

Recontextualisation

Tips on how to (not) secularise your school

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Recontextualisation of Catholic faith and Catholic school identity

What exactly is it?

How to bring it about in a school context?

Recontextualisation

A daily event



'Re-context-ualisation' = description of any formal process whereby something is placed in a new context, thereby receiving renewed meaning and plausibility.

As such, *Recontextualisations* are common and happen all around us, all the time:

- The new layout of the reception area of **municipal administrative services** makes a different type of interaction possible.
- **Coca Cola's** changing mottos over the years: *Always Coca Cola, Enjoy Coca Cola, Real, Make It Real, Open Happiness* create *Recontextualised* views on happiness and consumption. + The shape of the Cola bottle changed over the years, but in such a way that the original product remains recognisable.
- The meaning of **9/11** is *Recontextualised* as relevant contexts change, e.g. immediately after the attacks, after the war in Iraq, after the re-election of George Bush, after the election of Barack Obama, after the death of Osama Bin Laden, et cetera.
- **The birth a child** changes the context and the nature of a marriage, that consequently needs to re-invent itself.
- By renovating my **living room**, my daily life is *Recontextualised*.
- Et cetera!

Recontextualisation of Catholic identity

Fusion of horizons



Fusion of horizons

- The old and the new penetrate each other, forming a unity.
- *Deep encounter* between tradition and contemporary life.
- Intimate and creative *interaction* between text and context.
- Two things are fused with each other in such a way that the original components cannot be separated anymore.

Cf. making a soufflé:

- Creating something new by putting together ingredients.
- Cooking *can* be an act of *Recontextualisation*!
- The taste of the final dish exceeds the sum of the ingredients.
- While cooking, the chef must use *good* ingredients (Catholic tradition).
- No dish tastes the same twice.
- Cooking is an ongoing risk: uncertainty and possibility of failure.

Recontextualisation of Catholic identity

Multi-correlation



Multi-correlation

- **Human experience** can be interpreted in manifold ways.
- **Catholic tradition** can be interpreted in manifold ways.
- **Countless other attempts at correlation** (plural context).

Threefold hermeneutics:

1. Hermeneutics of the **text** (years 1960).
2. Hermeneutics of the **context** (years 1990).
3. Hermeneutics of the interpreting **subject** (present).

Today and towards the future, it will be increasingly difficult to 'fixate' young people in one, dominant, imposed correlation. Young people exist in a **powerful hermeneutical field**: they receive a tremendous amount of input and are seduced to comply with meanings offered everywhere.

Everything is subject to **deconstruction**, also in the church (cf. sexual abuse). People perceive clearly how power claims are involved everywhere.

Positive aspect: people *enjoy* the wealth of meanings, which can be enriching as well.

Life is multi-correlational !

Recontextualisation of Catholic identity

Particularity of the Catholic faith



Particularity of the Catholic faith

While *Christian Values Education* looks for the lowest common denominator / a compromise between Catholics and other-believers, *Recontextualisation* stresses the ***particularity* of the Catholic faith**:

- *Not only Christmas, but also Easter.*
- *Not only life after death, but also the resurrection of the body.*
- *Not only love, but also love for the enemy.*

From experience to Catholic faith, but from Catholic faith to experience as well.

At a certain moment, we need to allow for an *input* in the hermeneutical space. It must be possible to present new content in a deductive way. After all, Jesus Christ should remain a crucial component in all communication, education and learning.

This is contrary to *Christian Values Education*, where faith is to be derived from experience – or from the remaining Catholic *Confessionality*.

Recontextualisation of Catholic identity

Interaction with the context



Interaction with the context

Recontextualisation searches actively for a meaningful dynamic interaction with the context.

Reconfessionalisation, on the other hand, only uses references that are internally Catholic without taking the external world into account.

Recontextualisation

Pieter Paul Breughel (ca. 1520-1569)



Recontextualisation

Bishop Bayton's nativity story in Melbourne city (CEOM)



Artist Bishop John Bayton explains the symbolism of our Christmas wrap

ARTIST AND iconographer Bishop John Bayton has used traditional icons to depict the Nativity story in the context of Melbourne Diocese and City, on TMA's Christmas wrap. This is how he explained his picture:

Christ is shown lying in a manger in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral with His mother Mary. Joseph is seen bottom right in the guise of a young dispossessed client

of the Lazarus Centre, tempted to forget his responsibilities and get on with another life on the Melbourne streets.

A tram on its way from Shepherd's Fields attached to Captain Cook's cottage, symbolises both European civilisation and Indigenous dispossession.

Bottom left is the traditional Byzantine icon of the "Bathing of the Divine Child". The setting here

is the Melbourne Aquarium.

Behind St Paul's Cathedral is the city, with the West Gate bridge leading to Geelong and the southern parts of the Diocese. To the left of the Angel of the Annunciation is the steel Entrance Gateway to the city, at the end of the Tullamarine Freeway.

The series of triangles in the design of Federation Square here are symbols of the Trinity; symbols

of Indigenous culture are seen along the banks of the Yarra.

Flinders Street Station proclaims the possibility of visiting every parish in the Diocese via public transport. Left of St Paul's spire the steel sculpture "Satan's Rings", in the grounds of Heide Gallery, stands for scientific investigation and God's wider creation.

To the right of the Shrine is the icon of the Magi, the Wise Ones

who journey from institutions of learning, here symbolised by the image of Trinity College.

In the background are the wine coloured mountains of the Macedon Ranges, the Dandenongs, Red Hill, the YouYangs and the Otways, while over all is the mysterious serpent-like icon of the Holy Spirit, clothed in the black and white colours of friendly sporting conflict.

Recontextualisation ?

Townsville values poster



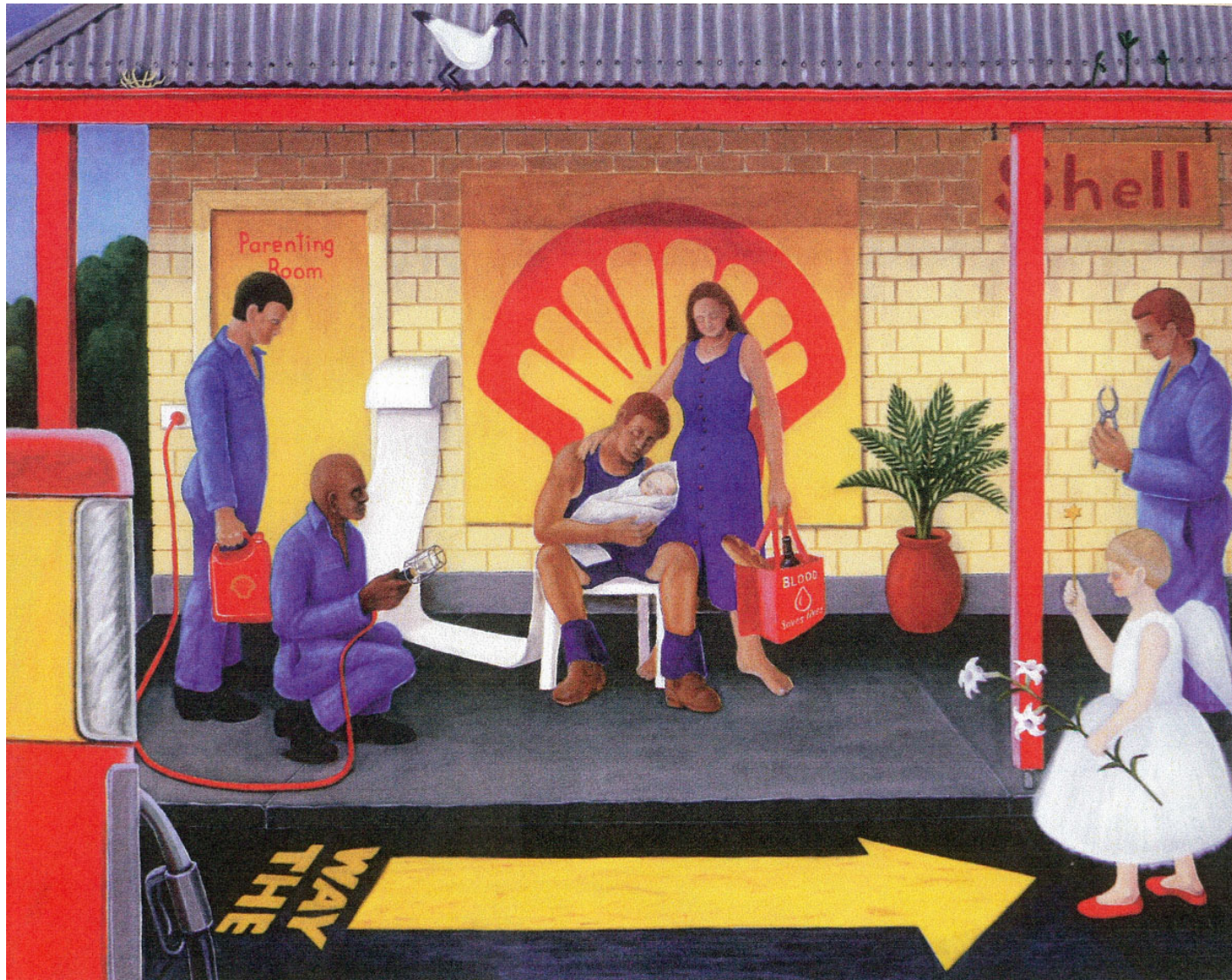
Melbourne Schaal

Recontextualisering van katholieke identiteit



Recontextualisation

Bonding time: the nativity in Townsville, Australia



Andrew Hamilton sj (concept) & Jan Hynes (illustrator)

Recontextualisation

Bonding time: the nativity in Townsville, Australia



Bonding time: the nativity in Townsville, Australia

The location of this picture is a service station, as stables are no longer found in our urban environment. Garage workers replace the shepherds as they tend the newly born baby Jesus. One carries a light (the light that Jesus is to bring to the world); the second carries a tool of his trade, hinting at the instruments of the birthing process; and the third mechanic carries oil (a reference to the handmaiden oil lamps, the good oil spiritual grace, illumination and benediction, the anointing of kings and the perfumed oils mentioned in the New Testament on several occasions). Oil is a symbol in many cultures of consecration, dedication and wisdom.

The golden Shell logo, symbolic of birth (Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, 1482) is commonly used in religious paintings. In many cultures it is linked with conception, regeneration and baptism. It is also a reference to Christian pilgrimage (St Christopher's attribute). Joseph, being a modern father, was present at the birth and holds the baby Jesus, demonstrating the connection of bonding. As there are no swaddling clothes, Jesus is wrapped in lengths of paper towelling, the only thing available at the service station in the parenting room. Some see the paper towelling as a reference to the ancestry of the Old Testament going back to the tribes of Israel. Joseph wears his carpenter's clothes. Mary wears her blue dress, the colour used to suggest spirituality. The dress opens from the front to facilitate breastfeeding her baby. The buttons are red (for blood) and heart-shaped (indicating her love for her baby). Mary carries a red shopping bag bearing the Red Cross slogan of 'Blood saves lives', portending Jesus' death on the cross to save the lives of believers. In the bag a stick of bread and a bottle of red wine represent the sacrament of Communion. The potted palm equates to the Tree of Life (Egypt and Arabia) and the New Testament reference to Palm Sunday. It is also a reference to the Virgin Mary 'you are stately as a palm tree' (Song of Solomon 7:7). The yellow 'The Way' sign on the driveway shows the way to salvation. The arrow points to a young girl dressed in a fairy outfit but evoking an angel as she holds a lily (Christmas/Easter lily) and a gold star (Star of Bethlehem). On the roof is an ibis (the Holy Spirit) and three sprouting seedlings (the Trinity and the three crosses of Calvary).

Recontextualisation

Creative crucifixes



Recontextualisation ?

Jesus Christ Superman



Recontextualisation

Pope Frances releases a dove (CLC)





Exercise in *Recontextualisation*

Halloween at school

Exercise in *Recontextualisation*

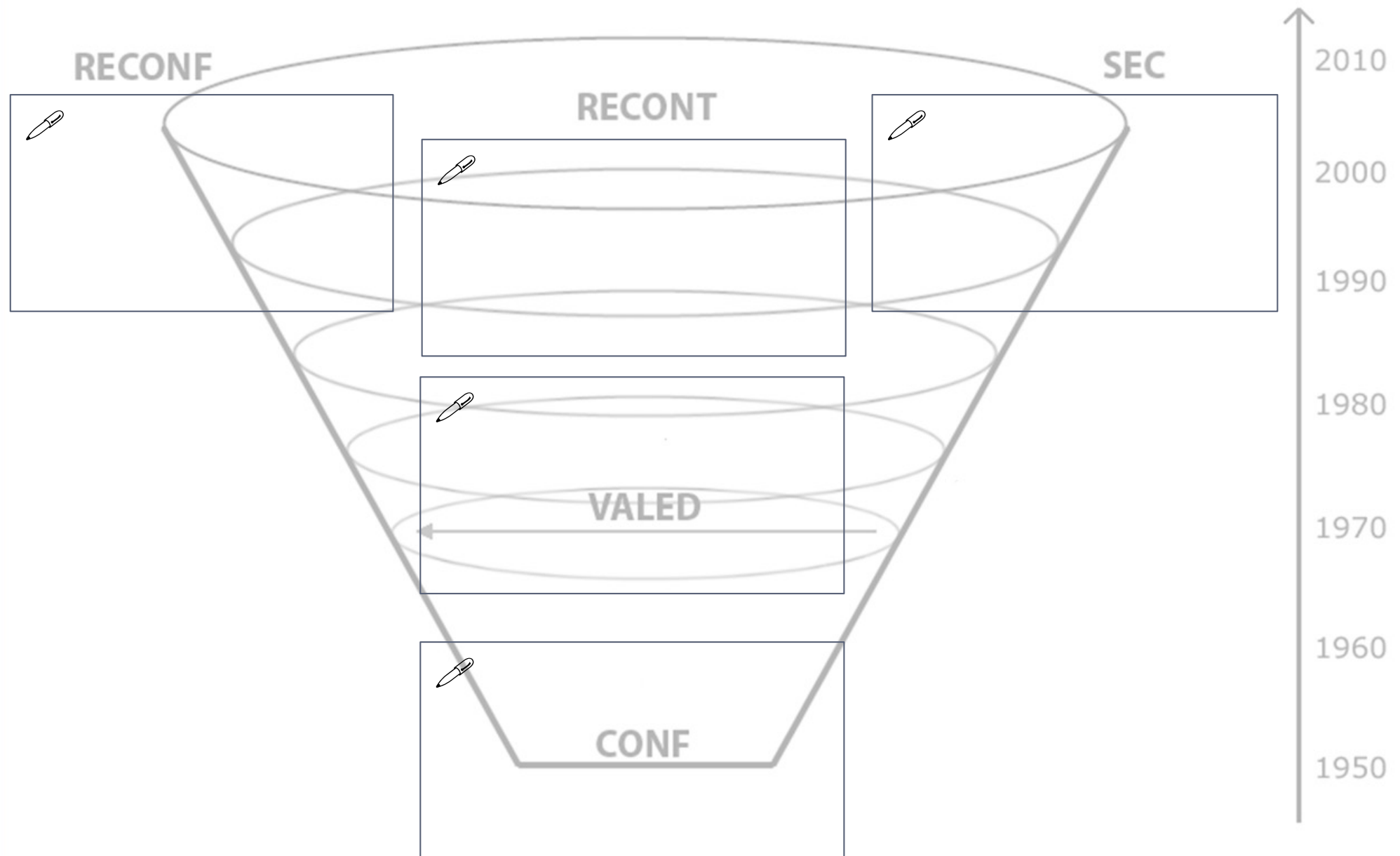
Halloween at school



How to handle the feast of *Halloween* in a Catholic school?



How to handle the feast of Halloween in a Catholic school?



What does it mean to *Recontextualise* Catholic identity in a plural culture, in distinction from the alternatives?

How to handle the feast of Halloween in a Catholic school?



RECONF

Even though the name of Halloween stems from a Catholic holiday called All Hallows' Eve, it is actually not a Catholic feast. The Catholic approach to death is alien to the Halloween practice. We do not have a cult of death! All the occult practices, such as fortune telling or ghost invoking, are forbidden in the Catholic world. Therefore Halloween should not be present in a Catholic school. It would be better to celebrate the Eucharist to remember family members who died last year.

Although the Church teachings focus mainly on life (earthly or eternal) and resurrection, death has also its place there. That is why students should learn about the topic of death – and Halloween is one of the ways that people deal with death. Spending a lesson on Halloween might be a good idea, so that students will get to know its history and traditions. However, there will be no fortune telling nor ghost invoking. Moreover, everyone should realise that it is more significant to light a candle in the church than lighting a candle in a pumpkin.

SEC

Why not Halloween?
It is cool to celebrate such new traditions.
It's simply another way of having fun.

2010

2000

1990

1980

1970

1960

1950

VALED

Halloween refers to the universal experience of death, recognizable by Catholic and non-Catholics. Therefore, it deserves a place in our RE unit on life and death. Celebrating a Halloween day can prepare the children to understand better why Catholics also pay attention to dead people.

CONF

Halloween? What's that? We do not celebrate this in our school. Instead, we are used to celebrate only church feasts such as All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day.

What does it mean to *Recontextualise* Catholic identity in a plural culture, in distinction from the alternatives?



How to secularise your school: 20 tips

Some handy tips on how to lose your school's Catholic identity

**"Irony is the highest
expression of earnesty."**

(S. Kierkegaard)

How to secularise your school: 20 tips

Interactive group work: PROCESS



Step 1. Prof. Pollefeyt presents two tips to *Secularise*.

Step 2. Tables, round one

- a) Reflecting on: the first tip for *Secularisation*
- b) Reflecting on: the comments to resist *Secularisation* and to effect *Recontextualisation* instead.
- c) Sharing your reflections with the group.

Step 3. Tables, round two

- a) Reflecting on: the second tip for *Secularisation*
- b) Reflecting on: the comments to resist *Secularisation* and to effect *Recontextualisation* instead.
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Secularise your school!

TIP 1: The logo.



Stop using the full name of your school. Use an abbreviation instead to easily eliminate those pesky saints' names, symbols or the words 'Catholic' or 'Christian'.

This turns your school name into a functional label that avoids making any reference to the Catholic origins of the school.

REFLECTION:

Look at your own school logo. Does it refer to the Christian inspiration or the founding fathers of your school? Or is it (in a way) secularised?

Do you view this logo as positive, negative, or neutral? Has your view changed? Explain.



Suggestion 1 to *Recontextualise*.



A logo can be a meaningful expression of the identity of a Catholic school, but only if it seamlessly, creatively and subtly continues to make reference to the philosophical and Christian foundations and character of the school (even if only through a wink or double entendre).

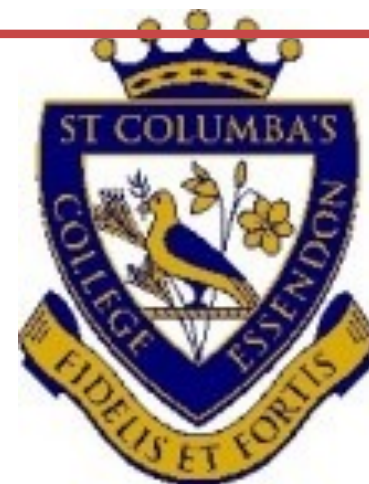
REFLECTION:

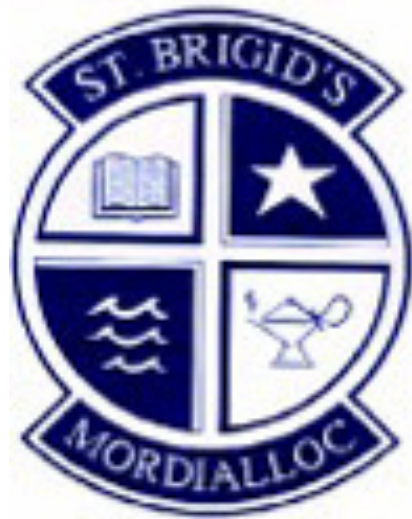
Do you recommend changing your logo so it more clearly symbolises the Christian inspiration of the school? Why or why not? Is the logo really Recontextualising? Or rather Reconfessionalising, or Secularising?

What kind of identity do you want incorporated into the logo? In other words, what is the spirit of your school? How do you refer to the Christian inspiration?

How would you 'adapt' the logo today so it refers to the tradition again in a Recontextualised way? Make concrete suggestions and jot some down. You might even create a competition for the students to design the first draft of the new logo, linked to the school's Christian history.







Secularise your school!

TIP 5: An 'other' space.



Turn the old school chapel into an eating hall, meeting room or, for a slightly more modern touch, a computer lab.

Not only can you make thrifty use of scarce resources, you can also leapfrog the difficult question of how sacred spaces should be refurnished today.

REFLECTION:

Are there sacred spaces in your school? Are these in regular use? How is it used: as a sacred space or in some other way?

Does the school need a sacred space? Why or why not? What would be the 'function' of a sacred space?



Suggestion 5 to *Recontextualise*.

Rediscover the value of chapels and other places as *sacred spaces* – as places that are precisely *not* functional. They are consciously 'different', deliberately *interrupting* the everyday logic of the school.

A good sacred space is at the heart of the school. It reflects the core of its identity. It is a place where one feels 'at home' and can grow – where people encounter each other and God. It is a place one enjoys coming to, is proud of, and wants others – such as visitors – to see.

REFLECTION:

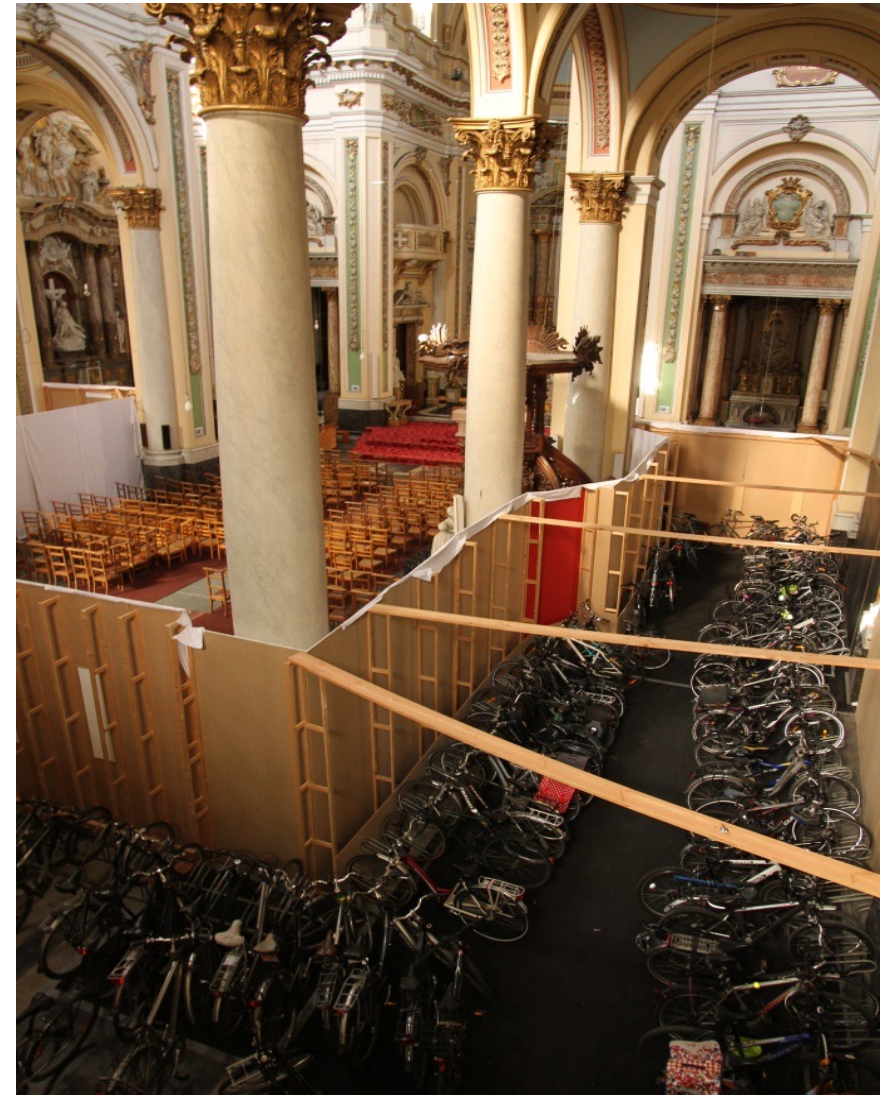
Which room at your school could be set apart as a sacred space? How would you organise the space?

How would you refer to the Christian inspiration in this space? Which "activities" would you want to take place?



Melbourne Scale

Institutional Secularisation



Melbourne Scale

Recontextualisation of Catholic identity



The renovated 'Manresa Chapel'
in a secondary Jesuit college in Flanders.



Modern school chapel of Nazareth Catholic
College in Findon, Australia.

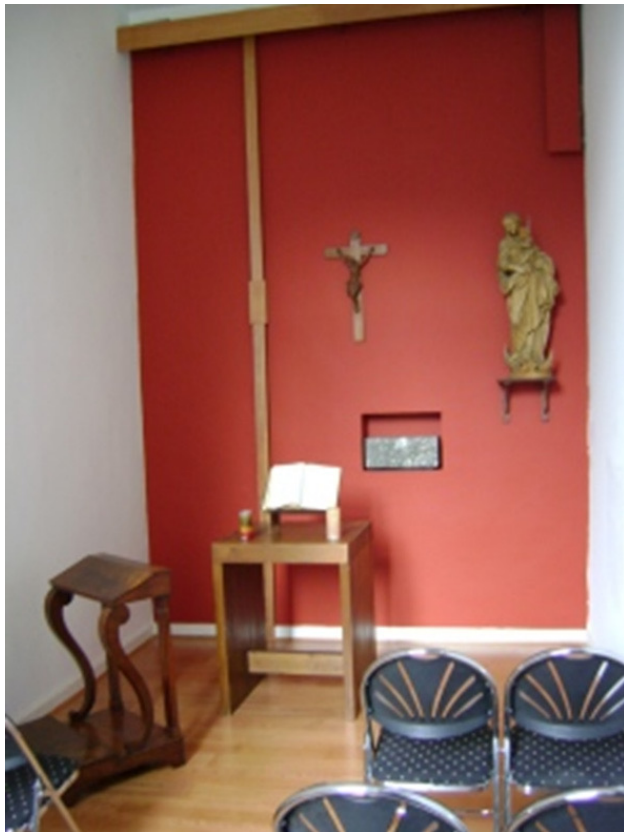


Melbourne Scale

Recontextualisation of Catholic identity



The renovated 'Manresa Chapel'
in a secondary Jesuit college in Flanders.



Compromise: a traditional prayer chapel
in the adjacent room

Modern school chapel of Nazareth Catholic
College in Findon, Australia.



Compromise: traditional Marian devotion
at the request of the Polish cleaning ladies

Melbourne Scale

Institutional Secularisation



How to secularise your school: 20 tips

Interactive group work: PROCESS



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Secularise your school!

TIP 2: Stuff it in the garage.



The past is the past, so why should we continue to concern ourselves with the history of the school, its religious roots and its originally Catholic inspiration?

It is better to ground our actions in the 'here and now' rather than in some bygone tradition. You should just pack all that old stuff into crates and stash them away in your garage somewhere.

REFLECTION:

Is there any attention paid to the history of the school and the original Christian inspiration into your school? If yes, when and how?

Do you think it is necessary to keep these religious roots permanently living or is it OK to put these stories in the archive? Explain.



Suggestion 2 to *Recontextualise*.



Who we are and what we do is always situated within an historical context out of which we confront the future. Our current and future identities are inescapably determined by our past – more so than we often imagine.

REFLECTION:

How would you dust off your school's tradition and breathe some new life into your school's historical inspirations?

A few examples might be:

- *Photo collage or some pictures on the wall*
- *Portable exhibition*
- *Section on your school website*
- *Inclusion in the curriculum*
- *Series of articles in the school newspaper*
- *Themed room at the school's open house day*



Secularise your school!

TIP 3: Christian values (the lowest common denominator).



If someone asks you about the identity of your school, just refer to general *values* that look 'Catholic' but are nevertheless shared by everybody, like friendship, solidarity, openness, tolerance and respect. In this way, you can avoid showing any differences with other schools that might put people off. If you stop explicitly talking about the religious aspects of your school, you won't scare away all the ordinary, reasonable people.

REFLECTION:

Does this example of 'Christian values' look similar to what's in your school?

Is it imperative to bring the Christian identity of the school to the forefront or do you think it's unnecessary or even not done to keep the school's religious aspect nominal?



Suggestion 3 to *Recontextualise*.



Christianity is characterised by its **countercultural witness and vulnerability**. It's not for nothing that its primary symbol is the cross.

GOD as Father, Son and Spirit / a radical love of neighbour (even for the enemy) / the catastrophe of the cross – and the resurrection / the eschatological expectation that goes against all doubt / the abundance that surpasses all worldly measures / the reversal of all values / the unreasonably broad scale of it all / the unconditional self-gift / the absurdity of belief...

The religious core of the Catholic faith cannot be fully expressed through universal values. Neither can it be moulded into some kind of compromise position in which everyone can easily place themselves. It is precisely the '**radicality of love**' that attracts, touches, calls and transforms people!

Go, therefore, and look for what sets you apart as a Catholic school. What makes you unique and different? What makes you go that extra mile? What do you do more than others? And how do you find strength in the Christian narratives?

Your school's distinctive features might be:

- 1. Expressed in an aptly chosen Bible story that stands central.*
- 2. Expressed in a special talent of the school.*
- 3. Expressed in a prophetic value (reconciliation, love of enemy, critical attitude towards society, an absolute priority given to the weakest)*



Secularise your school!

TIP 4: Condomise the Church.



When the issue of Catholic belief comes up at school, you can easily defuse the situation by strongly identifying the Church with the Pope, the Magisterium and the Vatican. The prejudices people have about them are insurmountable anyway. In this way, you can be sure that you yourself will not be seen as a part of the Catholic Church!

REFLECTION:

What is your relation to the Catholic faith? Are Christianity and the Church synthesized for you?

Which prejudices play in your head?

Are statements about morals an obstruction for a positive relation to faith? Why or why not?



Suggestion 4 to *Recontextualise*.

Do not let anybody take the Church away from you! Remember that you belong to this community of faith that keeps the faith tradition alive and passes it on to future generations. The Catholic Church has a rich tradition and has produced much good fruit. But she can also sometimes be imperfect and even sinful.

You should speak critically about the Church and Magisterium, but you should also be nuanced. Base yourself on facts and strong arguments. Speak candidly about the many positive elements of the universal and local Church at school. Help the Church get through these dark times!

REFLECTION:

Do you think you know enough to talk about the church in a critical and nuanced way? If yes, what are your sources? If not, what is missing and how can this be improved in the future?

Can you see yourself as members of the Church and the faith community? Is this, according to you, a requirement to teach in a Catholic school? Explain your answer.



Secularise your school!

TIP 6: Listen! God is speaking.



Replace prayer with meditation, Catholic formation with philosophical formation, reflection retreats with camping trips and celebrations with PowerPoint presentations and film forums.

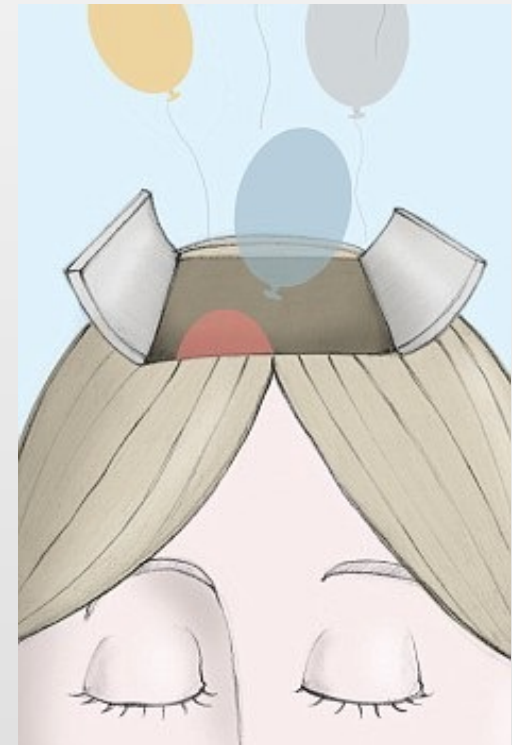
None of these are *against* the Catholic faith, are they? So why can't they be expressions of Catholicism?

Do away with all the activities that were originally inspired by religion, including even the words 'Catholic' and 'Christian'. Then you can remain a 'Catholic' school without really being one.

REFLECTION:

*How are the celebrations and retreats at your school?
What is the role of Christian inspiration in this?*

Which activities are originally religiously inspired? Have any of them secularised?



Suggestion 6 to *Recontextualise*.

Develop a school culture of calmness, meditation and prayer. An environment that is well-suited to quiet reflection invites people to think, calm down and come to insights about themselves. Create a place where God can speak to people and be heard by them.

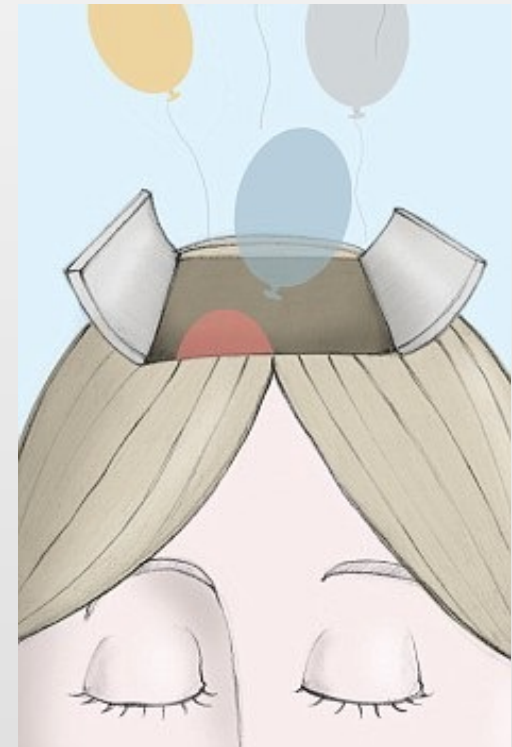
When it comes to prayer, be creative and innovative. There is a veritable cornucopia of different prayer methods: breathing techniques, Zen meditation, moments of silence, yoga, communal and individual prayer, *lectio divina*, Godly play, contemplative dialogue, creative reading and reworking of religious texts, and so on.

Engage the students in order to make these activities concrete and meaningful for them. Make contact with specialists who can provide guidance and formation. If the architecture is more a hindrance than an aid, do something about it.

REFLECTION:

Which of the above creative prayer possibilities have potential in your school? Explain. Which one would you like to learn about more?

Which room would you like to setup and use to make a school culture of sound mind, meditation and prayer possible? How would you do that concretely? How can the students get involved?



Secularise your school!

TIP 7: The sign of the cross.



After your school is renovated, you can conveniently 'forget' to hang the crucifixes and other religious symbols back on the walls. They are old-fashioned anyway. If you leave them out, you can avoid being accused of wanting to convert everyone again.

REFLECTION:

*Where do the crucifixes hang in your school?
What does the cross mean for the Christian tradition?
What does it mean for you that the crucifix is hanging there? Respect for the tradition from which the school was founded, a certain sacredness, nothing special, hope that death is not the end, searching faith, suffering, redemption, reconciliation ...?*



Suggestion 7 to *Recontextualise*.



Invest in modern day religious symbols and art. The cross is the most prominent symbol of Christianity, so why not make a ritual out of its installation in the school? For example, you could come up with a creative crucifix-making project, have a piece of artwork restored, and so on.

REFLECTION:

*How would you "revive" the cross again at your school?
What concrete steps could you take?*

Can a Recontextualised cross be worked into any current subjects, projects or even particular rooms in the school?

What is the meaning of the cross and how can it be interpreted? By whom?

*What can it still mean for young people in your school?
Would it be feasible to involve your students in the making of a Recontextualised cross?*



TIP 8: The school's mission statement.



Moreover, by avoiding the topic, you can guarantee *neutrality*, and that looks good when your institution is evaluated, which in turn makes it easier to acquire government resources.

Which elements do you recognise from this situation in your own school? Explain. Which issues are viable for the future?

All staff members are expected to make their *own* constructive contribution to the educational and formational project of the Catholic school. It's not merely a question of not counteracting it, but also about getting off the sidelines.

Is the religious education project of your school shared by most staff members? Is it important to you to see others involved? Are you inspired to constructively contribute in the future? Why or why not? Share one thing that you can make concrete.



Secularise your school!

TIP 9: Conformity vs. Diversity.



The nail that sticks out gets hammered down, so avoid letting philosophical and religious differences needlessly come to the surface. Don't let too many people with other beliefs or ideas express themselves at your school, or they might initiate some philosophical discussion!

Pointless discussions are better left out, allowing a quiet consensus to form.

REFLECTION:

What is the current situation at your school? Can dissenters explicitly express their opinions? How does that happen? Or is there a silent consensus? Which do you prefer? Why?



Suggestion 9 to *Recontextualise*.

Intentionally put philosophical topics on the agenda and allow teachers, students, the leadership and parents to enter into public dialogue with each other.

Bring attention to the philosophical and religious diversity of your school. Make this diversity visible, audible and tangible in the daily life of the school (e.g. dress codes).

From the perspective of a Catholic school, enter into dialogue with this 'otherness'. The question is, as a Catholic educational institution within a multicultural context, how do we respond to these similarities and differences in a way that brings God's radical love of neighbour to life? Foster a dynamic relationship between the Catholic faith and the cultural context.

Find people of other belief systems who are convinced, eloquent and speak out of their own particular traditions. Invite them to participate in a lecture series featuring diverse perspectives such as a humanist, a Muslim, a Jew, a Protestant, a Sikh, a Buddhist and so on.

REFLECTION:

How can you in your specific school context put philosophical topics on the agenda? Which suggestions above might work in your school? How can you promote the dynamic between the Christian faith and the secular context without losing the Catholic identity? Try to work out a concrete idea.



Secularise your school!

TIP 10: Adopt an economic rationality.



Keep up with the times and fit your education within an *economic paradigm*. In other words, treat your school like a business that produces an identifiable product (namely a high-quality education and formation) and offers useful services to its customers (the students and their parents) for a particular price and under particular conditions (tuition, government subsidies, etc.).

In this way, the laws of supply and demand will kick in, raising the quality of education. In addition, quantifiable educational targets will make for full transparency and accountability.

Finally, the consumers will be the ones in control. Based on their needs, they will determine how education at the school is carried out, controlling the what, the how and the why.

REFLECTION:

Which elements do you recognise when you look at your school and which do you not? Explain. What would you not like to see changed?

*Is it feasible to ban the economic reality completely from school?
Why or why not?*



Suggestion 10 to *Recontextualise*.

The creeping entry of economic rationality into education damages the *pedagogical relationship* between teachers and students, especially the conditions necessary for faith communication. Catholic faith demands an openness for the unexpected and unforeseen. To believe is to be exposed to something new and different. It requires a receptivity that cannot be foreseen or planned. You must be open for the *grace* that comes from *somewhere else* and that transforms you. Economic rationality stands opposed to a *Catholic view of the human person*:

- The human person is not a fully informed autonomous subject who is always in a position to make rational choices that will realise his/her freedom.
- The human person is rather a heteronomous 'self' with a fundamental openness for new modes of being. He/she can be touched by the transcendent.

Pedagogical freedom does not consist in making pragmatic choices for the most efficient education. It comes into being when one is touched by unexpected richness. The reason why religious formation is meaningful is not given *a priori*. You must discover it when you make it your own.

REFLECTION:

Which Christian humanity is put forward here? How does your own view of humanity compare to the Christian anthropology explained above? Elaborate. How could the school try to slide this Christian humanity forward? Give concrete examples.



Secularise your school!

TIP 11: A bridge too far.

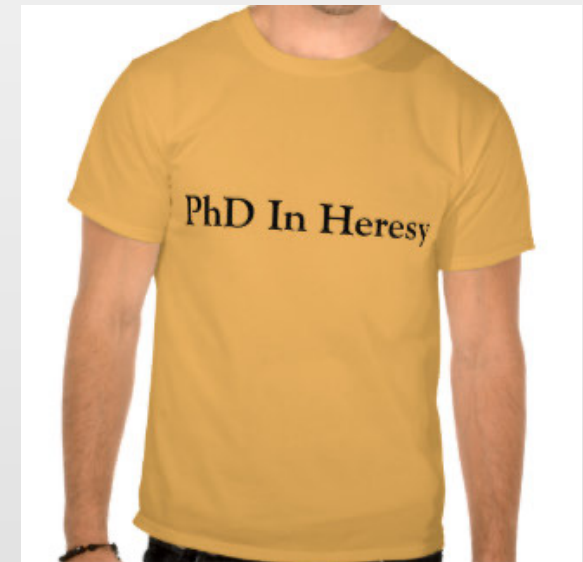


Make sure that the Catholic identity of your school remains fully otherworldly, standing at a distance from the daily lives of real people today. Try to be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good.

In this way, you can avoid the risk of being accused of heresy by the Church authorities.

REFLECTION:

Do you recognise your school in this description? Is the Catholic identity of the school far removed and isolated from the reality outside the school walls? Why or why not?



Suggestion 11 to *Recontextualise*.

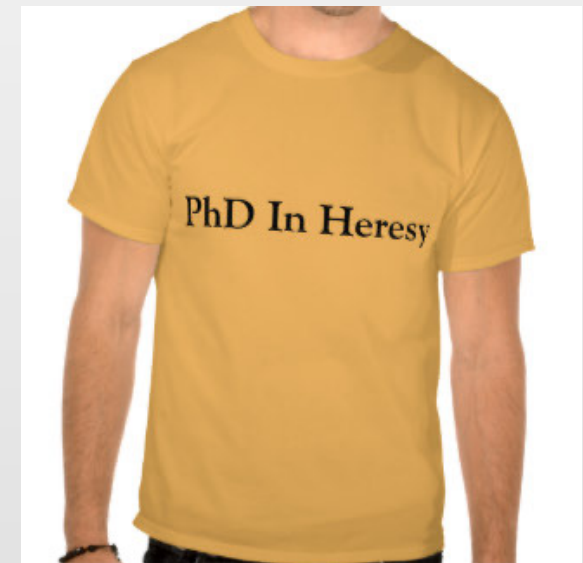
Innovate, integrate and invest in the Catholic identity of your school. Build bridges between the Catholic faith and the world of today's youth. Let your students help you with this.

Catholicity has a lot to offer people today. Bring it into the present context and look for points of resonance.

Mobilise, support, value, protect and reward the *bridge builders* – the people who take the risk to authentically present faith.

REFLECTION:

How would you be able to build bridges between the Catholic faith and the world of young people today? Try to work this out in practice. How would you proceed?



Secularise your school!

TIP 12: La chrétienté, c'est passé.



Interpret each work on Catholic identity as a romantic longing for the bygone past. This will allow you to evade the idea that Catholic evangelisation can also be meaningful for today and the future. (Moreover, the past wasn't all sunshine and rainbows either...)

REFLECTION:

What do you think about this yourself? Does Catholic identity belong to the past, only to be put away in the history books? Why or why not? Can the same be said about the Catholic identity of your school?



Suggestion 12 to *Recontextualise*.



For the past two thousand years, our ancestors have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ from within the contours of their own times – always different and always new. Now it is up to us to write a new chapter in the book of Catholic tradition!

The gospel continues to be meaningful and true – no less than before – for people yesterday, today and tomorrow. It is a message of faith, hope and love, an announcement of freedom, liberation and joy. It is a hopeful outlook towards the *new life*, despite suffering, doubt, sin and death. To whom could this message be irrelevant?

Catholic identity should not be a mere sterile reproduction of the past, where the past is seen as the measuring stick.

Search instead for what this gospel contains for people today and tomorrow. Which elements of the Catholic message are and remain important for our children and grandchildren? Every living faith is a creative re-creation of the Catholic message today with an eye towards the future.

REFLECTION:

What does the Christian faith mean for you personally? Is it difficult or rather easy for you to express this? Explain. Which elements of the Christian tradition remain important for our young people?



Secularise your school!

TIP 13: Leave it up to the teachers of religion.



Leave all questions and concerns regarding the Catholic identity of the school up to those with theological training, namely the pastoral team and the RE teachers. That is, after all, *their* specialty.

REFLECTION:

Do you consider the Catholic identity of the school to be only the concern of the religious teachers? Elaborate. Why is it important to involve the whole staff team? What is the pastoral team assembled? Do you feel competent and comfortable enough to communicate about the Christian tradition? Explain. If not, how could this be improved in the future?



Suggestion 13 to *Recontextualise*.



The philosophical identity of a school is always a matter of concern for everyone at the school, as it is described by the total sum of narratives told and experienced at the school. The leadership and the pastoral team, including the RE teachers, have a leading role, but all members of the school community have their own contributions to offer in accordance with their talents and sensibilities.

Make sure that all pastoral activities of a school are defined by the four dimensions of Christianity: service (*diakonia*); speaking the liberating words (*kerygma*); communal celebration (*liturgy*); and community (*koinonia*).

You can contribute to Catholic school identity through many avenues, such as playing music during celebrations, the transportation of students, the making of nativity scenes, help during reflection sessions, the layout of prayer pamphlets, visiting the sick, etc.

REFLECTION:

Which of the four dimensions of Christianity would you prefer to be involved in? Of course, it is intended for all four elements to thrive together. Which activity brings these four dimensions to school or which one current activity could be revised so that these four aspects are incorporated? How could you be involved with this?



Secularise your school!

TIP 14: Mountains of paper.

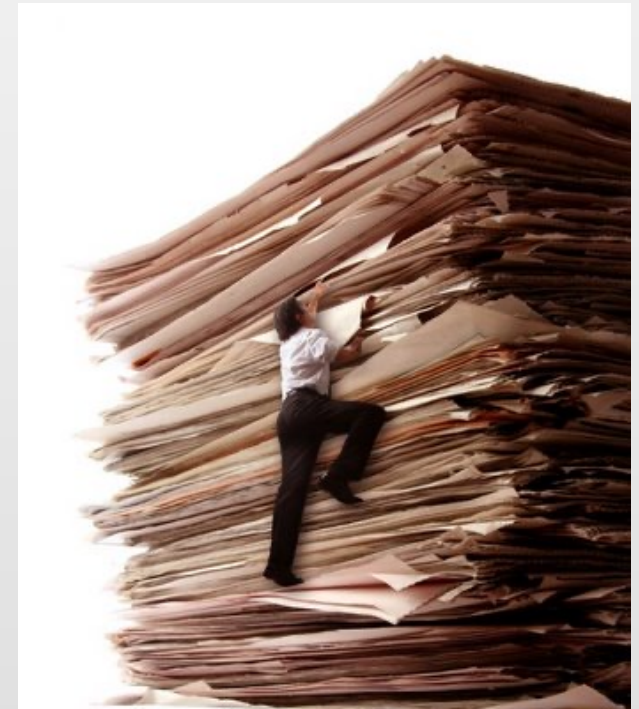


Create a busy and hectic school environment, where people are constantly pressed for time and expend all their energy and creativity in an endless flurry of activities.

By drowning the staff in administrative concerns, you can ensure that your colleagues will have neither the time nor desire to work on the Catholic identity of the school, or even their own philosophical and religious formation.

REFLECTION:

Which elements above can be found in your school? Is there little time for the Catholic identity because of the amount of paperwork and administrative tasks, or are there also other causes?



Suggestion 14 to *Recontextualise*.



Don't complain about the excessive administration. Instead, make it an issue at the leadership level, where the decisions that overburden the school originate.

Administration must always be at the service of what is really important. Help to change the education system so that teachers can concentrate on their educational relationships with their students.

You cannot organise, plan or schedule when Catholic identity will arise (active). What you can do is create a suitable environment, make opportunities and facilitate things so that the Catholic identity can develop (passive).

Allow silence, the useless, the unpredictable, the beautiful and the vulnerable to structurally interrupt the work at the school.

REFLECTION:

How would you allow work to be interrupted by the silence, the useless, the vulnerable, the unpredictable? Can you create opportunities to let the Christian identity break structurally into the school? Try to make it concrete.



Secularise your school!

TIP 15: The law of inertia.



DO NOTHING. Since Catholic school identity has been there forever, it will continue to exist, simply by virtue of its own inertia.

REFLECTION:

Will the Christian school identity persist if we do nothing? What is your opinion? Will there be anything left over, and what then? Are we forced to do something?



Suggestion 15 to *Recontextualise*.

The hour is later than you think. Standing still is moving backwards. That goes for all aspects of the school, including its Catholic identity.

Everything is in constant motion – the child, the school, the family, the Church, the community and the world.

Dare to recognise that, for many people, the Catholic confessionality of the past is no longer evident nor sufficient to serve as a foundation. People's sense of values, which in the past was almost entirely dependent on Catholic faith, is secularising and pluralising.

DO SOMETHING. Rediscover a new, refreshing Catholic faith. Go in search of what it can mean for people today.

REFLECTION:

How could you rediscover what the Christian faith can mean today? Do you need formation for it? Why or why not? Would you or would you not like to rediscover the meaning of the Christian faith? Elaborate.



Secularise your school!

TIP 16: Give up!



Just GIVE UP. It's too late to save Catholic school identity.

Catholicism used to be ubiquitous, but people and the community have fundamentally changed. The Catholic Church has lost a great amount of its prestige and power, and over the course of the years, Catholic schools are slowly *secularising*.

It is senseless to keep trying to save Catholic school identity. Doesn't it make more sense to focus your energy and creativity on other enterprises?

REFLECTION:

Who wants to give up because he/she believes that it is still too late to save the Catholic school identity? Elaborate. Who would not give up the Catholic school identity? Elaborate. Or will you be indifferent? What does Catholic identity of the school mean for you?



Suggestion 16 to *Recontextualise*.

Catholic school identity is a *decision*. It is a fundamental policy choice made by those who determine the school's course. A successful Catholic school identity depends in the first instance on a convinced leadership that both pushes and pulls. Apply the techniques of good leadership on these themes of identity as well!

In the short and long run, the identity of the school is shaped by big and little everyday choices, decisions and actions. Instead of secularising, the school can build up its Catholic identity, step by step. The quality of the relationships between people is decisive for Catholic identity. The principal plays a key role in this regard. He/she is expected to take on the role of an *identity coach*:

- who has a strong personal Catholic faith
- who is a visionary and works strategically
- who has strong communication skills ('people management')

The principal leads the *identity project team*, or is at least closely associated with it.

REFLECTION:

How can a school board work on the role of identity coach? What do you need? Formation? Who would you like to see in an identity team? Which small decisions can already be taken to build the Catholic identity of the school? What is your biggest fear regarding the process of building the school's Catholic identity?



Secularise your school!

TIP 17: 'Unknown is unloved'



Send out a strong signal: *restore* the Catholic identity of your school!

Renew the Catholic faith in all its strength and purity, uncompromised and unadulterated, and let it speak for itself.

Due to the lack of broad support, you have to intentionally push the Catholic faith to the fore again, demanding full agreement from everyone, without exception, under the following slogan: *"They just don't know what they're missing, but if they encounter and experience it again, it will touch their hearts"*.

REFLECTION:

Do you find this "recovery policy" resonates with you? Why or why not? What would be the consequences if this happens at school? How would you personally feel about it?



Suggestion 17 to *Recontextualise*.



Research suggests that the 'top-down' approach of imposing Catholic belief in schools is met with resistance and invites opposition from several quarters. It could therefore actually be the *shortest* route to a complete secularisation of a school's Catholic identity.

Moreover (and more fundamentally speaking), the forceful imposition of the Catholic faith is at odds with its very essence. Christianity is a fundamentally open, dialogical, heteronomous, reciprocal, inviting and liberating religion, and it is only when it exhibits these features that it truly enters into people's hearts.

Do not let yourself get discouraged. Keep right on inviting people in and showing a good example. Stay enthusiastic, determined and patient.

Make sure that the environment stays open. Look for new paths. Dare to take creative risks. Ensure that conversations on belief and nonbelief can be held with respect, seriousness and empathy.

Create an identity project team that will engage in the positive renewing and building up of the school's Catholic identity. Preferably, all staff members should be actively involved through a rotating membership system.

REFLECTION:

What do you think about setting up an identity project team? Will this only add more meetings and busyness or do you think this would be useful? What would be the goal of that group? How can you stimulate an open dialogue about faith and unbelief at school? Make it concrete.



Secularise your school!

TIP 18: To each his own.



Ignore the prejudice that says religious belief and Christianity are not for serious adults, and that one should know better once one has grown up.

Whenever someone at school attacks and critically rejects Christianity, react with nothing more than, “everyone is entitled to their own opinion” and let it go. With a smile on your face, adopt the general attitude of relativism, derision and cynicism towards religious belief.

REFLECTION:

What is your view about belief? Is this something 'childish' we must leave behind? Is there relativism toward belief or even a mocking attitude at your school? Or is there an open dialogue in which religion is taken seriously? Elaborate.



Suggestion 18 to *Recontextualise*.

Change the perspective on faith communication. Faith is a reasonable and adult subject into which children are gradually invited to *participate*. The focus is on adult catechesis.

Be just as tough on atheistic fundamentalism as on religious fundamentalism. Although critical thinking is welcome, you must take action against the *radical* criticism of religion that makes every attempt at serious discussion impossible.

The presence of religious criticism at a Catholic school is both necessary and fruitful, but this must remain a minority discourse that is prepared to give a positive contribution to the school's Catholic education project.

REFLECTION:

How openly can we communicate about faith so that faith does not fade into something naive? How can we stimulate nonbelievers, relativists and critics to contribute constructively to the Catholic education project of the school?



**"The intolerance of the other sets the boundary of my own imagination."
(Paul Ricoeur)**

Secularise your school!

TIP 19: Shame vs. humour.



Submit to the widely shared sense of shame towards religion and be embarrassed about openly discussing and reflecting on Catholic faith.

Given the current *zeitgeist*, it is safer to sweep Christianity under the rug and keep silent about it. At the most, you can joke about it.

REFLECTION:

Can the Catholic faith or religious belief in general be openly talked and thought about at your school? Is this something that should happen more? Why or why not?



Suggestion 19 to *Recontextualise*.

Don't be afraid to talk about the Christian faith. Be frank, patient, persistent and, if necessary, swim against the current.

In a Catholic school, Christian faith must be visible, not veiled, hidden or only to be found 'between the lines'.

Develop a social context in which religious discourse is not taboo. This may be a long-term project, but it begins with a small group that is allowed to grow.

Use humour to counteract shame. Appropriate the comic discourse, thereby breaking the ice and freeing religion from its 'otherworldliness' (cynicism vs. humour). In this way, you can introduce a relativising note.

REFLECTION:

How can you create a social context where a religious discourse is not taboo, but encouraged? How would you put this into practice?



Secularise your school!

TIP 20: Forget about the Worldwide Church.



Lose sight of the fact that the Australian Church participates in the Worldwide Church. Who is still concerned with the universal dimension of Christianity anyway?

"Forget what being Christian still means for millions of people today: being discriminated against, persecuted, hunted down or even killed. By doing so, you can avoid having our own faith problems put into perspective by their acts of witness." (Jan Dumon, Dies 2012)

REFLECTION:

What is your conception of the 'Worldwide Church'? What does it mean for you, 'the universal dimension of Christianity'? Do you think that you as a Catholic school are an active part of the Universal Church?



Suggestion 20 to *Recontextualise*.

Look for connections with the faith community outside the school walls, such as the local parish, convents, monasteries, Christian associations, new religious movements, and so on.

Learn about the other Christian churches in the world. Who are these people? How do they live? Make contact with Christian churches and schools in other parts of the world. Organise projects, exchanges, visits, testimonials, solidarity activities, etc.

Inform yourselves about the sometimes difficult situation in which many Christians around the world find themselves and how they deal with these situations out of their faith. Actively help Christians living under oppression.

Become conscious of the fact that, when it comes to religion, the West is an *exceptional case*. (David Grace)

REFLECTION:

Does your school already have ties with the faith community outside the school? Are students aware this? Which of the above ideas could you bring into practice in your school? Be concrete.





The Last Supper

Recontextualised

The Last Supper



The Last Supper



The Last Supper



The Last Supper



The Last Supper



The Last Supper



The Last Supper



Modern version of The Last Supper.

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The Last Supper



The Last Supper



The Last Supper



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The Last Supper



The Last Supper

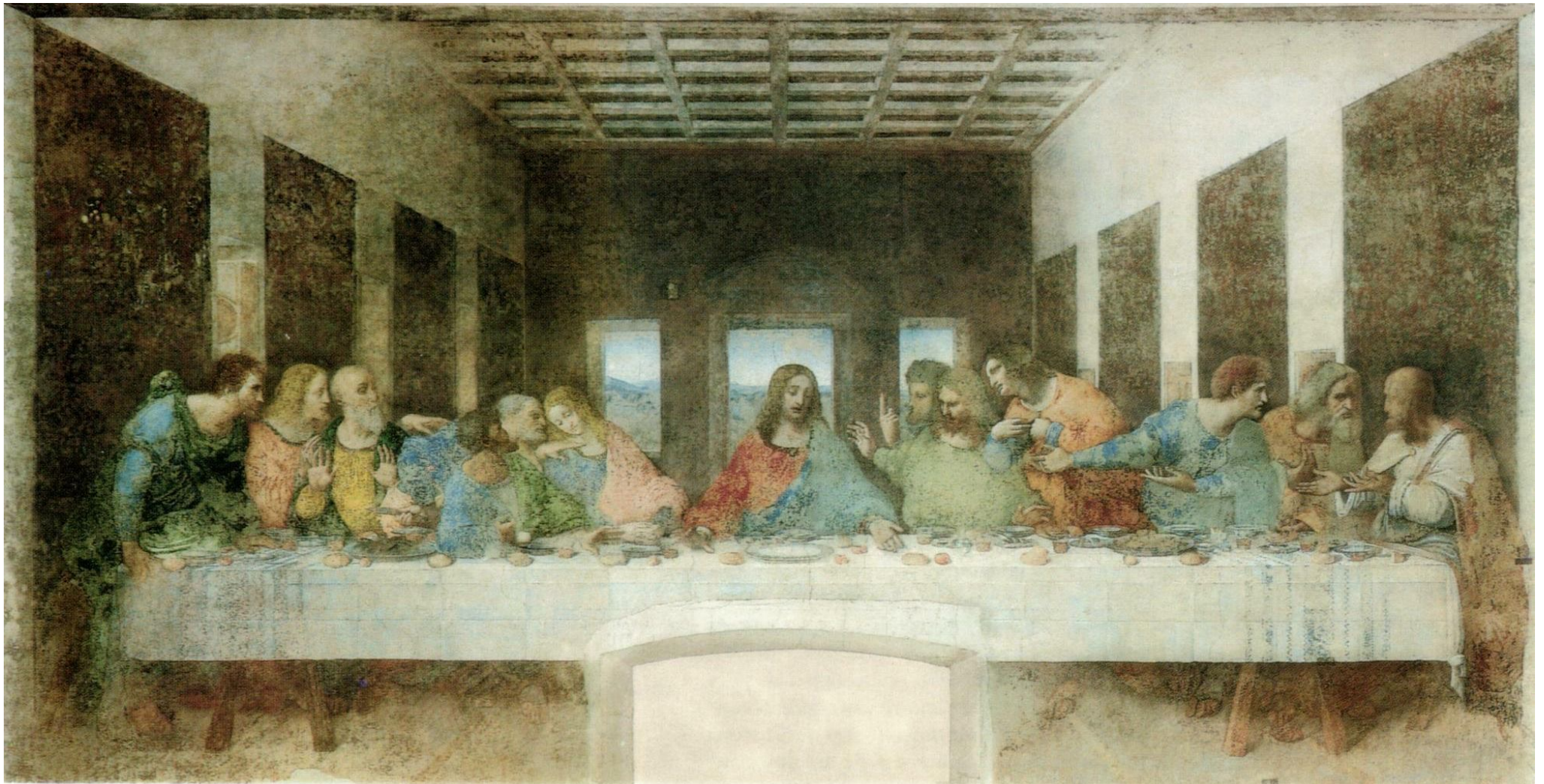


The Last Supper



The Last Supper

Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519)



Recontextualisation

Tips on how to (not) secularise your school

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Drs. Jan Bouwens

Thomas website



<http://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/god-at-cyberspace/>

<http://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/surfen-naar-de-hemel-cyberspace-als-religieuze-opvoedingsruimte/#11328>

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