

Abstract

This research is a case study of Catholic identity in a secondary school in Trinidad, St Benedict's College. The site is an archdiocesan Catholic school which is not affiliated with any religious order. Its independent status allowed for an interesting analysis of the school's Catholic identity as articulated by staff and students.

This research identifies those beliefs and values of the school's community which frame its identity, using a variety of research methods as the researcher is closely identified with the subject of the study. It also examined the question of whether it is possible for someone within an institution to identify aspects of that institution's culture with some degree of objectivity.

In order to surface the underlying core values, sixteen students, six teachers, two members of administration and three board members were interviewed in depth. An essay assignment was also given in their English class, on the topic, "Your impressions of St. Benedict's College", of which five were chosen from each form level. A discussion among form six students was also taped and transcribed.

The research found a somewhat complex and at times ambiguous expression of Catholic identity at the school. Both faculty and students mention the common rituals and practices found at most Catholic schools here in Trinidad, but the school's Catholic identity goes beyond those dimensions. The story of St. Benedict's College search for Catholic Identity turned out to be a story of the empowerment of a core group of Catholic teachers and priest in carrying out the dictates of Vatican II amid difficult historical circumstances, most notably the changes brought about by the Concordat of 1960.

Keywords: Catholic Identity; Beliefs and Values of the School Community; Core values; Ambiguous expression of Catholic Identity; Common Rituals and Practices; Empowerment of Catholic Teachers; Vatican II; Concordat of 1960.