

Chapter 13 – A theologian’s perspective on new thinking on Catholic education

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The reflections in this chapter were catalysed by the paper given at the International Conference on Catholic Education held in 2015 by Prof. Lieven Boeve that can be found in Chapter 7 of this collected volume. That process of development began in the form of a response to his paper at the Conference itself, and has continued as I have reflected further on the contents of his chapter. Here, I seek to put Boeve’s context and my own into dialogue with each other, very much in the spirit of the Dialogue Schools project that he is working on for the Bishops Conference in Flanders. My aim, in these reflections, is to shed light on the similarities of our two situations, and also what is distinctive about them, so as to further the project of Catholic education in both contexts.

I begin by looking at the current situation of Catholic education, and of the place of the church in a wider sense, in Belgian and British society. Recent studies have shown a decline in trust in churches in both of our countries, whilst it seems that there is still a lot of confidence in Catholic education. What this means for the project of Catholic education in Flanders in particular is something that Boeve raises, and I engage with his account of this pairing of mistrust and confidence as being paradoxical, suggesting that what it is that people have trust and confidence *in* may help unlock the relation between the two. I consider what it means to live in a post-secular and post-Christian culture in the light of Boeve’s analysis, and how this offers two important possibilities at this point in history. On the one hand, it helps us to recognise the breakdown of the secularisation thesis that was dominant in the modern era. On the other, it offers us the potential to craft a relation between belief and unbelief in new and creative ways, which can better serve the educational development of young people in our two countries, and perhaps more widely, too. What this amounts to is seeing education as an invitation to a community of identity formation, in which each of the participants can journey towards fullness of life, whilst accompanying others on their journey seeking meaning and fulfilment.

A Crisis of Trust

Boeve (2016, p.5) notes that, in recent years, there has been a dramatic fall in trust in the Catholic Church as an institution, a phenomenon that is by no means limited to Belgium. As he points out, the data he uses was published before the latest paedophilia scandal there, but even so, the Church fell from being the second most trusted institution in 1981 to the least trusted in 2009, measured against twelve other national and international institutions. In the UK, between 2003 and 2013, trust in the Church has also declined, though not in a uniform manner, from 42% to 30% of the population. In 2013, 61% of the UK population said that they had “very little or not much trust in the Church”, and the Church was ranked fourteenth out of twenty-four national institutions in a poll conducted as a follow-up to the 2011 Census (Field, 2013). At the same time as this decrease in overall trust in the Church, however, confidence in education in Belgium has increased slightly. Commenting on this, Boeve (2016, p.5) says: “What this means for Catholic education in Belgium is in many respects paradoxical. Unless, of course, its Catholic character has no influence on the trust people place in this particular project of education.”

The paradox arises partly because, in Dutch-speaking Belgium (Flanders and Brussels), the Catholic Church provides the majority of education, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, as well as the majority of adult education (Boeve, 2016, p.2). Boeve understandably draws a strong link between the educative process and the Catholic character of the provider, but if this link is not seen as strongly by others in Belgium, then the situation may not be as paradoxical as it at first seems. To be fair, he raises the paradox early on in his chapter, partly as a way of drawing the reader in, and it is precisely the connection between these two aspects that he examines, leading to the proposal he puts forward in his conclusion.

A slightly different way of reflecting on this paradox could begin by asking what it is that people in Belgium trust about education today. Their confidence could well be in the kind of provision that they have found in a largely Catholic education process since Vatican II – and Boeve’s analysis strongly suggests that this is the case. For good reasons, what was sought after the Council was an approach which recognised that commitment to traditional Catholic faith could no longer be assumed at the outset in a situation that was changing rapidly. As Boeve (2016, p.12) points out (in a process that sounds not altogether unfamiliar to my own English ears), the common ground of “Christian values education” was chosen as a way of articulating “a general communicable kernel” of Christian faith motivated by “the conviction that there can

be no contradiction between what is 'truly human' and 'truly Christian'." This conviction, based on the traditional Catholic notion that "truth cannot contradict truth" (John Paul II, 1996, para.2), seems at first to have served its purpose well. Public confidence in education has remained high and the Christian values education approach remains popular amongst staff and students alike, who see it as relevant to their lives in an increasingly diverse and secular society. However, as Boeve observes, this approach has in fact had a secularizing effect – strangely, it has contributed to the very process that it was put in place to respond to.

This is not as surprising as it might at first appear. After all, if there is no contradiction between what is genuinely human and what is authentically Christian, then the values and ethics that one puts into action in one's life can just as well be in the service of a form of, for example, atheistic humanism as in the service of Catholic Christianity. This sounds not very far from the cry often heard in England over the course of at least the last twenty years or so, that young Catholics leaving school seem to know a good deal about other world religions, and about ethics and philosophy of religion, but don't seem to have been as greatly enriched in their knowledge and practice of the Catholic faith. To some extent, trying to find a way of responding constructively to that challenge has been a motivating factor in the latest revision of Religious Education provision at GCSE and A level in Roman Catholic secondary schools in England and Wales. In response to changes across the whole of secondary education mandated by central government, religious education is taking a more theological, practical and doctrinal turn, but the deeper question of the rationale for education as such continues to merit reflection.

Another part of the puzzle that might help to unlock the paradox is also an unwitting outcome of the Christian values education approach that Boeve (2016, p.13) outlines: alongside the secularizing effect that it seems to have had, it has also led to a "passive tolerance" of the views and commitments of others. This has the advantage that it seems to offer the possibility of living together "in a de-traditionalised and pluralised context", in which differences can be respected and common projects undertaken. The problem, as he points out, is that distinct forms of life tend to be reduced to their lowest common denominator in this approach, effectively erasing their very distinctiveness, resulting in "a *soft* secularist consensus that offers little resistance against relativism and consumerism." Perhaps it is this process, supported and

encouraged as it is – albeit unwittingly – by a Christian values approach to education, that people are expressing confidence in. Christian values education might not be seen as distinctively Catholic, either to students, teachers or parents, so its connection with the institutional Church may be perceived as being somewhat loose and intangible. If this is the case, not only in Flanders but elsewhere, the current situation poses a significant challenge for any educative strategy that seeks to facilitate discipleship in Catholic young people, since a values education approach actually leads them in the opposite direction. A good example of a strategy that is trying to support the process of discipleship, albeit in a wider educational context, is the current National Vocations Framework of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. The Framework document avers that discipleship is key to all vocational calling, as a result of the universal call to holiness. Because of this, the Church is invited to help young Catholics “hear God calling them into discipleship, a living relationship with the person of Christ” and to find ways of accompanying them on the journey of discipleship (National Office for Vocation, 2016, p.2).

Post-secular and Post-Christian

Boeve helpfully unmasks the ideology of the prevailing secularization thesis, which underlies both the process of secularization that has been pursued in Europe since at least the mid-twentieth century, and also the Christian values approach to Catholic education put in place after Vatican II in Belgium. Once this ideology has been revealed, it can be called into question in order to lead the discussion forward. This process involves using a hermeneutics of suspicion, “the deliberate attempt to expose the self-deceptions involved in hiding our actual operative motives from ourselves, individually or collectively” (Westphal, 1998, p.13). These assumptions and motives shape the way we think and behave, though they do so beneath the surface and, as a result, often operate unnoticed and unchallenged. There are various ways of using this hermeneutical tool, in the service of different strategies, and Boeve uses it in support of his overall aim of fostering dialogue.

The aim of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, who stand at the origin of this hermeneutical strategy of unveiling, designated the “masters of suspicion” by Paul Ricoeur (1973: 205), is to unmask the presuppositions of Christianity in order to call it into question. All three authors see Christianity, and

religion more widely, as an understandable (and for some of them, valuable) stage in human development, but one that has been superseded and can be cast aside in a process of secularization. Boeve, rather, observes that this very strategy has, in the latter half of the twentieth century, become so strongly embedded that it in turn became invisible, taken for granted in debate about secularization, its aims and intended outcomes. However, the European Values Studies carried out between 1981 and 2009 show that secularization “can no longer simply be understood as a movement from a believing or religious stance to an unbelieving or non-religious one.” (Boeve, 2016, p.3) The reality, at least at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, is more complex than that.

The zero-sum approach to the relation between secularization and religion which Boeve calls into question (2016, p.7) has been contested for some time now, and perhaps for longer than is sometimes thought. Writing about the way that the Dutch Humanist Association spoke of humanization in 1958, Edward Schillebeeckx (1969, p.4) observes that, in such an approach to the development of humanity, “for every step forward man takes, God has to take a step backwards.” But, he asks, is this truly the case? Could it not be just as possible that it is a misunderstanding to think that God is in competition with humanity in this way? “Perhaps the prompt retreat of God each time man makes a step forward in his history really shows that it is only a pseudo-God which fades away, and not the living God under whose protection man has just made this very step forward. Again and again he walks one step further with us; and together, God and ourselves, we dislodge the pseudo-God.” (Schillebeeckx, 1969, p.11. Also see pp.41-84 for a similar reflection on humanism.) Of course, the masters of suspicion are convinced that every conception of God found in religion is belief in a pseudo-God, but Schillebeeckx’s response opens up a space for dialogue about this in a way that Boeve, following in his footsteps, is seeking to do anew today.

One helpful way of articulating this new situation, in which the dominant zero-sum secularization thesis is breaking down, is to speak of Western European society (at the very least) as becoming increasingly post-secular in the twenty-first century. Similar language can also be used with regard to Christianity, and Boeve describes Belgian society as becoming post-Christian as well as post-secular. He does not mean by this that, in a process of secularization, religion is being pushed to the periphery or into private space, gradually reducing its presence and significance in the public square. That would be the

description offered by the secularization agenda that is breaking down. What post-Christian means, rather – in a way that links helpfully to the question of trust considered earlier – is that “the Christian faith is no longer the obvious, accepted background that grants meaning.” (Boeve, 2016, p.6) As a result, meaning has to be constructed – though not completely from scratch. After all, those who are engaged in the process of meaning construction are not starting from nowhere: the attempt to do this is as problematic as the zero-sum mentality, and owes its origins just as much to the secularization thesis that is breaking down.

There is, in fact, no view from nowhere, no *conscience survolante* (Schillebeeckx, 2014.2, p. 191 [8]), even if some forms of the modern secularization thesis give the impression that pure objectivity is possible, that subjectivity can be escaped by using supposedly more neutral methods of enquiry than those offered by religion. Each of the participants involved in finding meaning, however this is expressed, starts from somewhere. This process may be described as rescuing meaning from the abyss of meaninglessness, so as to construct the very ground on which someone can stand, as Sartre (1948, p. 28) expresses it. It may involve finding meaning in a form of ethical action prompted by the demand of the face of the other, in a Levinasian mode (Schillebeeckx, 1987, p. 56-58), or pursuing the cause of the threatened *humanum*, after the manner of the Frankfurt school of critical theory (Schillebeeckx, 2014.3, pp. 108 and 116 [180 and 191]) – or, indeed, it can be expressed in any number of other ways. However, every way of articulating and engaging in the search for meaning is situated in a particular intellectual, cultural and experiential context, and this context shapes not just the quest itself, but also the person who takes part in it, even if – as many young people do – they choose to rebel against their context, seeking to find their own identity in opposition to it.

Boeve (2016, p.9) describes this process of identity-formation as ‘individualisation’. This term is helpfully open both to the task undertaken by the rebellious teenager and to what could become a mutually fruitful interaction with Jungian psychological understandings of human development, which speak of individuation (Jung, 1983, pp. 212-26). Indeed, this may be one of the dialogues that Boeve is seeking to facilitate in his use of the term. Although he clearly distinguishes individualisation from individualism, the way he speaks about identity formation gives the impression that the term ‘individual’ is not in itself problematic for him. I am less convinced of this, which could in part be to do with the lingering

effects of individualism in British culture in spite of the breakdown of the Cartesian self that was so much a feature of modernity (Kerr, 1986, pp. 3-27). Following Schillebeeckx, and a number of other theologians (see for example Soskice, 1993, p. 115), I see the human person as essentially relational – the multidimensional anthropology found in Schillebeeckx’s later writings (1995, 109-26) seems to me to be a great resource for complexity (see Tanner, 1988, p. 83) in theology. He stresses that human existence is co-existence with other human beings, and that it ‘is precisely in this reciprocal relation with others that man will overcome the limitations of his own individuality in a free and loving acceptance of the other’ (Schillebeeckx, 1995, p. 116). He also observes (1995, p. 117) that the social dimension of our existence is an essential part of our identity, not something that is added to it.

The task of becoming fully human might, taking cues from Boeve and Schillebeeckx, be termed personalisation: the formation of human persons in mutually beneficial relationship with each other, and in right relation with all that is around them. Schillebeeckx (1995, p. 116) calls it acquiring ‘person-identity’, deliberately distinguishing it from becoming an individual. The task of personalisation, for the theologian, involves both gift and construction, and the self that we are given – and that we make for ourselves – draws us deeper into our relations with others at the same time as it makes us who we are. There is no need for a zero-sum game here, either. Two things are opposed in such an approach to personalisation: the first, which has already been noted, is any form of individualism that sees humans as isolated monads, who can choose whether or not to enter into relationship with others. Boeve (2016, p.14) opposes this view himself later in his article, when he discusses the idea of the kind of dialogue that is appropriate for a Catholic school today. He states that Christian anthropology holds, “not that one is first of all an individual, who engages in a second move into dialogue, but that the dialogue is constitutive for one’s identity.” Christians, he goes on to say, hold that we do not, in the final analysis, initiate the dialogue. Rather, we find ourselves to be addressed, called by God, such that “we find ourselves already in an answering relationship.” The self is as much gift as it is something to be constructed. The second thing that is denied in this approach to personalisation, very much in the spirit of Boeve, is any form of personalism that relegates belief and the construction of personal identity to the private sphere. This, too, is being helpfully unmasked

today as part of the ideology of the modern process of secularization, and Boeve's project moves the debate on considerably by situating the process of identity formation very much in the public sphere.

The Invitation to a Community of Identity Formation

I would describe the kind of educational project, based on dialogue between participants, that Boeve sketches towards the end of his paper, as an invitation to a shared task – that of identity formation. This is the common ground that all participants can stand on in the dialogue, recognising that we construct our identity together, alongside others, some of whom share our point of view and some of whom do not. It is important to take this into account in the project being undertaken, so as to avoid the lowest common denominator mind-set that we now recognise as having been part of the previous approach, which inadvertently contributed to the “*soft secularist consensus*” that Boeve (2016, p.13) highlights.

The challenge is to construct the dialogue in such a way that helping the Catholic participants in it to become better Catholics, the Muslim participants to become better Muslims, and the atheists to become better atheists (cf. Boeve, p. 14) does not result in a relativist paradigm. The problem with such a philosophical outlook is that it stifles the very dialogue that Boeve seeks to promote, since it holds that there is little more to be said after recognising that everyone sees things from their own point of view, and is situated in their own context. If this is the case, then Catholic participants in the dialogue simply can't comprehend their Muslim or atheist interlocutors, because they would have to belong to that other group in order to do so. Debates governed by this rationale tend in one of two directions: they often become polite non-encounters, in which two points of view are rehearsed before a supposedly neutral audience, whose members are then invited to weigh up the pros and cons of each. Alternatively, they result in combative exchanges, in which each participant seeks to make it clear that their point of view is superior to the other, and that anyone who previously felt attracted to the other one should change sides by the end of the debate.

It is not that there is anything wrong with robust debate, or with the possibility of moving from one cultural and/or religious context to another – after all, one of the things that Catholic schools need to continue to provide is the possibility of conversion to (and, indeed, within) Christianity. What is needed is a

rationale that makes it possible, at the same time, to hold, on the one hand, that there *is* such a thing as a genuinely “livable humanity” (Schillebeeckx, 1995, p. 110) and that this is worth striving for. That is a realist claim, and opposes the relativist position that there is nothing but points of view. On the other hand, what is also needed is a perspectivism that recognises that one’s situation, one’s cultural and religious context, shapes one’s approach to everything – as stressed earlier, there is no view from nowhere, no purely objective approach to reality. The rationale being recommended here also needs to be able to hold these two positions in such a way that there is not a zero-sum game between them. The ‘on the one hand ... on the other hand’ structure used above does not hold the two hands out in front of you, like the pans of a balance, such that the more one stresses that there is such a thing as reality itself, the less importance is given to the recognition that all of us approach reality from a particular point of view (Poulsom, 2014, pp.92-93). These two notions need not exist in indirect proportion to each other. It is possible to construct a rationale that is a form of perspectivist critical realism (Poulsom, 2014, pp. 127-28), in which the ‘on the one hand ... on the other hand’ statements are seen to be in direct proportion to each other (Poulsom, 2014, p. 97-98). Thus, the more deeply someone enters into their particular search for a genuine liveable humanity that can, in principle, be lived by all human beings, the more they strive towards what human life really and truly is. This is exactly the rationale behind the relation spoken of earlier between the pointers that different perspectives offer and the journey that is undertaken in the direction that they indicate. A critically realist perspectivism is able to speak of the ability to revise the path taken, precisely because the journey may not, in fact, have led towards life in all its fullness, or may be leading to a liveable humanity that is not in principle open to all. In both of these situations where revision is called for, an appeal is being made to what truly good and liveable humanity is, in itself.

Such an approach to dialogue can be found in Schillebeeckx, though the strands that I will describe here do not exist as clearly discrete elements of his interactions with other theologians, and with the atheist and humanist writers around him. Schillebeeckx is a profoundly relational thinker, who interweaves these strands in his writing so much that it is often difficult to see the three strategies outlined below as being distinct from one another. Nevertheless, there are three distinct moments in the encounter that have different aims, and as a result, different strategies. These are eminently useful in the kind of dialogical

project that Boeve is recommending. The first of these (though it might not always be the first one to take place) is critical affirmation (cf. Poulson, 2014, pp. 131-34).

Critical affirmation invites those who are engaged in the dialogue to recognise that their interlocutors have got some things right, in two possible ways. One is that they may be articulating some ideas, or recommending some practical ways of behaving, that are genuinely human. These ideas and actions may not be straightforwardly transferable from one perspective to another, but it is possible to recognise that, in the context in which they are being expressed, they make sense and are valid and beneficial. For example, the Christian participants in the dialogue may hold that human beings are valuable because they are created in the image and likeness of God. An atheist may agree that human beings are valuable, though they will offer a different rationale as to why, which fits with the point of view that they have. The other way that one's interlocutors can get things right is to offer appropriate critique of one's own point of view. For example, Schillebeeckx admits that a number of atheistic writers have quite rightly pointed out that religious groups do not always strive for authentic and liveable humanity. As a result of this recognition, he agrees that "a religion which – in any way – really has the effect of dehumanising people – in whatever way –, is either a false religion or a religion which understands itself incorrectly." (Schillebeeckx, 2014.8, p. 93 [105]) The atheist may well be inclined to say that *any* religion that does this is a false religion, but a religious believer can understand this challenge as being one that calls for a realignment of the signposts that point the way to true and liveable humanity, because the atheist's challenge makes it clear that the previous direction taken did not lead to this goal, even if it was intended to do so. Such interaction, especially with regard to hearing accurate critique of one's own point of view, is not easy, and requires a dialogue that is marked by charity and a desire to hear one another at depth – but this is precisely the kind of dialogue that is needed today, and not only in school-based education.

The second moment in the encounter is critical negativity (Poulson, 2014, pp. 134-40), and is somewhat linked to the second example of critical affirmation just given. It involves pointing out a flaw in one's interlocutor's point of view, so as to show that they are wrong to hold that idea, or to participate in that action – or, at any rate, that they are not completely justified in thinking or acting that way. The key element to this moment in the debate is that, in pointing out this flaw, the assessment is made in terms of

one's interlocutor's perspective, rather than one's own. Bernard Reginster (2000, p. 49) points out an important distinction between this strategy, designed to show that one's interlocutor is wrong to *hold* their view, and another, arguing that their *view* is wrong. In the first, which is at work in critical negativity, the assessment is made in terms of the perspective of one's interlocutor, whereas the second assesses the idea or action in terms of one's own perspective. Applying this to the challenge offered in the previous paragraph, the atheist is challenging the idea or action of religion in question, because it does not fit with the claim that religion makes that it intends to seek and foster true and liveable humanity. Thus, the examples often given in debates – such as the Crusades or the Inquisition – can be offered as evidence that the religious point of view is not internally consistent in this regard and, as result, is not fully justified. This is why an appropriate response to the challenge is to seek to realign the guiding signposts of the religious viewpoint, because this indicates an agreement that the element that has been drawn attention to does not fit, and needs to be reassessed. What both participants are doing here is assessing the issue in question using the same point of view – in this case, the religious one. A relativist approach cannot do this without considerable difficulty, because it is much harder for a relativist to see how someone could inhabit another person's point of view, even if only temporarily.

The third moment in the dialogue is perhaps the most difficult one, because it seems, at first, to bear a striking resemblance to the kind of combative encounter spoken of earlier, which I argue is not true dialogue. In critical positivity (Poulsom, pp. 140-43), one argues that one's interlocutor's *view* is wrong, or at any rate, that it is less than fully justified. This is a distinct aim from arguing that they are wrong to *hold* their view, and part of this distinction is that, in this stage of the dialogue, one argues in the terms of one's own perspective. For example, in *Jesus in our Western Culture*, Schillebeeckx discusses a story of martyrdom, in which a soldier living in an authoritarian regime is told to kill an innocent man and that, if he refuses to do so, someone else will kill the man, and the soldier too. The soldier refuses, because he knows that the action is unjust and inhuman, and is killed, along with the innocent man. Schillebeeckx admits that an atheistic, humanistic account of the soldier's death is "ethically honest" (1987, p. 59) in its own terms (using critical affirmation to do so), but points out (using critical negativity) that this account reaches an *aporia*, a gap that cannot be bridged, because the soldier's action, at least for him, does not lead to fullness

of life – it leads, rather, to his life being taken. For most humanists and atheists, this absurdity, this *aporia*, must be accepted as part of the way things are. There is no hope for the martyr himself in this approach, because it believes that when this life ends, life as such ends. From an atheist, humanist perspective, the martyr can be seen to have given his life for the belief that justice is superior to injustice, that the *humanum* is worth giving one's life for, or that he died in order that others might change, hoping that the same thing would not happen again as a result of his courageous death (see Schillebeeckx, 1987, 61). However, Christianity can make all these claims too, from its perspective. What Christianity can also offer (using critical positivity to do so) is hope for the martyr himself.

A Christian account of martyrdom does not seek to remove this *aporia* completely: it is not “a denial by the believers of the possibilities of which the non-believers speak”, as Schillebeeckx puts it (1969, p. 213). The three beliefs mentioned in the previous paragraph can exist in Christianity, too. What the Christian point of view holds, at the same time, is that this experience of the threat of death, and the challenge that comes with it, does not reach or express the deepest, most significant, aspects of our human experience. A deeper reality can be found in the soldier's decision, for the Christian, which is ‘supported by God's absolute saving presence which is near to us in situations which he did not want, did not even tolerate, but are in fact absurd.’ (1987, pp. 61-62) What Schillebeeckx is doing here is arguing, on the basis of a Christian understanding of martyrdom, that the atheist's point of view is wrong, or at least that it is not as well justified as the Christian point of view that he is proposing. This may well play a part in convincing the atheist to become a Christian, but in the context of the dialogue that Boeve proposes, it challenges the atheist to become a better atheist by seeking a deeper aspect of the experience of martyrdom within their own point of view. It asks the atheist to respond to the Christian understanding of martyrdom with a similar charity to that shown by the Christian when confronted with the Crusades or the Inquisition.

The aim, in accepting the invitation to this kind of dialogue, is not entertaining mutual non-hearing, nor is it the destruction of your opponent's position. Importantly, it is also not an attempt to out-narrate your opponent. Neither is it to listen appreciatively and then go away and carry on living your life as you did before. The aim is the common realisation of the *humanum*, true and liveable humanity, which is both threatened and hoped for (Gibellini, 1994, p. xiv). This kind of dialogue is profoundly challenging, because it

involves deep honesty and genuineness, real receptivity, and openness to change and growth – not only in the dialogue partner, but also in you. It means, on the one hand, being willing to learn from the other, to allow the encounter to help you become a better proponent of your own view. In order to do this, hard truths will need to be confronted, and you must be willing to accept that some aspects of your current point of view do not make sense and may need to change.

On the other hand, it also involves helping your dialogue partner to become a better proponent of their view. This involves pointing out aspects of their position that do not make sense within their perspective, and also offering insights from your own point of view that seem to you to be better solutions to commonly held challenges, so as to help them develop their understanding both of their own position and of yours. This kind of dialogue must also, in order to be true to the *humanum*, be praxical (Poulsom, 2010, pp. 138-40) – the dialogue partners must learn and discuss together, of course, but there is more to education, at its best, than that. They are also called to become active fellow citizens, fellow humans in the world, fellow creatures amongst other-than-human-kind, so their dialogue should also consider practical issues, and result in common projects for the betterment of the life of the school as a whole. It should help them to engage together in local situations and in responding to local challenges, and encourage them to seek ways of responding together to challenges that exist on a global scale.

As a Salesian of Don Bosco, this approach resonates with me deeply, as I seek to accompany young people on their journey of discovery, walking with them on the road towards fullness of life. Walking with the young is an act of witness, making it clear that it is not only their identity that is being formed during this process, but also that of the educator. This is one possible application of the insight of Pope Paul VI (1975, para. 41), referred to by many of the participants in the Conference that led to this volume: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Identity, in this sense, is a journey that we make alongside each other, even if the guiding practices and principles that we follow might not always seem to point in the same direction. On that journey, as a theologian, I experience being beckoned forward by the God who is the future of humankind (Schillebeeckx, 2014.3, 109 [181]), who comes to meet us on the road, as the risen Christ met

the twelve once they had made their journey of identity formation from Jerusalem to Galilee, pointed in that direction by the women who were the first witnesses of the resurrection.

We do, however, need to be careful in expressing our hope because, as I have intimated already, not all dialogue is equal. Not all encounters are dialogical in the sense Boeve intends, and in the way I have described above. Plenty of so-called debates take place around us in our post-secular, post-Christian settings today in which the speakers never even seem to genuinely encounter one another, let alone enter into dialogue. All too often, debates can seem to be little more than Pascalian diversion (see Pascal, 1995, *Pensée* 36, p. 8), an entertaining way of passing a couple of hours in which almost anything is permitted – apart from genuine dialogue and shared identity formation. Other debates are open to the possibilities that have been spoken about here, but do not last long enough to make much progress: as the topic changes, and often the interlocutors with it, the debate starts again from square one. Though some progress is often made in such encounters, the participants can often find themselves parting with not a great deal more to say to each other than, ‘That was fascinating – we must do it again sometime’ (mirroring the response of the Areopagites to Paul in Acts 17: 32). In order to enter into a dialogue that makes a better future possible (see Schillebeeckx 2014.3, pp. 116-18 [192-93]), we need to find ways to craft educational experiences of genuine encounter, in which it is possible to recognise that the risen Christ is not only waiting for us at the end of our journey, but is also walking alongside us, if only we can recognise him, if only we can feel our hearts burning within us on the road (cf. Luke 24:13-35).

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