

Chapter 19

Religious education and ‘sponsoring’ the development of faith in adolescents

This chapter looks further into the relationships between classroom religious education and young people’s spiritual development.

In 1992, the Catholic Institute for Religious Studies published *Sponsoring Faith in Adolescence*.¹ It reported research on the spiritual development of Year 11 students in Catholic girls’ high schools, using Fowler’s scheme of faith development for its conceptualisation (the principal researcher was Carmel Leavey). The high-quality research compiled an interesting picture of the faith competencies of young women, consistent with a number of the conclusions drawn about youth spirituality in Chapter 9. The study, which reinforced the already strong position of Fowler’s faith development theory in Catholic circles, was well received. Its principal recommendation was to promote ‘sponsoring of faith’ (or ‘faith mentoring’) in adolescents; it emphasised the relationships between adults and young people.

While the process of faith sponsorship or mentoring was evidently relevant to spiritual development, there was difficulty in determining its implications for religious education. The Leavey research reactivated the same issues that arose in 1976 when the Australian Catholic education community first learned of Fowler’s theory through the publication of Westerhoff’s book *Will our children have faith?* (see the introduction to Chapter 18).² To revisit the response at that time is instructive for understanding the relationships between religious education and young people’s faith development.

Westerhoff questioned the relevance of what he called a ‘schooling/instructional paradigm’ for Protestant church Sunday schools in the United States. He considered that it was the local Christian community in its celebrative ritual which was principally responsible for developing the personal faith of children. He believed that in this context, community experience, especially liturgy, was much more influential than formal instruction. He thought that *religious socialisation* rather than *religious instruction* or *religious education* was the most relevant process.

In response, Catholic religious educators in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s sought to apply Westerhoff’s ideas to compulsory religious education in day schools – even though the context and purposes were different from those of voluntary Sunday schools. The paradigm of ‘community/inculturation’ was thought to be more relevant than ‘schooling/instruction’, and it motivated experimentation to make religion lessons more informal and personal, and more discussion-oriented. This view was also consistent with the community orientation of retreats and with research findings on the importance of social climate in Catholic schools. As a result, there was a tendency to focus on *community and interpersonal relationships* rather than on knowledge and skills (see the relevant sections in Chapters 16 and 18).

Westerhoff considered that improvement of the Sunday school required a *deschooling* of its structures. Following this lead, Catholic religion teachers thought that deschooling of classroom religious education would also be productive – moving away from formal, academic study towards something more low-key (not that what they were moving away from was all that academic). It took a long time for Catholic religious educators to understand this confusion of contexts, purposes and processes; and it is still not yet adequately resolved in the minds of all religion teachers and administrators. This thinking was partly responsible for the long opposition to a more academic study of religion in Catholic schools. Teachers were unlikely to move in a direction that appeared contrary to the dominant motif of faith development, thus sustaining an artificial dichotomy between the academic and the personal.³

The response of Catholic religious educators in the 1970s and 1980s, as far as the school implications in Westerhoff's ideas were concerned, was not as discriminating as it should have been. Westerhoff's proposals were appropriate for his context: he was dealing with a voluntary church activity. But the compulsory school context was different, where other factors came into play. So the efforts to make religion classrooms less 'school-like' and less 'education-like' did not in the long term prove relevant or successful.

The problematic reaction to Westerhoff's book, as well as to faith development theory generally, was lack of an adequate differentiation between *religious socialisation* and *religious education*; and consequently, between community/personal and classroom contexts. As a result, there was ambiguity about the ways in which education, counselling, personal interaction and group processes might contribute to the development of faith. A relatively simple 'either/or' solution predominated at the time, without sufficient understanding of the relationships between socialising and educational processes.

By 1992, progress had been made towards resolving the Westerhoff-related problems. State religion studies courses had been newly adopted and the acceptability of a more academic religious education had improved, although there was still ambivalence about the place for a personal dimension. It was likely that the problems related to the 1970s confusion of contexts would not be repeated. Nevertheless, reviews of the Leavey publication *Sponsoring faith in adolescence* showed that there was still a lingering remnant of the earlier problematic thinking about the role of religious education in fostering faith development.⁴

Before looking at possible school implications for faith sponsoring or mentoring, the differences between socialisation and education will be considered.

19.1 Comparing and contrasting religious socialisation and religious education

Socialisation is different from *education*. It refers to the way in which people absorb attitudes, values, beliefs, patterns of behaviour and ways of looking at life from their immediate social environment – the family and various other groups in which they participate. Socialisation can be interpreted as learning from culture by osmosis. While the family is the prime location for socialisation, and while peer groups are always important, increasingly, television is subsuming this role; for some children, families become modifiers of the primary socialisation mediated through film and television. For adolescents, their peers, especially their own circle of friends, may become the dominant reference group that governs their lives. It can even serve as a

‘multiplier’ of influences from the consumerist/advertising/entertainment bloc; where the popular opinion of the group endorses a consumerist lifestyle and determines what is ‘cool’, young people are conditioned to go to considerable expense to conform. This is why marketing experts are so keen to implant the mythology of consumerism within the thinking of the ‘texting community’ – and to exploit it commercially (9.2.6).

By contrast, education in schools is a formal instructional process. It is concerned primarily with helping young people learn how to think critically; and to become familiar with the intellectual culture; and to acquire certain academic, technical and interpersonal skills that will be valuable for their future lives and employment.

Table 19.1 Contrasts between religious socialisation and religious education

Categories	Religious socialisation	Religious education
Degree of formality	Low. Can occur at any time; especially in family, peer groups and through the media.	High. Usually in a formal school classroom setting; expectations related to the aims for schooling.
Degree of informality	High.	Low.
Use of instructional curriculum materials	Nil.	Strong. Of fundamental importance for learning in this context.
Personal nature of the learning environment	Usually personal and interactive.	A public, structured learning environment. Personalism is limited but not inappropriate.
Intentional learning process (set aims and objectives)	Usually No. Mainly informal, personal learning; not formally directed.	Yes. Standard educational aims.
Relatively ‘unconscious’ informal learning processes	Yes	No. However, attitudes and values may be affected.
Learning of attitudes, values and beliefs by example and imitation	Yes. The main process of personal learning.	Minimal. Main emphasis is on cognitive learning, although personal learning may be a hope.
Learning of knowledge; development of understanding and skills	Yes, but the emphasis is usually on personal learning.	Yes. The main emphasis in education at school.
Scope for critical evaluation and appraisal of arguments	Yes, but in an informal way; not usually systematic or involving study.	Yes. Special attempt made to develop skills for critical analysis and evaluation.

Despite the differences, education and socialisation overlap; for healthy personal development, complementarity between the processes is desirable. A young person’s school religious education makes some contribution to his or her overall religious socialisation. Similarly, aspects of religious socialisation can make a contribution to their religious education. The differences in emphasis need to be acknowledged, otherwise the responsible adults may be trying to achieve the wrong things in a particular context. The classroom cannot produce the sort of socialisation that can be

delivered by family, peer groups or local faith community. Similarly, classroom study of religion can make contributions to young people's overall education that are not possible within a family or parish.

One of the reasons efforts to improve the effectiveness of religious education have not been successful has been the blurring of distinctions between religious socialisation and education, and blurring of the boundaries between different contexts. Ministry and religious education require different configurations of processes to be relevant and effective. Each has a distinctive 'channel' or style of contribution to the development of faith. For religious education, too great a store had been placed on the faith-developing potential of personal interactions, and not enough on educational activities.

19.2 The faith-sponsoring or faith-mentoring process

The sponsoring of faith development envisaged by Fowler and Carmel Leavey is, in the main, a personal one-to-one process. A classic example is where parents, with a close relationship with their children, are able to talk with them about issues significant in their lives at the time. Another example is where a teacher or significant other has a supportive relationship with a young individual in which aspects of their lives such as 'master stories', 'centres of power', and so on are shared.

The value of such sponsoring or mentoring activities is not in question. But from a classroom perspective, they are not processes usually associated with the teaching of religion. They may operate at the level of teacher-pupil relationship, but they would not be regarded as a pedagogy. This is not to say that religion teaching is less important than faith sponsoring: it is different, and makes a different contribution to the young person's overall spiritual development. Hence it is more appropriate to develop the metaphor of religious education than faith sponsorship to describe what happens in religion lessons.

We are reminded here of the amusing comment of one teacher at a seminar at which ideas about faith mentoring or sponsoring were being proposed for religious education: 'I have a fair chance of making some progress in meaningful dialogue with Jack the Ripper on a one-to-one basis. But when you have twenty-five youngsters before you in a classroom, trying to arrange one-to-one personal contact is ridiculous. The classroom is about something else – *educating*.' The classroom is not a counselling situation, even though some counselling skills will be helpful for the teacher.

No doubt the idea of faith sponsoring has implications for other contexts like counselling, youth ministry and personal relationships because it involves listening, empathising, advising, exhortation, learning by example, and identification. It is a matter of community concern that too few people – many parents included – seem to have the time and inclination to develop the emotionally supportive relationships with youth that might help them in their search for meaning and values.

Also it is important to note that at times even the availability of the best personal support will not guarantee success in guiding them through troubled times or in developing their faith. We have in mind instances where one or both parents provide the right sort of emotional availability but where one or more young persons in the family respond favourably while another – given the same, and often more, opportunities and consideration – responds not at all. Alternatively, the response can

be uneven – for example, the young person may develop a sensitive social conscience, but this can coexist with selfishness and intolerance in the way that individual treats other members of the family. Personal development does not always fit neatly within the structural stages of various developmental theories, even though these theories provide helpful interpretations of the process.

19.3 Classroom religious education and the sponsoring of faith in adolescents

The conclusion above is that faith sponsoring or mentoring is not a useful metaphor for religious education. Rather, the notion of *educating* young people in their religious faith tradition in ways that will *resource their spirituality* is more appropriate. This does not deny that the Catholic school has some limited role in faith sponsoring. Religious education should try to take into account the needs and interests of young people, and their spiritual starting points, making a helpful contribution to the spirituality of all in the class, both the religious and the non-religious. The apparent lack of interest that many show for religion lessons, while yet being interested in spiritual and moral issues, is a point in question. One way for teachers to acknowledge this problem is to construct a notional typology of students in the class, regarding their varying interest in religious education:⁵ some have an explicit religious background and are naturally interested; others with a similar background are not, while some with no religious background may be responsive; some will be antagonistic and/or apathetic; some will not be difficult in class, but are just indifferent to proceedings as if religion had nothing to offer them. The Leavey research confirmed this typology: religion classes were likely to include such a range of interest. In addition, it showed that a proportion of students who were antagonistic did so partly as a reaction to the strong religious background in their homes. Adverting to such a typology can help teachers be mindful of their students' attitudes to religion and religious education, and can help them avoid making unrealistic assumptions about their spirituality. More importantly, it can help them see that educating young people religiously needs to be larger than trying to appeal to the minimal level of student interest. Attending to student needs and interests is important in any area of curriculum, but this should not be an exclusive emphasis in content selection and pedagogy.

The Leavey research considered that the young people surveyed were theologically illiterate because, among other things, they could not talk coherently about 'Kingdom of God theology'. Perhaps a fair comment, but it did not give the complete picture. If theological literacy is to be defined in such terms, then most young people will have illiterate scores. Other research showed that young people often have a well-developed social conscience – perhaps more sensitive to social issues at that age than were earlier generations. However, as noted in Chapters 9 and 17, today's young people are secularised; they do not look to organised religion or to its theological language for leadership. Many feel that organised religion not only has little to offer in relation to social issues, but is only marginally relevant to their everyday living – for them, religion has to do with large background concerns about evil, death and the afterlife where it offers security, so for most of their lives they can get by without it. Nevertheless, the aim of developing theological literacy remains a valid aim for church school religious education. Whether or not they are particularly interested in religion personally, to become educated, young people need to have access to the basic theological meanings of their religious tradition. The educational goal is to be

pursued through an enquiring study, without the presumption that all in the class will consciously incorporate these meanings into their faith development. This interpretation was evident in a statement on religious education made by the German Catholic bishops in the 1990s. It proposed that religious education met different needs for different pupils: for those who were already actively involved in a parish, it would consolidate and enhance their faith; for those who were not practising Catholics, it would give them a basic understanding of their religious heritage; for those who were antagonistic or uninterested, at least it would give them some knowledge of what they were rejecting, as well as some experience in thinking about spiritual-moral issues.

19.4 Religious education and the development of religious identity

Chapters 5–7 explored identity development as the process in which individuals drew on cultural traditions when fashioning their self-understanding and self-expression. Before the Second Vatican Council, there appeared to be a well-defined religious identity in which all Catholics participated; it was more like accepting a ready-made model rather than developing your own version from the available resources. What it means to be a Catholic today is more varied, and there is a much stronger individual component in its construction. Young people’s emerging spiritual/religious identities draw on the Church’s theological traditions differentially, often minimally. Nevertheless, they need basic access to these traditions to know what spiritual resources are there in the first place. Provision of educational access to this heritage is a central purpose of Catholic religious education.

As noted in earlier chapters, social change, particularly in Western countries, has resulted in a breakdown in the traditional patterns for handing on a religious heritage and sense of religious identity. While a proportion of young people still have a fairly traditional Catholic identity, others retain a loose connection with Catholicism; still others appear to have lost a sense of what it means to be specifically Catholic or even Christian – and they do not feel that they are missing anything. What it means to have a religious identity is not a question to which a lot of young people give serious attention. Their identity requirements may be so well catered for in a consumerist lifestyle that there is little need to acquire distinctively religious components; they are so busy they have no spare time for religion in any case. Personal identity – let alone religious identity – often remains a problematic question for young people.

In tune with the general notion of education in identity (Chapter 10), religious education can contribute to identity development in two ways.

19.4.1 Identity resources and the development of a religious identity

Young people have a right to basic knowledge links with their cultural religious traditions because these may at some stage serve as helpful identity resources, though the extent to which these religious identity building blocks will eventually figure in an individual’s personal identity will vary. What is fundamental to religious education is provision of *access* to these resources, while acknowledging that it cannot determine how these will be used.⁶ The notion of access takes account of young people’s right to a religious heritage, while acknowledging their sensitivity to having a religious identity ‘imposed’ on them (17.7); it also respects students’ freedom while at the same time freeing the teacher to provide a systematic exploration of religious traditions without the unwanted pressure of feeling that the process is about effectively producing practising Catholics.

Educational access to religious traditions refers mainly to theological meanings. However, a crucial factor in identification is the feeling of *belonging*, and no amount of theology can mediate this. Young people are not always made to feel ‘at home’ in the Church. Some who identify as church members are angry that little scope is given to them to have a say in the conduct of church life; they feel it is the one organisation in their lives that does not seem to treat them with a sense of valued participation. Some young people feel a comfortable identification with their Catholic school, but this does not always extend to identification with a parish.

Religious education can acquaint young people with the theological meanings needed for religious identity. All students, whether religious or not, have a right to such an education. While they may not at the moment be interested in becoming active church members, they should still be given enough information, history and experience of their tradition to acquire a minimal sense that there is a religious dimension to their cultural heritage. In addition, the school can provide influential experiences of community; this is often done well, with students acknowledging a strong sense of belonging and an experience of being cared for individually. But in the long term, the development and maintenance of a religious identity will depend a lot on the quality of the religious life of local communities of faith.

Thus Catholic school religious education can assist the development of a recognisably traditional religious identity in some pupils. Also, it can affect identity development in others who do not participate in the Church, but this identity enhancement will not be so evident. Helpful meanings and spirituality may be absorbed into individuals’ self-understanding and self-expression, though this may not be as identifiably Catholic as might have been the case formerly.

19.4.2 Exploration of the nature and psychological function of identity

Identity development is an important process that should be investigated in religious education. It often has personal ramifications, even if these do not surface in the study. Also, religious identity is controversial because of its links with nationalism, multiculturalism, migration, racism, violence and terrorism.

In students’ study of identity development, there is some danger that the focus on self may implicitly affirm self-centred values. Because it is concerned with ‘self-development’, caution is needed to ensure that it does not unintentionally encourage narcissism. Correctives could include:

- Studying identity development in a larger context that emphasises a place for transcendence and responsibilities, as well as rights and freedom, a commitment to social justice, and a need for critical interpretation of cultural influences on human development.
- Stressing the importance of *internal* identity resources does not have to imply self-centredness. Individuality does not have to exclude altruism; autonomy does not have to exclude interdependence.
- Christian spirituality has much to offer in its emphasis on fidelity to others. It states parabolically that individuals may find ‘themselves’ best in the very process of giving themselves away for others.
- Social justice is central to Christian spirituality, and service is central to Christian ministry.

- Modern society's preoccupation with individuality and also its materialism can be called to account.
- The 'linguaging' of identity is essentially spiritual; it can draw on 'psychological spirituality' (see Chapters 8, 16 and 17), highlighting core gospel values of love, inner truth, fidelity to commitments, social justice and identification with the marginalised.

What is crucial for enhancing identity development is the perceived relevance of cultural elements (including narratives) for making sense of life. There has been a deterioration in the significance of religious identity, because the language in which religion has been traditionally expressed seems to have little relevance for people today (17.5) — they do not see it coming to grips with the issues and questions about life that are of most immediate concern. When principles and stories help people make sense of their current experience and of the world they live in, then they will ascribe relevance to these elements. For youth (and adults) the credibility of both religion and education is now dependent on their perceived relevance to today's issues.

As well as an obvious interest in *religious identity*, religious education is also concerned with fostering a healthy *moral identity* in young people. Either consciously and/or as illustrated in their behaviour, they will have a moral profile of values, beliefs and commitments that gives direction to their lives and colours their interaction with others; the *conscious* moral identity may not always coincide with the *lived, operative* or *implied* moral identity. These and other questions suggested in note 7 are the sorts of topics students could explore.⁷

19.5 The problematic notion of religious identity

Research on the attitudes of German youth by Nipkow in the early 1990s showed up some of the ambiguities in their notion of religious identity.⁸

Nipkow set out to test traditional assumptions about religious identity. Developing 'ecumenical' and 'interreligious' dialogue are aims proposed for religious education. They tend to presume that individuals begin with an established *denominational* religious identity before they can develop a more general *ecumenical* Christian identity; then, with some specific sense of Christian identity, they may be able to learn from dialogue with other religions.

His research showed that many German youth had little sense of either a denominational or an ecumenical identity. Traditional religious identities were eroded. Furthermore, the youth were not interested in acquiring either of these identities. Neither were they interested in ecumenism; they felt that the churches and religions in general had little to offer them in the living out of their lives. They tended to have a relativistic outlook on religion. One religion seemed as good as another; all religions appeared to have similar concerns and the differences and conflict seemed to be just a matter of opinion anyway.

One could get an impression from this research that perhaps identity itself was not such a prominent concern for youth. But this is not sustained by other findings that show how identity is an important dimension to young people's psychology. Personal identity, national identity, fashion/retail identity – even component identities related to sporting teams and heroes/heroines – are as significant for youth today, if not more significant, than formerly.⁹ But many do not seem to have much time or space for a

distinctively religious component to identity; or it may be a different type of religious identity from the traditional.

These findings raised questions about the pursuit of ecumenical and interfaith learning as goals for religious education. Nipkow considered that this could be wishful thinking, because it did not take into account the radically changed world situation and young people's response to it. The aims for such dialogue are not in question for adults who have a sense of denominational identity and who are disposed to learning from other religious traditions. This may well be a long-term goal for school students as well, but it is unrealistic to set high standards for what might be achieved. Developing knowledge and understanding of other religious traditions is a valued aim for religious education, but outcomes more appropriate for committed adults should not be expected.

19.6 Religious identity and the development of faith

The spirituality and identity of many young Catholics do not relate to Church theology in the same way as for older generations. The faith development process is therefore likely to be different. The sort of faith intended in traditional religious education aims is not the same as the sorts of faith typical of many youth graduating from Catholic schools. The differences may not be radical, but they will be significant enough to affect content and procedure in religious education. This was not a problematic question in the past, but it is today. The discussion in Chapters 8 and 9 shows that there is such flux in contemporary spirituality that the notion of personal faith too will also be undergoing mutations, resulting in more variety in types of personal Catholic faith than before. They will range from the very traditional to a more secularised, individualistic faith that is not so institutionally centred.

Fowler's theory is helpful in interpreting such change because it makes a distinction between the *process* and *content* of faith. It maps changing faith competencies. In this regard, religious education could aim to enhance the believing process, to some extent independently of the content of an individual's faith. For example, it could be belief in the same God, but expressed in new ways. However, a change in the content of faith – say a different understanding of God – could also affect the style of believing (for example a more autonomous, adult relationship with God rather than a childlike one; a more trusting and less fearful relationship). In some instances, progress through Fowler's structural stages could be interpreted as the development of a personal Catholic faith with an accompanying sense of Catholic religious identity. Others, however, may well pass through Fowler's stages but not into a recognisably traditional Catholic faith; it may be more diffuse, relativistic and eclectic in its style of believing, though believing in the same God nevertheless. While the concept faith development presumes that change in faith is desirable, when it comes to considering possibilities like the above, the notion of change in faith becomes more problematic.

Religious education intended to develop a theologically literate personal faith in young people does not appear to be 'successful' because fewer young people are participating in local communities of faith when they leave school. For some youth, there will be such an overt religious identification. But it is inappropriate to judge that they represent 'successful' outcomes of religious education, while those who do not so identify are 'failures'. Parish performance is not an adequate measure of successful religious education. Religious education has been helpful for both groups, but in

different ways. Something spiritually valuable has been contributed to the latter youth, but it does not show up on the traditional religious scorecard.

This interpretation is helpful for many educators because they know religious education has been beneficial for their students even if they do not become regular church attenders. Others may not accept it because they feel it waters down the objectives of religious education: ‘if it does not result in churchgoing habits then something must be wrong’. For them, it appears to be giving in to secularisation and accepting a vague religionless spirituality as a satisfactory outcome.

The ideal implied in religious education aims is a committed personal faith that draws extensively on Catholic theology and scripture. It is expressed in a spirituality that is in touch with the wisdom and prayer traditions of the Church; and it is a faith that takes justice responsibilities seriously. It is actively involved in the local community of faith. Faith cannot be measured. But the last-mentioned note – parish participation – is often regarded as not only an indicator of religiosity but as a sign of faith, even if it cannot give an accurate or comprehensive account of it.

There are Catholic youth who are socialised into what might be called a ‘conventional’ religious faith, particularly where there is a strong climate of Catholicism in the home with parish affiliation. But this group is a minority.

While the religious education aims of the Catholic Church are not equivocal about wanting to promote young people’s personal faith, their *type of faith* is often different in many ways from what has been regarded as conventional – especially in scope and expression. This is part of the *privatisation of religion* that is now common in Western countries. Whether or not this is a desirable trend needs to be considered, but not at this point. For many young people, their faith is evolving in a secularised direction. They are still spiritual and are still believers, and they retain a Catholic identification, but religion itself has a different function for them. They derive values and beliefs in from various cultural sources, including their own tradition, to form an idiosyncratic interpretation of life. Religions and denominations as seen as relative, as if they were similar in nature with a common psychic origin. They are aware of the psychological functions that religions serve in giving meaning and purpose. Consequently, the exclusive truth claims of particular religions, and doctrines that seem more esoteric, are not taken so seriously. Differences and doctrinal conflict between traditions are much less significant for them, unless the differences are abused as a basis for violence. When they do take special interest in the teachings of their own religion, it tends to be those concerned with spiritual and moral issues, and with the ultimate dilemmas of life, such as death and what lies beyond.

Comparable with the notion of conventional religious faith is the idea of a conventional Catholic religious identity. This too is an ideal implied in the aims of Catholic religious education. It begins with the individual’s formal self-identification as a Catholic. Because of the overlap between spirituality and identity, the above description of a conventional Catholic faith also describes identity – it utilises Catholic liturgy and piety in self-expression, and Catholic theology, culture and history in self-understanding. Identification with the local church is an essential element and a key indicator of an authentic Catholic identity.

The idea of change in religious identity is usually accommodated more easily than change in faith. Faith is regarded as a more fundamental process, ultimately

concerned with one's relationship with God, whereas identity has more to do with personal and institutional expression of the self.

What was said above about changing expressions of faith could just as easily be used as an account of change in religious identity – the same dynamics viewed from a different perspective. Depending on the interpretation, the change in young people's religious identity might be regarded as a decline, or, alternatively, as the emergence of a *different* form of religious identity.

Just as for questions about young people's faith and spirituality, there is angst among educators about changing religious identity. It is difficult to analyse and it can be painful for some because it seems to indicate that their cherished aims and best efforts as religious educators have been unsuccessful. We do not judge the new situation so negatively. What constitutes success in trying to hand on a religious tradition and foster personal faith is complex; it cannot be understood just in traditional terms. Some insight into this complexity suggests that educators have been doing a good job, but the situation of contemporary youth is so different that spelling out what is entailed in a relevant religious education will remain a challenging task. A perfectly relevant approach is an impossible dream; at the same time it is possible to discern directions that will be more beneficial for youth and more satisfying for teachers.

The interpretation offered here remains controversial, but there is no doubt that it taps into issues that are fundamentally important for Catholic school religious education.

Notes

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- 1 C Leavey et al. 1992, *Sponsoring Faith in Adolescence: Perspectives on young Catholic women*. See also C Leavey & M Hetherington (eds) 1988, *Catholic beliefs and practices*.
 - 2 JH Westerhoff III 1976, *Will our children have faith?*
 - 3 Examples of this problematic thinking are considered in GM Rossiter 1986, *The place of faith in classroom religious education*; GM Rossiter 1994, *Religious education and the spiritual development of young people: A reply to Gideon Goosen*.
 - 4 See for example the extended review of the research in *CEO Religious Education Newsletter*, Sydney Catholic Education Office, August 1992, pp. 5–11.
 - 5 ML Crawford & GM Rossiter 1988 *Missionaries to a teenage culture: Religious education in a time of rapid change*, Chapter 3.
 - 6 The religious education theme of 'access' to traditions is strongly developed in the writing of Mary Boys in the United States: Boys 1989, *Educating in Faith*.
 - 7 Examples of other questions about identity development that might be studied were noted in Chapters 8 and 9. The following is a summary list: how theories of identity development can be used to explore human potentiality; the strengths and weaknesses of religious identities; the 'erosion' of religious identity in secularised society; possible links between religious identity and

violence; possible dangers to humanness in the quest for authentic identity; the potential for ‘identity seduction’: how an identity can be subtly constructed and ‘imaged’ as a marketable package by power, economic, advertising or media groups in society; ‘retail identity’: how marketing preys on people’s identity vulnerabilities; film and television as the most prominent contemporary source of identity building resources; ‘stars and heroes’: possibilities and problems in identification with, and hero-worship of the stars (e.g. in film, television, music and sport). Normative principles and value judgments would be involved in studying these topics, especially with respect to what ‘authentic identity’ might mean. While educators themselves may take different value positions on these questions, the differences do not excuse them from undertaking the task – articulation of value assumptions is an essential part of a critical evaluation.

- 8 KE Nipkow 1991, *Pre-conditions for ecumenical and interreligious learning: Observations and reflections from a German perspective.*
- 9 Cf. the considerations of identity in Chapter 5 and on youth identity in Chapter 7.