the Church community as well as for society as a whole. The Church community is enabled in such a university to interact with the plural public forum that characterises today's society and the society of the future in an exercise both in humility and renewed identification. The Christian faith is likewise challenged to recontextualise its own identity and relevance. As a training ground for society, the university forms intellectuals and experts who are able to interact with the complex and plural world of religion and other fundamental life options, people for whom the plurality and otherness present in a multi-cultural society do not constitute a threat but rather a challenge to openness, depth and communication, in respect for the uniqueness of the other; people who are also aware of the threatening equalisation and disempowerment of the many and the other by the processes of globalisation and marketisation, people who are willing to resist such processes and to mobilise the critical potential of their own traditions in situations of both dialogue and conflict.

(c) A major difficulty facing the realisation of this fourth option is the change of attitude it calls for both in the internal and the external arena. Such a change of attitude requires a degree of maturity that may still be at the developmental stage. From the political perspective, the present day ruling political forces have not yet been able to sufficiently exorcise the ghosts of the old ideological differences. The socio-cultural order would appear to be in the grasp of identity blurring and consumptive libertinism. The transition from analysing the current context in terms of pluralisation rather than secularisation has not yet been fully realised.

Conclusion

First, I have argued in the present contribution that the Catholic Church has the capacity to render a service to a multi-faceted Europe, enabling it to rise above the process of marketisation by presenting it
with an all-embracing educational project in which the human person, society and the world are seen in their totality. Such a project has its roots in non-material values and explicitly provides a space for discussion of and reflection upon profound religious and philosophical questions. Europe can only become a community in the most meaningful sense of the term when it also becomes a spiritual Europe. Christians rooted in their own multi-faceted tradition also have something to offer in this regard.

Second, the question as to the capacity of the Catholic university to offer this service to society on behalf of the Church community has been thwarted to a degree by the increasing detraditionalisation that has led, at least in Flanders, to an internal pluralisation among both students and teachers. It remains possible that a Catholic university will be able to offer such a service where it is able to deal creatively with this internal tension and simultaneously respect plurality and the specificity of the Christian faith. Indeed, the Catholic university has the potential to provide a locus for dialogue between Christians and non-Christians, a locus for reflection on fundamental life options, a locus aimed at preparing young people to consciously participate in a plural, multi-cultural society in which plurality and difference are no longer a threat to one’s own identity but rather an enrichment thereof. It is precisely this attitude that will provide the best resistance to the all-embracing grasp of marketisation and its tendency to subject everything to the unifying undifferentiating logic of the market and to reduce the most fundamental questions facing humanity to a matter of need and fulfilment, supply and demand.

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