

Australian Catholic Education in New Times: New Policy Contexts and Challenges for Resuscitating the Common Good

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of the common good as it may be employed and applied at many and varying levels in the discourses of educators in Australia. The paper is drawn from the doctoral research of the author into changes in New Times in the usage and context of social justice terminologies and ideas, such as they may be applied to the re-emerged vexed question of the just allocation of public funds to Australian schools, and in particular their Catholic sub-component.

The paper also investigates the extent to which those aspects of common good sentiment which have not been neglected, have been wrested from their corporatist and anti-individualist associations to help serve dominant discourses supportive of neo-liberal and market-oriented policy objectives in education.

The paper argues that the neglect by some as well as the selective and arbitrary construction and use by others of common good terminology, such as 'mutual obligation', in discourses relating to educational funding and resourcing, is a result of the eclipse of modernist redistributive social democratic constructions of social justice, advancing educational virtue propositions in quasi-collectivist public good/public ownership terms.

The paper also posits that the failure to recognise in a New Times view of education and the human person an opportunity to resuscitate and recharge communitarian discourses of social justice by promoting common good ideas as opposed to those advancing a view of education as intended to secure for some a positional advantage in a highly competitive economy.

In particular, the paper points out that because Catholic education, in Australia as well as globally, has been built upon common good philosophies and assumptions, such a loss of association, coupled with an outdated tendency in some quarters to analyse schooling in structuralist-modernist terms, leaves the notion of the common good in education a highly contested but paradoxically a somewhat underdeveloped moral discursive site.

The paper further offers some suggestions to advance and refine common good discourses in Australian education, as a solution to the re-emerged conflict over state-aid between the public and private sectors of education and as a counter to the class-based, neo-modernist terms in which opposition to recent neo-liberal shifts in Commonwealth schools funding policy have been articulated.

The paper explores how current public education arguments critical of Commonwealth funding to independent schools may be strengthened by questioning assumptions relating to the perceived coalition between Catholic and non-Catholic independent schools implicit in current funding arrangements and which exert hidden yet powerful pressures on Catholic education that are inimical to the common good.

The paper concludes by arguing for the relocation of Catholic and other schools serving populations similar to those of government schools into a diversified public sector on the basis of the special character of Catholic and similar schools being a stronger guarantor of compensatory as well as accessible and inclusive educational practices supportive of the common good, than the opposition to neo-liberal ideas currently mounted by counter-

hegemonic forces in public education oblivious of contradictions in education policy driven by neo-liberal forces currently dominating public-sector education in Australia.

Introduction

Over the last two decades there has been a determined effort to rearticulate the social justice project in education in terms of dominant liberal-individualist theoretical paradigms (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993). The prior quarter century, particularly the years since the second world war, saw the dominance of a social democratic grand narrative in social justice, with a marked preference for articulating public policy, especially in regard to the purposes of education, in state-centric Keynesian wealth redistributionist terms. Sturman (1997) attributes the subsequent supremacy of the liberal-individualist view to it being attuned to neo-liberal ideologies of economic rationalism, corporate managerialism and consumerism, which argue that greater justice can be achieved by the provision of equal opportunity, the honouring of the principle of merit, and through the removal of barriers to the market.

In this neo-liberal version of the social justice project, the role of the state is to remove barriers to the market, rather than to interfere with it in the interests of influencing a just redistribution of social goods. As Rizvi and Lingard (1993, p. 8) point out, the current ideology is 'a contradictory amalgam of Rawlsian redistributive principles and Nozickian entitlement theory'. Common to both theories, however, is a dramatic shift in the role of the state, ostensibly to advance the cause of social justice, but actually operating out of mutually opposed ideological frameworks, viz. the social and the individual. At the same time, while Rawls and Nozick consider social justice from different angles, they both assume 'individualistic liberty as a value prior to any consideration of social justice' (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993, p.7).

In this articulation, to return to an Old Times battle between the defeated collectivists of the Left and the triumphant individualists of the Right has little fruit to yield in making headway to preserve and advance an ethic of social justice because both sides traverse an ideological territory that has nothing new. A possible way forward from this impossible hiatus is offered by what was once called the common good, an anti-individualist concept, belonging somewhere in the centre, and bereft of both collectivist as well as state-driven neo-liberal ideologies common to the above two frames.

The research upon which this paper is based therefore explores opportunities in New Times for the articulation of anti-individualist ideas for the pursuit of social justice without risking a return to a cliched past in which social justice panaceas are predicated on state-centric collectivist assumptions that, as history has shown, can be effectively overturned by neo-liberal forces gaining control of the machinery of state-power to influence public policy changes originally thought inimical to the the state and its *raison d'etre*. In other words, the paper seeks to articulate translate into reality an anti-individualistic theory of social justice without reference to state-centric assumptions, and in a climate in which the very machinery of the state is the instrument through which neo-liberalism and individualism are promoted.

New Times

The cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, is generally regarded as among the more persuasive and articulate proponents of a New Times thesis, through which he explains cultural alterations and developments universally in postmodernity. As such Hall is one of the most prominent intellectuals identifying trends in public policy, commencing with Keynesian Old Times, and resulting in Thatcherite Hard Times, which in themselves have since passed to make way for new ways of determining and understanding public policy in postcommunist postmodernity (McLennan,G., Held, D. and Hall, S., 1984).

The above three cultural frames enable public policy theorists to understand culture as a regulative system (Hall, 1996). Central to an understanding of changing cultural times is a major epistemological rearticulation of what constitutes public and private goods, especially in relation to education, and who funds them once the state becomes the instrument and captive of neo-liberal forces (Ball, 1994; Dale, 1981; Yeatman, 1994).

Ball and his confreres propose that to regard New Times as a purely economic construct is to reduce the complex consequences of its impact as well as to offer too glib an explanation for the ever-shifting boundaries that are part of the New Times cultural condition. One constant that New Times assures is change, reflective of postmodern preoccupations with shifting identity and difference. No philosophy, no ideology nor consequent policy, Hall therefore argues, has much value or significance without taking account of the New Times thesis.

At the same time, in case it is thought that the common good offers too many nuances from yesteryear to warrant resuscitation and serious reconsideration to augment a social morality for New Times, Ball's major 1996 contribution to this thesis provides a sharp critique of the trendy nomadic voyaging of the postmodern thinker pursuing difference that may not have significance. The political theorist and philosopher, Parekh (2000), in reflecting on the major contributions of Hall, the postcolonialist, Said (1993), and the nomadist, Melucci (1989), to contemporary discourses on cultural change and cultural boundaries, states:

Some... are culturally footloose, owing loyalty to no single culture, floating between several of them, picking up beliefs, practices and lifestyles that engage their sympathies, and creating an eclectic way of life of their own. Although in judicious hands such a way of life can be highly original and creative, it also runs the risk of becoming shallow and fragile.

Lacking historical depth and traditions, it cannot inspire and guide choices, fails to provide a moral compass and stability, and encourages the habit of hopping from culture to culture to avoid rigour and discipline in any one of them. It is a culture of quotations, a babble of discordant voices, and not a culture in any meaningful sense of the term.

In some, but by no means all of postmodernist literature, there is a tendency to romanticise this approach to culture, based on the mistaken belief that all boundaries are reactionary and crippling and their transgressions a symbol of creativity and freedom.

Boundaries structure our lives, give us a sense of rootedness and identity, and provide a point of reference. Even when we rebel against them, we know what we are rebelling against and why. Since they tend to become restrictive, we need to challenge and stretch them; but we cannot reject them altogether, for we then have no fixed points of reference with which to define ourselves and decide what differences to cultivate and why.

A nomadic cultural voyager, driven by a morbid fear of anything that is coherent, stable, has a history, and involves discipline and delighting in difference for its own sake, has no basis on which to decide which boundaries to transgress, why, what new world to build out of such acts of transgression, and which differences do really make a difference. (Parekh, 2000, pp. 150-151).

In casting his net wide for evidence of contributors to new discourse of social morality, Parekh draws the poet and writer, T.S. Eliot, into the debate by observing that because culture is concerned with the meaning and significance of human activities and relations, and since this is also a matter of central concern to religion, the two tend to adumbrate. He makes the telling point that there is hardly a culture in whose creation, constitution and continuation religion has not played an important part, so much so that we have few if any examples of a wholly secular or humanist culture. 'Although modernity might seem to qualify as one, it is in fact an heir to, and is deeply shaped by, the values, ideals, beliefs, and myths of Christianity' (Parekh, 2000, p.146).

Parekh and other cultural and literary theorists, such as Eagleton (1996), generally reflect that postmodern discourses have failed to recognise that 'no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion' (Parekh, 2000, p.250). The return of the Eastern bloc in postcommunist times to the ardent practice of religion provides ample evidence of this. Writing in similar vein, Fukuyama promotes the view that Western secularised society lives morally on a kind of inherited moral capital left over from an age of faith. "It is hard to point to sources other than inherited moral capital to explain contemporary community" (Fukuyama, 1994, p.4).

Accordingly, several of those who might be classified as New Times cultural theorists have identified the dearth of and need for a return to some kind of New Age of faith because of 'considerable evidence that that capital is slowly depleting' (Fukuyama, 1994, p.4). As if in response to such a challenge there has emerged a dramatic interest in spirituality and a search, if not for the kind of transcendent God of most premodern religious typologies, of a spirituality of immanence: a sort of God or spirit of all things, emphasising the pantheistic interconnectedness of all natural objects, both animate and inanimate, and bringing together all things as interdependent parts of a cosmological whole (de Chardin, 1934; Fanfani, 1944; Otto, 1950; Malinowski, 1954; Lenski, 1961; Neal, 1965; Wilson, 1969; Geertz, 1973; Berger, 1974, 1979; Zaretsky and Leone, 1974; Bellah, 1976).

Indeed, several philosophers and ethicists have responded to this challenge and consequently explored the significance of the theme of the spiritual enchantment of the universe (Rahner, 1969; Boff, 1980; Bohm, 1980; Radford Reuther, 1992; Fox, 1984; Berry, 1988; Arbuckle, 1988; Kung, 1989; Griffith, 1989; John Paul II, 1990; Swimme, 1992; Brueggemann, 1993; O' Murchu, 1997; McCormick & McBrien, 1991). Part of the above discourse has been an attempt to harness spirituality to social action and responsibility, and to articulate a world view in which spiritual questions are not lost in a welter of 'otherworldliness'.

Many of the questions raised are relatively new and seek to articulate feminist and postfeminist ideas as well as ecological ones. The difference between these new questions and traditional ones raised by theologians and religion scholars relates to the epistemological and paradigmatic bases from which they emerge, most of them resulting from the New Science/ Quantum Physics rearticulations of New Times (Lovelock, 1979; Wilber, 1982; Capra, 1983; Sheldrake, 1985, 1993; Zohar, 1990; Talbot, 1991; Suzuki, 1997).

Apart from introducing ecological and postfeminist questions into the cultural theory domain, applications of the above rearticulations have emerged in decidedly 'inwardlooking' directions, fuelling the search for identity and meaning in life but essentially focussed on escapist and New Age panaceas to do with the virtues of interiority and personal growth, while leaving unaddressed several critical questions relating to the public sphere of politics, economics and policy (Heyward, 1989; Singer, 1990; Brock, 1992).

To a degree such selection is a product of the hold that psychology, and its preoccupation with the individual, has over New Age constructions of the social sciences, especially questions of identity and diversity (Hobsbawm, 1997). It is almost as if politics, like sociology, has been written out of the New Times epistemological frame, one consequence of which has been the occlusion of many social justice questions, other than to do with issues of ecology, identity and diversity, from postmodern discourses as belonging to a kind of cultural vernacular that is now obsolete.

Some inwardlookingness has digressed into 'backwardlookingness' in the form of attempts to rearticulate a premodern past so as to lend spiritual verisimilitude to prehistoric practices that the more structured religions replaced, such as those of paleolithic feminine consciousness (Fiand, 1993), and of the Celts and other First Nations (O'Donoghue, 1997). While these explorations are valid bases for a rediscovery of the past, the absence in them of a discourse about virtue in the New Times political sphere creates a sharp vacuum, currently filled by interest in the New Ethics.

However, the vocabulary for such a discourse has no recognisable connection with New Times and depends on structures and images that are largely rearticulations of a modernist discourse: the New Ethics discourse, with the exception of the aforementioned contribution of Singer and his bioethical opponents, is largely a revamp of Owenism and neo-Calvinism, valiantly struggling to offer the jaded moral palate earnest *fervorinos* on the importance of practising virtue in the public domain (Donnison, 1998).

For common good adherents, including that large body of people who call themselves Catholic as well as others brought up outside Calvinist and similar traditions, the New Ethics emerges out of and as a consequence of political elites of the New Right demolishing the terms of reference for the usage of an Old Ethics, most of which had strong foundations in the structuralist scaffolding of socialist and modernist discourses.

Thatcher's devastating remark that there was no such thing as society, but only the individual, has found a new life in the Blairite political doctrine that poverty is only found in the Third World. Part of the New Times project therefore is inescapably a systematic attempt to obliterate justice from the dominant discourse and to destroy the idea that society needs a protective contract or understanding between its 'haves' and 'have nots'.

In place of justice, and in particular distributive justice, has once again emerged a neo-Victorian penchant for discourses of charity, compassion and philanthropy that is owed largely to the New Times rearticulation of the state as a captive of neo-liberalism and therefore a sworn enemy of the notion of its former construction as an agency for compensatory redistribution.

Several reports and enquiries conducted by social policy agencies and churches, such as the Australian Council of Social Services and the Australian Catholic Bishops' Enquiry into Wealth Distribution, have had relatively little influence on policy and are couched in older linguistic discourses that New Times aficionados treat, to the evident jeopardy of the common good, as having little or nothing to contribute to the construction of a more just community.

(An unusual New Times phenomenon, however, is the emergence of action groups, which, perhaps aware of the apparently futile quest for a vernacular in which to express ideas supportive of the common good, have introduced words like 'empowerment' and 'localisation' into the policy vocabulary to balance and combat dominant discourses of 'globalisation', 'wealth creation' and 'growth').

Indeed, the adumbration of moral and economic discourses in the globalisation process appears somewhat to have united free-traders, social justice-activists and neo-marxists as they collectively do battle, albeit for different reasons, to advance the claims of incarcerated asylum-seekers in evident response to global trends inexorably exerting themselves to relocate large groups of people from 'human resource-rich polities' to those destinations where stability and the promise of a more affluent future prove too much of an attraction to validate following tedious and archaic queueing procedures in war-torn and unstable countries of origin (Kelly, 2002).

The dramatic decline of the middle class, which has generally been a marker of a corporatist, redistributionist, and socially progressive society, has demonstrated the vapidness of the trickle down effect, categorically ensuring that wealth trickles up in a deregulated public policy environment to the wealthy (Reich, 1994).

The resort in New Times to increasingly punitive penal policies and discourses, exemplified in the popularity of three strikes legislation, the growth of 'crimestoppers' and a resort to 'crackdowns', in order to discipline victims of the system who make trouble, has done nothing to ameliorate crime statistics, instead breeding increasingly violent subcultures among those excluded from mainstream societies.

A typical *leit motif* for such a cultural development is the global popularity of television programs, such as *The Weakest Link* and *Survivors*, which not only promote a view of knowledge and success as absolutist, ruthless and objective but also punish failure. The idea that excellence is relative and truth a social construct has not gained a firm foothold in an environment in which modernist-absolutist habits die hard.

When the Prime Minister of Australia in addressing a youth forum declares that he would prefer not to have a child who is gay, and is perceived in the public eye to lend respectability to the attempted discrediting of a judge of the High Court of Australia because of his private sexual preference, one gets some idea of the chasm between reality and fantasy in assessing the extent to which diversity is honoured and valued in the public domain.

The arrest and consequent dismantling of a discourse of social justice is such that society is divided in New Ways, freeing the more successful from a sense of responsibility for the 'underclass'. The restructure of the post-Fordist state by anti-welfarist, neo-liberal interests has led to an increasing reliance on private responsibility for the provision of health care and social services.

An entire new class of people locked into a positional advantage perspective and without long-term commitment to social values supportive of the common good, except perhaps on some green issues, has emerged. The selective application of environmental ideas, such as a decision not to have children, is vulnerable to attack from New Conservatives like Angela Shanahan in *The Weekend Australian*, who persuasively maintain that common good credentials are harder to establish when ecological attitudes are part and parcel of a positional advantage politics.

New Age discourses to help promote this lifestyle are now well established. Although dominant contemporary discourses frequently trumpet such phenomena as necessary predicates to greater fairness and equal opportunity, there is much evidence that entry to the more privileged occupations is being closed off at earlier stages in life because much employment increasingly require qualifications provided by a full-time system of education which excludes less successful students from the ladder early in life rather than encouraging people to climb the ladder at any stage (Teese, 2000).

The growth of selective schools and of much of the educational private sector, principally as a result of diversified funding, has contributed to the growth of inequality. Compensatory educational discourses, espousing the desirability of accessible and inclusive education, have made way for New Times sectional discourses espousing the benefit of selective schools, 'stage-based learning' and a re-emergence of homogeneous streaming (Middleton, 2000).

The politically crucial middle reaches of society, hitherto the target of hope for a better future, are left without a language of coalition and solidarity between the rich and the poor. The political traditions, especially of policy critique, which reformers formerly drew upon for mobilising a response to such divisive trends are now deemed to belong to a modernist past in which class politics rather than centrist corporatist intention once ruled supreme.

The marginalisation and atrophying of a moral discourse in education and its replacement by the techno-language of information technology has effectively ensured that the politics of education, and especially policy sociology has now given way to the study of the cultural politics of education. One aspect of this is the gradual eclipse of History as an academic discipline with its propensity to awaken judgement and consciousness about social and cultural conditions, and the replacement of Sociology by the much more phenomenologically constructed discipline of Cultural Theory.

To a degree the dislocation of social justice from its former dominant position in policy discourse was a casualty of its association with a class politics which relied on adversarialism and envy as instruments for consciousness-raising rather than on discourses that more strenuously promoted social justice in terms of wholeness, interconnectedness and social responsibility.

However, the increased resort to 'wedge politics' strategies by forces of neo-liberalism, impervious to appeals to human and ethical values to resolve complex problems to do with asylum seekers, is a measure of the extent to which the jettisoning of old discourses has left a void in the vocabulary of public moral discourse in Australia beyond anything to do with conservative personal behaviour codes. Beveridge (1996), the champion of full employment, regularly reminded his audience that misery bred hatred.

The pessimistic effect of modernist ethical discourses may account for the postmodern occlusion of social ethicism as antediluvian and negative, and the reduction of ethics to a series of public rules and regulations to ensure minimal conformity to supposedly widely agreed professional practices in public life. The development of a critical conscience and reflection as part of growth into adulthood and cultural criticism (Kohlberg, 1981; Habermas, 1989) is actively discouraged by such a development.

Discourses of leadership (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Treston, 1992; Spry, 1996), some of them bafflingly claiming to be 'post-critical' as a means of rationalising their positivist origins, are now dominated by the alluring but unidimensional language and imagery of personalism, charisma and individual initiative. Survey evidence from the United States and Great Britain attribute the popularity of political leadership to the personality, media-savvy and photo-opportunism of President Bush and Prime Minister Blair.

The spoils of office bestow a kind of spiritual halo effect by the media in which image triumphs over sound policy critique. Indeed, an analysis of the dominant discourses of tabloid journalism locates the media as the instrument by which policy is mediated by social elites to the masses who largely conspire through such an arrangement in their own political disenfranchisement (McLuhan, 1967).

In current management-speak a plethora of resources are invested in pursuing staff-development and training geared to releasing 'creative energies' and 'empowerment' (Covey, 1990), through a commitment to management-training exercises with reference to the New Spirituality, but at such a level there is almost no discourse supporting the development of solidarity, the nurturing of community power and the awakening and support of civic leadership and social responsibility with a sound policy sense to it.

Also missing from the above is a discourse of public morality, and in which an awakening of such a consciousness can enable people to develop shared values and a wider sense of civic responsibility. While there may be some exceptions to this rule in the form of the New Environmentalism, it is possible to argue that such some green moralising is little more than a camouflage for deeply disturbing positional advantage positions in relation to refugees and asylum seekers.

While modernist approaches to the development of public morality discourses alienated many people because they were couched in the language of bureaucracy and social command rather than of subsidiarity and localised autonomy, the challenge to resuscitate a language that augments society's collective power, without locating the effectiveness of such a thing in centrist, state-ownership hands, has yet to be met.

Indeed, in those postcolonial polities where the state is found to be deficient in ensuring the spread of equality and justice, a descent into a new Dark Age, occasioned to some extent by global aspects of neo-liberal forces, is evident with the rise within the Fourth World of neo-feudal robber-barons whose usurpation of power to exploit the poor has all the hallmarks of an oppression far worse than any form of neo-colonialism (Castells, 1998).

A further problem for social morality in New Times takes the form of the loss of a kind of widely acknowledged and objectivised descriptive, analytical and diagnostic vocabulary, which relativises as a form of cultural and social construction, and consequently bestows respectability and equal value to a diversity of interpretative frameworks, understandings and responses to phenomena that must be treated with deadly earnestness if humanity itself is to be protected.

One example of this loss of a common vocabulary is the remark, widely attributed to President Mbeki of South Africa, that the Acquired Immune Syndrome had no connection with HIV (McGreal, 2002). While postmodernism cannot be excoriated for the abandonment of Enlightenmentian scientific objectivism, it is certainly true of the postmodern conception that the utterance of such a gaffe should not be subject to forthright challenge for fear of upsetting postcolonial epistemes and reimposing new forms of Northern cultural imperialism on the recently decolonised South.

On all available evidence then, no New Times social morality can be articulated without reference to the use of a term, distinct from private morality usage, but moral just the same, as well as potentially available to a wide range of participants, such as the common good.

This treatise sets out next to explore the danger in New Times of the loss, within Australia, of a discourse on the common good, and in particular to one of its major proponents, the Roman Catholic Church, and to explore the challenges and consequences for such a loss, notionally central to the concerns of some Catholic and other educators, to the provision, funding and curriculum of one of Australia's most enduring and ubiquitous presences, viz. its Catholic schools.

The research on which this paper is based shows how such a discourse, critically dependent for its clear articulation on an interplay between factors of provenance, funding and

curriculum, might be restored and the possible beneficial consequences for such a thing on all education systems in the Australian polity.

The Common Good and its Discursive Significance

Taken by themselves, words like 'good' and 'bad' are little more than appreciative or hostile noises and convey little more than feelings or subjective sentiment. By making them nouns and qualifying them four important outcomes ensue. First of all, they establish reference to an institution of some kind, such as a profession, a community or a church. Even so, their context may be somewhat woolly and ill-defined, though serving a useful purpose in identifying a group of people with a shared interest and distinctive ways of interacting which are based on shared feeling, experience and ideas.

Secondly, associated with an institution is a series of practices or ways of operating congruent with the institution and supportive of its aims and values. Thirdly, practitioners develop, sustain and continually modify a tradition or culture which sets standards and defines good and bad practice, which have a largely moral rather than a technical character. It does not matter if the purpose of the profession, such as building or catering, is technical; members with an ethical awareness express moral outrage, not just technical disapproval, when they encounter work that fails to maintain the standards of their trade.

Finally, members are committed to an openness to an evolutionary world in which institutions, practices and traditions are subjected to constant review and renewal in response to changes in economic and social circumstance as well as in knowledge, technology and ideas. Furthermore, because change is a constant, participants recognise and acknowledge the importance of debate, discussion and even the inevitability of conflict in responding to change. Eventually, such conflict has to be resolved and new definitions of good practice may then settle into an agreed pattern. However, new conflicts will constantly succeed old ones because no perfected, unchangeable, universally valid practice and tradition can ever be attained (MacIntyre, 1990).

The prevalence of conflict means that a complete and uncontested definition of the common good is never possible. In a vigorous field of scholarly work there is always an argument of some kind going on, but these conflicts, which worry participants authentically seeking a universal and permanent definition of the common good, are a healthy sign of life, provided the argument is constructively settled in ways which enable practitioners to adapt to changing circumstances and move on. Change, as in *New Times*, may originate from many quarters, ranging from changed economic conditions, or they may be prompted by advancing technology or new knowledge. Public debate and changes in the law may play leading parts in changing moral values, and indeed, the *New Times* postulation is that often several of these changes will simultaneously be at work (Hall, 1996).

Once they have taken hold, these influences bring about changes in public morality and therefore changes and new ideas about what is meant by the common good. Thus discourses of the family, a powerful common good concept, have altered in *New Times* to accommodate the high marriage annulment rate in Western polities and to include blended families. However, to promote openness to such reflection, refinement and change, it is necessary to gain insight into the interior moral, intellectual and cultural world of those involved in the institution or culture.

Thus, phenomenographic research (Marton, 1981; Saljo, 1994) into the common good, a *New Times* research methodology if ever there was one, necessitates getting mentally inside the world of those involved in the institution and their understanding of its practices, traditions and conflicts, as well as to stand outside that world and assess its values in the

wider changing social context, inevitably drawing individual conclusions about the evolution of the tradition involved (Furtado, 2000).

In the final event, the right and obligation of the researcher to make a judgement about the wider world is unavoidable: the pretence to abandon such subjectivity makes as much sense as talking about 'good' concentration camp kommandants (Schlick, 1997). Nevertheless, the beneficial way to treat conflict is to welcome and address it as a precursor to enhanced human development and understanding (Galtung, 1975; Pike and Selby, 1988; Richardson, 1990).

Additionally, no common good standards and values can be developed privately, as it were, within the confines of one institution and its practices. To withstand criticism of its actions, institutions must be accountable and their practices transparent to others in neighbouring arenas of discourse. To take a controversial example: the Roman Catholic Church asserts that abortion is murder and therefore always wrong.

Its standpoint is more convincing if it asserts equally passionately, as it has done in some quarters after the Second Vatican Council (Benestad, 1982), that society should help parents choose when they wish to bear children, should help them to raise and care for their children, and should treat other forms of killing, such as the death penalty, as murder also and ban them too.

Institutions which reject closely related values have the difficult task of justifying what seems like inconsistency. Of course, it is not suggested that general agreement about issues such as abortion will eventuate, but that it is possible for all parties to the discourse to learn from one another and to clarify and further refine their standpoints by exploring how values relate to those which people apply to other relevant issues (Frankl, 1997). An effective defence of moral standards cannot be achieved in isolation from other people or other arenas of discourse.

Part of the task of advocating or defending such standards has to consist of showing that they fit the society in which they are embedded and will change or stabilise that society in desirable ways. Such a discussion, on the location of goodness in *New Times*, must take place within communities of people to whom the standards apply, and whenever social change is confronted, if participants are to feel that the prospects of those whom they care about are clearly linked to the outcome of the discussion (Appleyard, 1999).

It follows that people who participate in very few vigorous institutions, such as fundamentalists and isolationists, will find it harder than others to develop, renew and adapt robust moral standards, or their standards will be regarded as deviant because they are shaped by institutions and experiences which other people do not share. The danger here is that in a diverse and fragmented universe, in which discursive forays into what constitutes goodness are unsupported and abandoned as too difficult or too controversial, there can be no common good.

The failure to explore the role of goodness in *New Times* is as much the responsibility of those who would abandon it (as the product of premodern 'God-talk') as that of others who insist that the two are indivisible. Appeals to God do not settle complex questions involving injustice, conflict and peace; they simply reformulate them into questions about what kind of God is preferred.

This juxtapositioning may suggest that Catholicism has very little in common with belief systems based on doctrines of personal redemption, and a great deal more with whole-world ideological world views. If, therefore, for Catholicism God is a social God and one concerned

quintessentially with questions of justice and peace, there is much that they can share with and learn from others whose life quest is shaped by considerations of social justice and social liberation than from other 'God-talkers' whose God is otherworldly and private.

Common Good proponents in such a scenario are those who rely on constitutional principles not to define the good society itself but to show how rational, unbiased citizens would set about drawing up its rules and principles. A telling example of the difference between the two is the ringing terms in which the United States and French Constitutions are expressed by comparison with the Australian, which hitherto lacks a preamble.

The social priorities which emerge from a conflict between an ideologically framed world view and another in which rules, practices and procedures take precedence over vision and sentiment are well explored by Rawls (1971) and Nozick (1993). Rawls, who favoured a universalist social justice world view, admitted in later years that his postulation of so-called universal laws of justice were unrealisable other than in specific social and cultural contexts:

What justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realisation that, given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us (1980, p.519).

It is therefore precisely because it endeavours to embed moral talk in an understanding of conditions and trends in the society in which it is to be applied, and keeps those judgements open to criticism and amendment as times change, that relativism, the *bete noir* of literalists everywhere, carries conviction particularly in terms of pursuing a working historicist definition of the common good, rather than by prescribing universally valid principles which reject criticism or opposition.

Seen in this light, it is possible to argue that the Catholic strategy of constantly revisiting the terms and conditions ordaining the amount of Commonwealth funding for Catholic schools in Australia, while holding firm to base principles of needs-based funding, is an excellent example of the common good at work, simply because of the pragmatism of its application and the flexibility and permeability of the principles employed.

However, this paper argues that when needs-based principles are under attack from neo-liberal 'wants' regimes, a more definitive and rearticulated set of common good values is needed to restore the status quo. Consequently this theorising postulates that the common good is an ideal that guides policy and action, rather than an absolute in relation to which there is no opportunity cost factor.

It therefore follows that when common good adherents conceptualise excellence, it is a kind of moral excellence that they describe rather than the excellence of perfectionism and individual achievement that is often delivered at the expense of communitarian interests. If the common good offers any material advantages over individualism these may largely be to do with group synergy and sharing and are often achieved at the cost of individual sacrifice and the satisfaction of the ego.

Having said that, the common good is distinct from collectivism in eschewing uniformity and absolute equality. The voluntary exercise of individual gifts for the benefit of the community is evidently expressive of the uncoercive and unenforced nature and quality of common good. Thus, as crucial as the common good is to the discourse of New Times, it is a constantly changing phenomenon that cannot be provided as a result of a formula or a black box of authoritative solutions.

It is instead likely to emerge as the result of constantly reviewed, hard-won, better informed and more carefully reasoned moral choices that are relevant to local conditions rather than reduced to assertions of taste, as between mere preferences for coffee over tea, or set in secrecy and stone as a result of dogmatic claims to unchallengeable authority for All Times.

Australia, Australian Catholicism and the Common Good

Perhaps more than any other polity, Australia exudes many aspects of a common good tradition. The utopian workers' paradise experiments and ideologies of the nineteenth century found a large and sympathetic audience across a wide range of Australian political opinion. While never quite subscribing to the kind of class consciousness that would raise revolutionary action to the extent that occasionally eventuated elsewhere, a factor mediated by a typical late nineteenth century radical Whiggish combination of ethnocentricity as well as pragmatic reform among political and colonial elites, Australia embraced a political culture that valued state-mediated protection over economic liberalism (Encel, 1970).

A corporatist dislike of individualism of any kind ensured that common good sentiments and terminologies, such as a 'fair go', found a natural home in the Australian polity. While several policy analysts, such as Mackay (1999), have identified dramatic changes in policy contexts, the points of critical and analytical reference employed by them consistently allude to a sustained attack in *New Times* on a hitherto corporatist polity in which common good values and middle-of-the-road corporatist attitudes have traditionally dominated the political culture (Rosecrance in Hartz, 1974).

To a degree such a history and tradition expose a particular difficulty in articulating common good values in a modernist era in which class politics was triumphant: those polities, particularly in interwar Europe, in which class politics failed to solve major problems of ideological division and economic inequality, embraced a kind of common good politics with a vengeance that obliterated the expression of dissenting political opinion and led in many instances to the later rise of fascism (Lipset, 1955). A modernist interpretation of the politics of the common good therefore exposes aspects of it to be a kind of anti-politics, demonstrating quite markedly anti-democratic and socially illiberal manifestations (Bell, 1964).

For the common good then to succeed in *New Times* calls for expressions of democracy and liberty, as corner-stones of a New Politics, that actively promote harmony and conflict resolution by articulating a culture of political participation to counter the adversarial parliamentary and judicial traditions that still dominate the polity and the policy process, but without interruption to democratic processes and social-liberal ideas. Looked at from another perspective, common good practices and aspirations have much to offer in the development of a New Politics with a focus on the peaceful resolution of problems and the power of coalition and persuasion rather than domination and suppression.

To lend credibility to such lofty aspiration the Australian Constitution specifically legitimised judicial arbitration and mediation in industrial disputes, which, as a feature of *laissez faire* capitalism, were characteristically resolved elsewhere by strike-breaking and attacks on the rights of workers. In doing so, the influence of the Leonine papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, a seminal contribution to the Catholic Social Teaching on the common good, was specifically influential (Higgins, 1938).

Part of the reason for such a close truncation of Catholic and Australian common good values related to the influence of a large working-class Anglo-Irish Catholic population, simultaneously religiously conservative as well as politically radical, ensuring the impact of a strong tradition of Catholic Social Teaching on Australian political values: the Australian

Catholic Church has for half a century devoted a specific Sunday and an accompanying episcopal letter or document to the theme of social justice and its influence on public policy.

The above process took a dramatic new turn with the closure in 1990 of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, a lay body set up by the Australian Catholic Church to apply Catholic Social Teaching to issues of public policy. Severe criticism had been exerted by social conservatives and neo-liberals, some of them Catholic, about bias in relation to the degree of pro-Labor political influence exercised by the CCJP, particularly before federal elections.

The official reason for its closure and replacement by a body under the jurisdiction of the episcopate was that the CCJP lacked the capacity to do the work of a public policy change agency on the Catholic and general community (Nestor, 1988). While replacement bodies work valiantly to espouse the common good principle in Australian life, it is doubtful if they have as powerful and influential a profile and therefore an impact on Australian public life as the CCJP.

In part, this outcome may be a casualty of the withdrawal of the Catholic Church from playing a vibrant role in several aspects of public policy for fear of being accused of resuscitating a confessional politics that dogged Australia in the 1950s. Consequently, Australian Catholic discursive contributions to the common good, with the exception of Brennan's intellectual work (1994), have not generally kept pace with the level and degree of development in applying common good ideas to contemporary culture and politics to be found in the United States and in Britain, where key new critical enunciations in relation to the renewal of schools (Bryk, Lee, Holland and Blakely, 1993) as well as a vibrant discussion in professional and academic journals appears to be well underway.

Another inhibiting factor in this regard may well be the paucity of evidence in Australia of the tradition of the public intellectual, which, paradoxically, is alive and well in the United States private university sector: most Australian universities are unremittingly secular, as opposed to pluralist, and unashamedly interpret their *raison d'être* in terms of the pursuit of market-oriented, functionalist, utilitarian, positivist and technicist discourses.

Nevertheless, some observers of the role of the Catholic Church in public affairs readily acknowledge that the demise of the CCJP in *New Times* coincided with the commencement of a distinctly conservative and quietist public policy attitude by the Australian Catholic Church (Collins, 1991). This observation may also well be a product of the tendency of the media to trivialise the issues involved: a split within Church circles is easier to report than a multi-layered common good critique of complex public policy issues.

Another difficulty Australian Catholicism has had to contend with is that a major critic of the CCJP was the Australian corporatist writer and broadcaster, BA Santamaria, whose particular 1950s brand of Catholic anti-communism did not cohere with advances in Catholic Social Teaching since that time.

While Santamaria's ideas were thought to have merited attention in an earlier era, they expressed a preoccupation with issues of Church politics, industrial relations and Australian foreign policy that did not keep pace with dramatically shifting perspectives in contemporary culture. Santamaria is widely credited with exacerbating the split in the Australian Labor Party, and in consequently keeping the conservative coalition parties and their socially illiberal policies in federal office for twenty-three years (Murray, 1970).

Paradoxically, such schisms are a matter of history, and it is generally agreed that Santamaria was Australia's outstanding Catholic corporatist intellectual, the credentials for

this recognition coming from the decimated left-remnants of such dramatic shifts in public policy that Santamaria, towards the last decade of his life in the 1990s, earned the widespread reputation of being the most articulate critic of neo-liberal policy frames in Australia from a common good perspective.

The facile description therefore of Santamaria as 'right-wing' provides an intellectually flawed framework through which to understand and critique his views. In fact Santamaria was clearly a common good corporatist, who was selectively critical of both absolute collectivism as well as an abjectly free market.

Additionally, the 'Split' also lends insight into the complex and diversified nature of Australian Catholicism, an issue quite distinct from the opportunity it affords to study the nature of Australian anti-communism in the Fifties, because it sheds light on the beliefs of two groups of Catholics with radically different ideas about how and on what theological basis the Australian Catholic Church should be involved in political action (Duncan, 2000).

This insight may help explain the reticence, three decades later, of the Australian Catholic hierarchy to support the work of the national Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, which on all available evidence was subsequently decommissioned because of the degree of opposition its statements evoked among many conservative Catholics.

It may equally explain why discourses on the common good, which proliferated at the time of the 'Split', are considered *passee* as well as controversial in some Australian Catholic Church and other circles, and pose a unavoidable obstacle if the clear articulation of Catholic Social Teaching in New Times is to be effectively addressed.

Catholicism, Other Religious Traditions and the Common Good: a Comparative Assessment of Discursive Contributions

Though the notion of the common good is almost entirely absent in postmodern thought, and the state of postmodern theological writing has manifestly moved on to explore new ideas and realities, it is the defining feature of a Catholic theology and philosophy (Maritain, 1943).

Not simply Roman Catholics, but Anglicans, Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims and some religious groups outside monotheism, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, have corporatist social teachings and traditions, which set them apart from many other movements and sects, whose social theologies, relying on interpretations of scriptural texts, and an exegetical preoccupation with Revelation, tend towards espousing programmes promoting individual and personal redemption (Weber, 1947).

Even the social justice theologies that the contemporary Roman Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia and elsewhere share in common do not eclipse the particular affinity, drawn more from Catholic Social Teaching than from Scripture, that Catholicism has for the common good.

A search of the literature also reveals several examples of non-religious and non Judeo-Christian common good writers and practitioners, particularly, though not exclusively, from the Eastern and humanistic traditions, such as Ruskin, Gandhi and Mandela (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993), whose writings and political persona can clearly be seen to contribute to contemporary understandings of the common good.

In ecumenical context, the interwar Anglican Primate, Archbishop William Temple of Canterbury, was probably Britain's best known corporatist, reflecting in his applications of the Christian Gospels to social questions of unemployment and poverty anti-capitalist views

almost exactly similar to those of the interwar Pope, Pius XI. Similarly the influential and charismatic Moderator of the Methodist Church in Britain, Donald Soper, was perhaps the most outstanding proponent of a common good public politics in post-war Britain.

Notwithstanding the universal popularity of common good aspirations, the almost exclusively anti-modernist and neo-medieval origins of common good ideas and their subsequent resurrection and sustained rearticulation to meet new industrial realities are universally recognised as a Roman Catholic contribution to the world of political ideas (Watkins, 1964).

Indeed, so pronounced is the Catholic attachment to the social-rational tradition of the common good, despite several inspiring examples existing of the contribution of evangelical Protestants to Christian social radicalism, such as in the Owenite tradition, the political radicalism of the Quaker tradition universally, the Sojourner movement in the United States and the prophetic Lutheran 'resistance' theology of Bonhoeffer, that Troeltsch (1931), Yinger (1957), Parsons (1954) and O'Dea (1970) have traditionally classified Catholicism as the religious archetype of anti-individualism.

Thus, while the common good is by no means an exclusively Catholic concern, it relies for its articulation, in terms of an ideology, an ethic, a theology and a philosophy, as well as through the lived experience of particular groups, on a foundation that is universally recognised as Roman Catholic.

Some Catholic Difficulties with Espousing Common Good Ideas for Addressing Universal Ethical Dilemmas

Arguably then, the absence of a religious discourse in New Times in much cultural theorising, such as identified earlier in this essay by Parekh and others, is partly a product of the occlusion of some of the key defining features of a traditional Roman Catholicism to do with Catholic Social Teaching and the common good. Some responsibility for this must be attached to the eclipse of a certain kind of juridical Catholicism, advancing scholasticism and impervious to experiential, ontological and existential philosophic ideas, and which were hallmarks of a kind of fortress Catholicism until about the time of the Second Vatican Council.

While sweeping modernist reforms, bringing Catholicism up-to-date with postwar and postcolonial realities, were partly responsible for these changes, common good questions were subsequently eclipsed in the daily discourse of Catholics by essentially private morality issues focussing largely on sexual ethics for a first world now exposed to techno-instrumental solutions to bio-ethical dilemmas.

The first blow to common good ideology was dealt in the rejection by many Catholics of the official papal teaching on artificial birth control (Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 1968). Subsequent Catholic resort to pregnancy termination and in-vitro fertilisation in numbers similar to non-Catholic usage indicates an abandonment in Catholic circles of a sexual morality based on a resort to the presumed laws of nature.

How therefore could Catholic Social Teaching, with its strong espousal of the common good, expect to maintain and strengthen its hold on Catholic opinion, when the entire teleological basis for the Church's sexual morality ethic was under challenge from millions of Catholics worldwide? The argument has been assiduously explored by Finnis (1978) in his discussion of the link in Thomism between a Catholic discourse on freedom, contraception, love, poverty, death, civil rights, urbanisation and communism.

To expect to appeal to one epistemology in order to express moral opinion on so ubiquitous a range of issues would, notwithstanding the genius of Aristotle and his Christian acolyte, Aquinas, be somewhat entropic if not fallacious (Toner, 1958).

The consequent diminishing effect on the concept of the common good, and the relative failure of the Catholic Church to rearticulate its reproductive morality in the light of biotechnological scientific discovery, for instance to do with stem cell research, may have severely disabled the former strident voice of Social Catholicism and therefore helped dismantle the strong Catholic contribution to a discourse on human rights and social justice that has for nearly a century been at the core of a traditional Western cultural consciousness.

Another nail in the coffin of the development of a postmodern common good discourse has been the ways in which neo-liberals have presented and justified social policy reform, shifting values discourses in social welfare and education away from social ethics to those much more narrowly locked into a standards debate, hitherto exclusively couched in the language of the Right, and of individual responsibility, thus making education and community services, almost universally, less a part of social policy discourse and increasingly viewed as a sub-sector of economic policy (Neave, 1988; Lingard, Knight & Porter, 1993).

The vehicle through which such change has been driven is corporate managerialism, which has been defined as the replacement of public policy objectives couched in terms of social goods by others couched in terms of economic goods for the purpose of fostering a competitive economy (Marginson, 1993).

A further reason for the occlusion of common good discourses in education may lie in the fact that in almost none of its early waves has the educational reform movement highlighted the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching and learning, yet more than ever before it is urgent that new technologies and reform strategies be evaluated as means for achieving ends that promote the common good.

The absence of a unified teaching profession, particularly in Australia, where the politics of funding keeps educational professionals with similar discursive preoccupations strategically divided, has been partially due to conscious and unconscious cultural sensitivities and therefore resistance to recognising and exploring the moral power inherent in schooling (Furtado, 2000).

The teaching profession, yet another critical participant in educational discourses, potentially stands to augment its status and to enjoy increased control over its technical affairs by voluntarily acknowledging that education is first and foremost a moral and civic enterprise that is strengthened by public involvement and participation (Smith, 1990; Connors, 1999).

Unfortunately in Australia it has until recently set itself upon a course of putting the cart before the horse on insisting on public involvement and support before identifying precisely what moral values in favour of the common good it is defending and promoting. Where attempts are made to identify such values (Gwyther, 2001) state school apologists tend to conflate common good and public good positions, without evident recognition of the paradox and irony of defending the public good when the state itself is the champion of deregulation, competition and privatisation.

Catholic Education and the Common Good

While formal Catholic religious practice has diminished in Australia, as it has elsewhere, undoubtedly the major presence of Catholicism in the Australian polity is that of Catholic

schools. One in four Australians attends private school, and for one in five Australians that school is Catholic. In global terms, no other polity has such an expansive private Catholic school system (Furtado, 1998).

However, the provision of Catholic schools almost universally, with the exception of those in developing countries, where public services are few and quality schooling is still a luxury, is considered to be a common and a public good. Even in those polities where there is no capacity for the Catholic school to be supported from the public purse, the anti-individualist, common good philosophy of the Catholic school is so clear as to make the notion of a Catholic school as a private school almost a misnomer.

Indeed, it is also difficult to see how a Catholic philosophy of education, with its particular view of human nature, could be compatible with the market philosophy currently underpinning government schools and with a view of education that advances positional advantage and individual privilege.

Even academies for *ancien regime* Catholics in Europe and elsewhere stress the importance of a common good world order that is often diametrically opposed to the cultural norms of their constituents, and with a commitment to educating for justice that sits uncomfortably with the elitist expectations of many in their class constituency, but which logically offers common good challenges to the materially rich to share their wealth with the poor.

For this reason alone, it is important to differentiate what is meant by the public good from a common good schooling intention, because in the inverted Giddensian (1994) construction of politics it could well be that the private school promotes the common good, while the state school simply focusses on positional advancement.

Furthermore, the Catholic school would look with suspicion upon the control of education by those who seek to impose learning objectives from outside, and would notionally reject the treatment of education as a commodity to be purchased for the purpose of obtaining a positional advantage.

However, because Australian education does not offer an automatic right of entry for Catholics to a Catholic school it is possible and indeed likely that the private sector location of Catholic schools, with their reliance on fees, potentially excludes some people on grounds of disability, poverty, social background or ethnicity.

The common good philosophy, that such attributes are irrelevant to the value of each person and therefore offend against the virtue of equality, is thus more jeopardised by the private sector location of Catholic schools in Australia than by an alternative arrangement that guarantees greater access to Catholic schools by all who would seek an education for the common good.

Nevertheless, common good values are under threat wherever individualism replaces community, consumer demand determines what is of value, competition replaces co-operation, utilitarianism replaces idealism, and diversity and choice are rationalised in terms of market factors and client satisfaction.

The last point affords a clear example of the distinction between common good intention and neo-liberal usurpation. The teaching on the common good categorically rejects collectivist and bureaucratic control of education, reasoning through the principle of subsidiarity that the provision of public services is best located within close and easy proximity to and control by those most affected by such services and likely to use them.

The crux of this argument, which favours parental choice of schooling as localisation, as opposed to schooling as a bureaucratically controlled form of centralisation, has been rearticulated by neo-liberals to activate an individual-choice, market-driven ideology that virtue ethicists would regard as a major distortion of common good teaching.

In Australia, a major preoccupation of the Roman Catholic Church has consequently been to define and redefine the distinctiveness of the Catholic school and to locate the relevance and rationale of a Catholic education in terms of constant pressures to rearticulate shifting identities in New Times.

As part of such a project it is undoubtedly influenced by Vatican documents, such as those emanating from the Congregation for Catholic Education, the official Roman prefecture for Catholic schools and universities, and whose statements are redolent with references to a Catholic education being a public good and not for the pursuit of individual power and privilege (1977; 1998).

These statements, read in the context of a century-old papal tradition of encyclicals, updating the application of common good principles to a changing social, economic and cultural landscape, make Catholic Social Teaching a major stumbling block to the reconstruction of education as a sub-sector of economic policy in postcommunist New Times.

Thus, even though the concept of the common good is not static - John XXIII (1961) noted that 'it is progressive, and that the general norms by which it is defined are in accord with the nature of things and the changed conditions of social life' (p. 220, cf. 65) - and perhaps because of such a thing, those entrusted with espousing and promoting it face a constant challenge to articulate it in culturally relevant terms.

In former times, both premodern and modern, a defining characteristic of Catholic attachment to common good ideas was a resort to confessional politics and the support and control of influential Catholic political parties as conduits for the attainment of Catholic interests in democratic polities (Whyte, 1974).

Central to these interests has always been the Catholic determination to operate a parochial school system, and underpinning such a system has consistently been a Catholic philosophy of education based on the notion of the common good rather than sectarian consolidation and introspection (Furtado, 1998).

Indeed Catholics currently give expression to contemporary meanings of the common good and its role in education by enthusiastically supporting the development of ecumenical schools in many jurisdictions worldwide, though this softening of sectarian boundaries is sometimes possible to be read as a consequence of dwindling economic resources and a newfound show of ideological solidarity in the face of relentless irreligiosity, undiminished secularism and public distaste at supporting non-government schools from the public purse.

Evidence in support of such a view, given the continued popularity of religious schools in Australia, is scant indeed although a Catholic shift to the Right to consolidate policies held in common with fundamentalist Christians is observable in some quarters (Novak, 1992; Pell, 2002).

The eclipse of confessional politics and the postmodern preoccupation with shifting identities has dealt other body blows to the articulation of common good ideas, among which has been the dissipation of Catholic identity in pluralist postmodern cultures, where, if people do acknowledge a Catholic identity, it is increasingly one that is qualified in terms of defining

moments and events that have helped shape that identity. Thus, cultural theorists, more than others, are inclined to identify at least two if not many variants of a postmodern Catholicism (Archer, 1985).

Neo-liberals in the global New Times polity have been quick to seize the advantage in such a loss of identity, to make alliances with Catholics, some of them social conservatives, unaware of or jaundiced by Catholic social teaching and its clear-cut social-activist agenda, and eager to articulate a new Catholicism allotting religious practice and identity to the personal, private and otherworldly spheres of life.

To a degree this has been a result of official Church embarrassment at and a consequent determination to avoid a repeat of problems relating to a confessional past and during a post-war period when social radicalism and anti-Catholicism were the markers of left-liberal attitudes, resulting in the aforementioned split in the Labor Party.

The development of vibrant Catholic discourses on the common good has since been somewhat stymied by widespread jaundice among many emancipationist groups, and in particular women and gay people, whose cultural agenda is high on the list of identity issues addressed in New Times, because the Vatican has placed firm closure on any discussion of claims to cultural acceptance and legitimation by these groups (1994; 1996).

Consequently, without a contextual widening of the discourse of common good ideas to include such social justice claims, Catholicism has arguably lost its former powerful foothold on the discourse of human rights that is part of the core of a traditional Western cultural consciousness (Skidelsky, 2000).

Instead, any reading of Vatican contributions to the discourse of globalisation would reveal growing gaps between common good criticisms of neo-liberalism and Vatican strategies and arguments, particularly as epitomised in the millennial encyclical, *Dominus Jesus* (2000), promoting what many Catholics and others would regard as the rearticulation of Catholic claims to religious exclusivism and global religious leadership.

The theology underpinning such claims, now largely discredited in many circles, devalues the traditions of other religious groups in almost Nietzschean terms, rejects the widely accepted view that scriptural inheritance in all traditions is largely a matter of social and cultural construction, promotes a re-invigorated Roman Catholic fundamentalism that establishes alliances with apolitical or right-wing Protestant scripturalists, and is profoundly at odds with the common good tradition, flowing from Aristotelian rationalism, that has been the major contribution of Catholicism to the social ethos of the polity.

In educational terms it also sends mixed messages to educators, who, having expunged Catholic schools of responsibility for the evangelisation of youth, a matter now officially relegated to parishes, struggle to interpret such claims in the context of a massively redesigned religious education curriculum to focus on rigorous and well articulated courses of study on Catholic as well as other religious traditions rather than essentially on catechesis or faith development.

The apologeticist principle, that error has no rights, overturned by the reform process of Vatican II, has now implicitly been restored and one major casualty of this development has been a dislocation of the Catholic common good contribution to discourses of social justice in New Times.

While Catholic scholars have enthusiastically redirected a considerable amount of intellectual and research acumen into articulating theologies responsive to new paradigmatic

thinking, one aspect of which has been the critique of a redemptive theology and its replacement by theological scaffolding with more inclusive frames of reference (O'Murchu, 1997), severe epistemological and conceptual gaps exist in this approach to articulating a politically-literate program for the impoverished casualties in New Times of the neo-liberal economic project.

Put simply, the new creation-centred theology has yet to find a language to address important political realities to do with the state and its responsibility to ensure the common good of all citizens. Not simply Catholicism but social justice in general is poorer for the loss of such an element. Contemporary discourses of diversity simply do not evoke the same passion for social change and intellectual argument for social reform with the degree of appetite that common good imagery and theorising formerly did.

Indeed, passion appears to have made way for artifice without commitment, while the rigour of jesuitical social analysis, now classed as an outdated neo-marxist tool, has been replaced by appeals to the unassailability of epistemic privilege and the power of undeniable truth and assertion in advancing the just claims of the oppressed.

The rewards of the New Times alliance between fundamentalist religion and neo-liberal politics (Apple, 2001) also demonstrates the relative failure of the liberal-left globally to review its ideological attachment to secularism and to regard all religious sentiment as inimical to the pursuit of social progress.

In the United States, where constitutional prohibitions separating Church and state have hitherto debarred Catholic schools from public funding, a situation under attack from the Bush administration, who now bypass legal barriers to such a thing by funding religious organisations for the delivery of government services, the Catholic school has been a bastion of common good corporatism and equal opportunity.

It has done this by affording *arriviste* groups, many of them non-Catholic, the opportunity to gain a step up the social hierarchy that other education systems do not intentionally offer, though indeed the rationale for such a development may well be found in a pursuit of positional advantage objectives rather than those relating to the common good. In a sense then the very success of the Catholic school has been at some cost to its common good objectives and new indicators and parameters for the articulation of such objectives still need to be explored and enunciated.

Indeed, most of the research into school effectiveness readily acknowledges the phenomenon of the relative success of Catholic school outcomes over those of other systems, and it is suprising how little attention has been paid by public educators conscious of being assailed by negative comparisons between the school effects of government and non-government schools, to the potential modelling and exemplary aspects of this research (Carpenter & Williams, 1990).

To allude to a modernist and therefore outdated use of a formerly well-understood political language, it therefore makes a nonsense that the political left should so strenuously appeal to the constitutional separation of Church and state to drive former left-liberal Catholics, anxious for a share of public funds for Catholic schools, into the welcoming arms of the neo-liberal right.

Whether this new phenomenon is a consequence of upward positional improvement and social mobility among Catholics, particularly in Anglo-American polities, or of a diminution of common good consciousness, is a matter for debate, though it would be a mistake to

attribute explanations for this development in such mutually exclusive and perhaps archaic modernist terms.

The fact also remains that Catholic schools almost universally appeal to an ideology that triggers the interest and sometimes the admiration of those who regard schooling as bigger than a series of hoops through which children are put in order to socialise them into an adult world. Whether Catholics themselves have conformed or not to common good prescriptions is not at issue here.

What is at issue is that Aristotle's corporatist ideas provide for them a template for assessing ethical behaviour in both the personal and social spheres of life. Some of these ideas, naturally, underpin the expression of a Catholic philosophy of education relating to the common good, the current exclusion of which has deprived the polity of a major argument against the spread of neo-liberal ideas, as much in education as in several other policy spheres.

Instead, the rhetoric of the common good appears to have been highjacked by neo-liberals, such as the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, who have employed it to articulate a doctrine of 'mutual obligation' to support a sustained policy thrust of economic deregulation involving, in particular, a roll-back of direct responsibility by the state for the provision of social and community services, predictably couched in the anti-bureaucratic sentiments of neo-liberalism and, in terms of explanations tendered elsewhere in this paper, based on a misreading of the subsidiarist sentiments of Catholic Social Teaching.

Indeed the gradual replacement by Church and other non-profit organisations, often without the infrastructure resources and microeconomic nous to articulate, analyse, critique and enact public policy in terms of services formerly offered by the state, and the means by which this is done through linking the continued public funding of such agencies with an imperative to take on such a role, has arguably robbed the Catholic Church of an important prophetic voice in its commentary on public policy simply because it is now locked into a survivalist agenda that pre-empts such an independent and autonomous commentary from being made (Gregg, 2000).

The situation is charged with considerable irony and paradox because it illustrates the extent to which independence can be a guarantor of the common good. However, this dissertation argues that better solutions are available to outstanding public policy issues driven by neo-liberal agenda than the current resort to a strategy of withdrawal and selective protection of Catholic interests, which appears to also underpin the rationale behind changes to the role of the Church's welfare agencies, educational and social services.

In bald terms it is clear that most of the official public policy and welfare commissions and agencies of the Catholic Church, answerable as they are to direct episcopal control, are locked into the kind of policy bind that exposes a scant attention to common good principles and therefore an incapacity to address the gaps in a public policy discourse that now expose them as pragmatic collaborators in Australia's overall neo-liberal public policy experiment.

Within global Catholicism itself, interpretations of post-Vatican II common good terminologies, such as the preferential option for the poor, are now widely recognised to be the products of conflicting paradigms of social justice (Green, 1993).

The effects of power relationships that these paradigms produce and reproduce are the central points of such an analysis, which reveals how the dominant discourse has deconstructed and restructured the ideological elements of a subordinate discourse to

produce its own interpretations of what the Church now calls a 'preferential *but not exclusive* option for the poor'.

The result at several local, national and global levels is the restoration of a broader Catholic institutional and educational project which, intentionality notwithstanding, potentially supports rather than subverts the system that oppresses people in poverty. The flaw in such an approach may be the result of placing the short-term cultural interests of the Church above those of the common good, where the two are seen to clash, and to promote a conservationist, shoring-up agenda when a radical missionary return to first principles is required.

The attitude and strategy of those responsible for expressing a Catholic view on educational funding is a case in point. Their discourse is almost exclusively focussed on protecting Catholic interests rather than in critical participation at every level in the greater debate (Lorenz, 2001). Entirely missing from their *apologia* is any mention of the common good, even when their opponents appear regularly to misuse or misappropriate the term at the same time.

As a consequence of the pursuit of such limited strategic objectives an opportunity is missed in contributing to the common good, and the good reputation and tradition of Catholicism as serving a world beyond its sectional interests is tarnished. Such a conclusion arises inescapably from the response of Catholic education to the new deregulation, which takes the form of extending its systemicisation, and therefore its sharing of resources, to all Catholic schools in each state and territory.

Unfortunately the rationale behind such a move offers an inadequate defense on common good grounds against the overriding neo-liberal impetus of Commonwealth funding policy, as a consequence of which the temptation to respond to free-market forces by Catholic schools and colleges with cultural capital and a keen understanding of the frailty and voluntary nature of the Catholic position exposes several flaws in the Catholic position.

The recognition and development of Catholic education as a unified sector in its dealings with governments may well be a stroke of genius, but in the end the paucity of its contribution to the greater debate about restoring the civic purposes of schooling in a neo-liberal age make such an achievement, for all its notional contribution to the sharing of resources between Catholic schools, a surprisingly limited expression of the common good.

For instance, the inability and even reluctance of the new Catholic funding 'system' to provide a Catholic education for all who seek it on account of its compulsory fees impost continues to be unaddressed other than in terms reflective of Catholic sacrificial sentiment. Catholic schooling is thus presented as advantageous on account of its precise pursuit of neo-liberal, abstemious good-housekeeping rules.

Where universalist principles are proclaimed they are parsimoniously applied to the existing provision and interests of Catholic schools and no attempt is made to explore their implications for major policy shifts in education funding other than in the most minimal ways, e.g. that the real problems to be addressed concern the overall size of educational budgets rather than in arguments over a division of funding spoils. Moreover, that such a strategy cannot address the predicament of large numbers of Catholic children who continue to be turned away from Catholic schools there can be little doubt.

Conversely, the above critique of the extent to which the language of the common good has been used to subvert its ends and to promote a conservative agenda is arguably an attack on the very notion itself of the common good, not dissimilar to attacks on economic

rationalism that fail to engage the very real economic concerns that must be brought into the common good discourse if the excesses of neo-liberalism are to be tempered and ameliorated.

A keen example of this is the view that the common good is not about wealth at all but instead about making people more richly human (Ireland and Hogan, 1991). The challenge in this aspect of social justice discourse is that it potentially esotericises the issue and concedes responsibility to neo-liberals and others for sound economic sense and argument to be employed in any debate about wealth redistribution.

To reinforce the point, the use of the word 'poor', unless it attracts specificity, is easily romanticised and robbed of reality by religious adherents with a tendency to spiritualise discourses of poverty and deprive them of material significance (Dorr, 1984). While spiritual poverty is undoubtedly a reality, to regard all poverty as spiritual is to reject engagement with neo-liberals and thus to abnegate an opportunity to prompt critics of neo-liberalism to consider the degree to which their objectives are founded on fundamental ethical disagreement rather than on exclusively ideological grounds.

Another casualty of the common good construction is that it surrenders discursive space necessary for reflecting differing judgements of the functioning of the economic system, such as what constitutes sound social policy, to the detriment of the education of the public in the vernacular of neo-liberalism, including the dismantling of public services into a franchise system at the direct service of the state rather than communities (Cappo, 1992).

The net effect of this development has been to rearticulate social justice as public charity and to reconstruct the role of community welfare organisations as social philanthropists rather than as purveyors of the common good, while Church agencies, having effectively lost their non-government status by shifts in funding intended to quell their independence, have been co-opted into supporting the neo-liberal New Times project at many and varied levels, including schooling.

Thus the Catholic position can be seen to be fraught with contradictions and a mish-mash of strategies and attitudes that reflect an inadequate, contradictory and uncoordinated response to the neo-liberal funding policy thrusts that assail its schools and other institutions as well as attack the greater good of the community at large.

It is therefore only by returning to first principles that a well articulated and comprehensive Catholic policy based on a defense of common good principles as they apply to school funding in New Times can be developed, and the forum in which to do such a thing should be the entire Australian community.

Shifts in Common Good Discourse: Some Necessary Questions

What is meant by the 'common good', and what if anything has the 'common good' to do with the 'public good'? Are these two entities necessarily the same, or might legitimate differences be drawn between them? Is the 'common good' a fixed thing or does it depend upon contextual location for a clear understanding of its intent? Is indeed the common good at all common or is it overtaken and occluded by exigencies and realities that make more sense in New Times?

These are some of the question that those who seek to articulate a philosophy of school funding, or indeed a philosophy of anything in New Times, must address if they are to proceed with a clear enunciation of what is meant by the common good in a contemporary culture in which the state regards its primary task as being to make way for the exercise of

market forces as a solution to the need to withdraw from the public-sector provision of goods and services.

While clear-cut answers to the above questions, commanding universal agreement, will not be possible, papal encyclicals from the time of Leo XIII (1891) onwards shed some light on how to proceed in answering them. Each one of the Roman pontiffs over the last century or so have enunciated and rearticulated Catholic Social Teaching to address global phenomena to which Catholics and others needed an ethical response. Thus, the Leonine thrust was mainly to address the response of the Church and others of goodwill to the dramatic social upheavals of late nineteenth century industrialisation.

Similarly contextually, Pius XI (1931), the twentieth century interwar pope, applied Catholic Social Teaching to problems of national reconstruction after the Great War. John XXIII (1961) and Paul VI's (1967) mid-twentieth century applications set ground rules for collaboration between Church and state in the task of European post-War social restoration and Third World development.

To simply regard Catholic Social Teaching then as anti-statist, or anti-collectivist, on the one hand, and anti-individualist, and therefore anti-capitalist, on the other, is to miss the importance of shifting contexts in the application of fixed principles: Catholicism has universally tended to avoid adopting static positions in relation to the complex world of politics, and where it has lapsed into confessional attitudinising, its status as an enlightened voice in the polity has diminished into the protection of sectional interests, such as those of the Catholic Church in interwar Germany (Cornwell, 1999).

One cultural theorist who has attempted to define the common good in terms of a sacred trust or compact between various elements in society for its protection and advancement is Francis Fukuyama (1995). Fukuyama states that an association built out of rational individuals who come together on the basis of a social contract for the sake of the satisfaction of their wants cannot form a society that is viable over any length of time. In other words the mediation and expression of needs and not wants should be the cornerstone of a good society, while the rights of the community have precedence over those of the individual in any expression of the common good.

A notable contributor to common good discourse in Australia is the philosopher, Raimond Gaita (2000), who regards the contemporary expression of the common good as all that is done to enhance and support the view that there is such a thing as a 'common humanity'. In fact, reflecting on the dispossession by non-Aboriginal Australians of Aboriginal ownership of Australia, Gaita opines that the most injurious aspect of such racism is its denial of a common humanity. Gaita shows how the expression of a common humanity is as much a product of materialist considerations as of other factors that are ethical and spiritual.

He infers, citing the example of a nun he observed who worked with mentally disturbed people, that to conflate common humanity positions with public policy stances is to reduce their impact to instrumental behavioural outcomes which are not forthcoming in his experience, still less supportive of the common good, as a consequence of policy *diktat*, without reference to personal assent or volition on the part of those whose common good services are sought.

Gaita instantly and problematically shows that goodness, common or otherwise, cannot be ordained in politics without reference to other factors, both personal as well as social, thereby debunking any suggestion that the common good can find active expression without leadership and example, sacrifice, forgiveness and reconciliation, and showing that social

justice is a product of both practical and spiritual forces working to advance the notion of a common humanity.

Gaita's point here is that to ensure that common good principles are met, personal commitment must accompany social action, an insightful recognition in postmodernity that modernist ideologues of the Left and Right tellingly tended to miss.

The danger in this, however, is that a New Times accent on spirituality and interiority without reference to social action has great appeal for 'otherworldly' apolitical, religious archetypes with an interest purely in personal salvation, and has the potential to attract and dislocate the common good focus of a Catholic cohort lacking exposure to the forthright Social Catholicism of yesteryear.

To return to my earlier example of the United States: in a polity long criticised for its unashamed promotion of a market ideology, the conservative dislocation of the Catholic Church from its former stentorian support for a notoriously fragile common good provision has dealt a body-blow to the American civil liberties tradition, which has hitherto counted among its staunchest allies the powerful left-liberal voice of United States Catholics. The danger when this happens is that religion becomes the captive of fundamentalist forces.

Whatever its context, therefore, the New Times moment for Catholic Social Teaching would appear to offer several opportunities to critique neo-liberalism rather than to resort to an outdated litanising of Catholicism's historic opposition to a now non-existent communism or an analysis of its capitulation to social liberal elites with transitory social action programs to replace those related to the development of an authentic religious faith (Pell, 2002).

Thus Roman Catholics in the United States are forced now to choose between the pursuit of policies to champion a sectional interest such as the federal funding of Catholic schools, cleverly exploited by Republican strategists targetted with garnering a larger share of the Catholic vote, and their hitherto impeccable Democrat credentials, historically instrumental in spearheading civil libertarian values into reformist social policy agenda.

En route, the powerful and now conservative American Catholic episcopate has formed new alliances with Protestant religious fundamentalists in dislocating itself from its former enthusiastic participation in public policy discourse and rearticulating its strategies to pursue Vatican directives intended to set it on a quietist and reining-in political agenda (Origins, 1999, 2000, 2001).

Such an agenda could not have been anticipated nearly half a century ago, when as a result of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church threw open its doors to dialogue with the world, abandoning a grand narrative making universalist and absolutist claims to truth and hegemony, and establishing instead an open narrative with all people of goodwill, characterised by flexibility, permeability and openness to the pluralism inherent in the stories of postmodernity.

Subsequently, cultural shifts away from dogmatic formulations and towards pastoral views of the human person and human situations assumed prominence in the development of critical consciousness among Catholics, particularly in terms of new discourses of religious education (Barry and Harvey, 2001).

Such critical consciousness, embodied in the personal and cultural experience of Roman Catholics, a diverse and culturally dispersed group, assisted in the development of alternative justice narratives for postmodern times, located in the experience of people and cultures and disseminated through personal interaction and communication media other

than those dominated by the government and structure of the Roman Catholic Church. (The cultural theorist, Iris Marion Young (1990), provides one of the better frameworks for this postmodern construction of the social justice project in New Times).

The consequent struggle between competing discourses of justice in the Church and the subsequent re-imposition of a hegemonic discourse by a highly centralised Church structure has deflected common good discourses away from Thomist politico-economic prescriptions about the virtues of corporatism, emphasising instead the experiential domain and its capacity to raise the critical consciousness of Catholics and others in regard to social injustices.

The former modernist attempt by Rome to impose a one-size-fits-all, biologically essentialist view of social justice has effectively been forced to make way for a theology of justice from below in which principles relating to the common good matter somewhat less than the experiences of people who struggle for justice (Rorty, 1989; Habermas, 1987).

At the same time, cultural and literary theorists, several of committedly Catholic and impatient with the incapacity for identity politics to deliver social justice, have reverted to modernist common good discourses to advance their ideas (Eagleton 1996; Hobsbawm, 1997).

The Occlusion of a Common Good Discourse from the Australian School Funding Debate

The Catholic Church in Australia similarly faces a complex and bewilderingly different range of policy circumstances and choices in its approach to the provision of Catholic schools, with recent and unexpected changes to Commonwealth funding, and with profound consequences for the curriculum.

Six years ago no senior policy aficionado in Australia could have foretold dramatic changes to the Commonwealth funding of non-government schools (Daniels, 1997). Most forecast a mere partisan tinkering at the edges, with a general consensus on both sides of politics of maintaining the needs-based position of Catholic schools as a unique common good entity in the overall provision of schooling in Australia.

The Catholic position had been virtually unique in terms of its almost exclusive and exceptional access to public revenue for its schools. The advent of the Howard government in 1996 signalled a more than radical shift in policy discourse, away from education as a common good and towards its commodification in terms of market choice, with a series of measures to deregulate the funding of all schools. While there is still some policy territory to traverse before this deregulation is complete, there can be no doubt that the process has commenced, and that new constructions of the purposes of schooling are well underway to complement such dramatic and deliberate policy redirection.

The impact of such policy direction on state schools has been dramatic, eroding the principles of a free, secular and compulsory education that were the cornerstone of public education systems in Australia and reinventing public education as a major player in a new and deregulated education industry in competition with government-assisted private providers (Meadmore, 2001). Although funding now effectively follows enrolment patterns and becomes the free-market tool through which industry efficiency is maintained, the loss of a free, secular and compulsory education system has several adverse implications for common good constructions of education.

While for the time being Catholic education in Australia has been able to immunise itself against neo-liberal policy trends and to insist on needs-based funding for its schools, there is

little doubt that this policy concession has come at a price, viz. the tacit agreement of the Catholic schools funding lobby to support the overall deregulationary trend of the Howard government by participating enthusiastically in trialing the new socio-economically based (SES) funding model and by limiting its commentary on policy shifts to one of neutrality if not of support for the Commonwealth position (Armitage, 1999).

Such policy shifts have driven the public sector to claim that they serve the public good as a consequence of which they argue that resources redirected away from them and towards the private sector constitute a social profanity. Several public figures have publicly registered their disturbance at the way in which the new funding equation promotes a drift away from government schools fuelled by parents' concerns about perceived quality decline (*The Weekend Australian*, May 12-13, 2001, p.15).

Equally, the non-government sector has come to rely more than ever before on the parental choice argument in defending the decision of the Commonwealth to increase funding to non-Catholic schools, including new categories of low-fee schools that have rushed in to take advantage of the deregulation of the monopoly power of state schools in the new edumarket.

Catholic education is left in a bind by this dramatic change to the policy context. On the one hand it has been a most fervent advocate of the subsidiarity argument, attributing to parents the right to educate children in the way they see fit. On the other hand, Catholic Education in some dioceses such as Parramatta has signalled its opposition to the dominant corporate managerial imperative for schools to become a reflection of the marketplace by offering specialised and niche-marketed curriculums to targeted clientele, and instead has set in place procedures and benchmarks for enacting the common good (Bezzina, 2000).

Driving this opposition to the dominant educational paradigm is evidence demonstrating that despite Catholic rhetoric to the contrary Aboriginal and Islander students are underrepresented in Catholic schools (Chesterton & Johnston, 1999). Moreover Cardinal Pio Laghi, the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, in effect the Pope's Education Minister, enunciated the following value in relation to Catholic schools after his visit to Australia in 1996:

...the Catholic school's public role is clearly perceived. It has not come into being as a private initiative, but as an expression of the reality of the Church, having by its very nature a public character. It fulfils a service of public usefulness...(1998, p. 20).

At the core of this debate must therefore be a discourse as to whether the public and common good are one and the same thing, as well as a parallel discourse on whether parental choice is simply a matter of market choice or of civic participation. Clearly, the common good, in deregulationary, neo-liberal times, does incorporate aspects of public good provision, though not necessarily of public ownership and control.

Similarly, parental choice may realistically require the provision of market choice, but also draw local community opinion and involvement into the education process far more directly than is possible under a universal provision arrangement, which attaches little value to the cultural demands of diversity, localisation and particularity.

Put simply, the common good position lies somewhere between the public good and parental choice positions, and recent neo-liberal funding policy changes have drawn the hitherto centrist Catholic systems into a forced alliance on funding policy with the neo-liberal New Right, thus jeopardising the Catholic common good position in relation to schools.

The only resolution to the risk in *New Times* of the reopened state-aid debate is somehow to appeal to the public good argument as well as to the parental choice argument in defining and engaging as many parties as possible in a fruitful discourse about the role of the common good in schools funding.

The rearticulation of both public and private concepts in a way that honours recognisable elements of the common good is fundamental to achieving a sense of civic virtue in the future determination of Australian school funding policy direction as well as in restoring to the Catholic sector some of the common good social value positions that have evidently been sacrificed in terms of dramatically changing policy contexts by repositioning Australian Catholic education somewhat to the right of its former corporatist position.

Until recently the way in which the two notions of the common good and parental choice have been argued has been to place them as polar opposites on a scale in which state schools favoured the public good argument and private schools the parental choice idea. Some sifting around with the concepts exposes many aspects of the common good that may not be met in a neo-liberal state policy age by state school provision, especially the relatively low value placed on parental choice by the state over schooling matters by constructing parents as product consumers as opposed to partners in a complex and multifaceted education process.

Equally the reduction of the parental choice rationale to a matter of market choice by neo-liberals demonstrably misses the personalism and diverse aspects of schooling that underpin many arguments for the provision of choice. The tendency of both sides of politics to ideologise these constructs places the Catholic position, notionally in favour of the common good and therefore directly supportive of neither, in some jeopardy.

In general terms, it is the private school lobby that expects the support of Catholic education in advancing its claim to a greater share of state aid. Understandably, the response of the state schools lobby is that the Catholic state-aid provision is an exceptionality and a dispensation, healing a suppurating wound on the Australian body politic, that has subsequently and unfairly been reopened to advance exaggerated claims on the polity for an increased funding apportionment to private schools.

Another difficulty with the new deregulation is that it has resulted in increased enrolments in Catholic schools from those who perceive them as cheap and efficient private schools rather than from Catholics and others with a clearer understanding of the common good rationale of Catholic schools. As a consequence of this enhanced privateness the ethos or special character of the Catholic school is threatened and the public character of the Catholic school potentially diminished.

A further threat is aimed at a Catholic education that has managed to professionalise its religious education curriculum against attack from a culture in which secularism as religious indifferentism and religious fundamentalism are dramatically on the increase. Catholic schools, more than ever before, are consequently under threat from both factions to either contain the religious character of the school in the first instance, or to convey absolutist answers to complex questions, such as those relating to sex education on the other (Willmet, 2002).

The logic of the new funding model, already realised in the dramatic proliferation of new schools operated by fundamentalist sects, has unleashed forces calling for a return to a model of Catholic schools as extensions of the worshipping community, thus eroding the carefully differentiated boundaries between Church and school and wiping out years of

intense effort and achievement in articulating models of religious education that are the envy of religious educators from other traditions (Petersen, 1995).

In such a rarefied market environment pressures are brought to bear on the quality and thrust of religious education programs of the Catholic school, which have tended to follow pedagogically sophisticated modes of design and delivery modelled on the outcomes-base of other subjects or key learning areas.

At the heart of such a problem is a widespread recognition that the Catholic school is not a Church and that an authentic religious education is not to be automatically conflated with evangelisation, which is rightly the responsibility of the faith community. Additionally the preparation of Catholics in the expression of an adult faith is one that is now confined to teachers and not imposed on young learners as happened in the past.

A return to niche marketed Catholic schools (Burton, 2002), as pressures to survive in a cut-throat private-school environment begin to exert themselves, will arguably dislocate the very real gains made by Catholic education to professionalise the framework of religious education, which will consequently diminish in importance, as it has in most market-conscious, non-Catholic independent schools, in a choice-driven curriculum environment.

The necessity then to Catholic educational interests of maintaining key aspects of a free, secular and compulsory education as supportive of the common good cannot be underestimated, especially in the context of a Catholic public educational presence in several polities, such as England and Wales, Scotland, some Canadian provinces, Belgium, the Netherlands and New Zealand, and in which free, secular and compulsory have come to mean accessible, pluralistic, professional and necessary.

Shortly after the commencement of state aid to Catholic schools on a needs basis, it became clear that the trend was for Catholic schools to become fully-funded and, as was the case elsewhere, the Education Minister of the day, Kim Beazley Snr., was apprised by the first Chairman of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, Ken McKinnon, of such a prospect (McKinnon, 1984).

The Minister and the Prime Minister indicated their understanding and acceptance of the logic of such an arrangement, which was conveyed shortly afterwards to the National Catholic Education Commission, but such a prospect was turned down by the latter body. No clear reason for this has ever been articulated, but all evidence points to a negative impression at the time on the part of the National Catholic Education Commission of the relative benefits of Catholic school integration with the public sector as in New Zealand.

Doctoral research conducted in relation to the analysis explored in this paper (Furtado, 2001) shows such a judgement to have been founded on flimsy evidence and to have largely been conducted by Catholic school interests inimical to the idea of a Catholic school as having a public character.

In effect, Catholic schools in Australia came subsequently to be associated with private and voluntary educational interests and to have seen benefits in an expansion of the private sector rather than in a consolidation with public sector education. The agency through which this direction was cast is the Australian Parents Council, which notwithstanding its impeccable Catholic origins, is vehemently opposed to the notion of public sector Catholic schooling.

In time the neo-liberal lobby, has availed of an opportunity to form alliances with a growing and recently reinvigorated Catholic Right to do battle with a favourite left-wing cause, viz.

that children, in terms of their access to an education paid for from the public purse, should all be treated the same.

Social liberals have countered that funding shifts rationalised to follow the flow of children from one sector to the other - in reality away from the public and towards the private sector - are a reflection of replacing an enfeebled discourse of education policy as a part of social policy with a New Times hegemonic discourse of schooling as a sub-sector of economic policy.

En route it is possible to read a neo-liberal agenda in this policy thrust to franchise public education to those providers, such as the Catholics, who have historically relied upon arguments emphasising the lower unit costs of their schools relative to those of government schools in order to justify their share of the public purse.

While the Catholic share of the new policy deal has remained substantially the same, the non-Catholic independent sector has been considerably advantaged, with sixty of the nation's wealthiest schools, not one of them Catholic, receiving a funding injection of over one hundred million dollars, a figure that will be withdrawn when the Australian Labor Party wins federal office.

However, the new mode of funding, introducing a deregulatory factor to reflect market conditions is unlikely to be removed, except that Labor will give more weight to fees in its policy, reflecting a major flaw in Coalition ideology that did not require recipients of public funds to lower their fees in order to make their schools more inclusive.

While Catholic authorities have been quick to respond to public outrage at policy changes in deregulatory mode, entirely missing from the debate has been any semblance of a Catholic critique of the dangers that an education system, funded on economic policy premises alone, poses for the common good as it impacts on the values framework of Catholic schools.

Somehow a resolution must be sought to this dilemma if the reputation of the Catholic Church as a proponent of justice and peace is to be enhanced. The existing funding arrangement through which it seeks to preserve Catholic third party status, and therefore Catholic political neutrality, is no longer tenable, given the overwhelming thrust of funding ideology and the undesirability of maintaining neutrality when base social justice positions are called into question by New Times neo-liberal policy shifts.

At the same time, the size and unhappy history of the Catholic community in relation to state aid policy is a clear explanation for official Church reluctance to engage in the debate publically for fear of introducing a confessional element into Australian politics, and may well explain a Catholic preference in English-speaking polities for mediating the schools question behind closed doors.

So far the stock response of senior Catholic educators has been to argue that Catholic schools are not advantaged by the new policy, an observation, which, if plausible, does not address a critique or commentary of the overall new policy thrust of the Commonwealth. If there is such a commentary it is usually couched in highly euphemistic terms, such as the somewhat baffling mantra that it is the overall size of the education budget that should be increased as a solution to current policy discord, rather than its apportionment.

The difficulty here is that discussions about overall budgetary allocations cannot occur in absentia of how revenue is raised, and senior aficionados of Catholic education cannot be immune to the fact that new funding policy articulation is inextricably linked to the Howard

government's propagation of the mutual obligation doctrine, which ultimately attaches great importance for the provision of public services to private philanthropic and not-for-profit agencies, such as the Churches.

Part of the package deal for such a policy rearticulation has been for the Commonwealth to secure the ideological neutrality, if not the support of the Catholic Church in Australia, for the shift from taxation-at-source to indirect sources of revenue collection. This consolidation has resulted from several strategies being successfully employed by the Coalition to win the support of senior Catholic Church leaders.

The intervention of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, subsequently translated to Sydney, on the eve of the 1999 Commonwealth election, stating that he did not know of any Church teaching against indirect taxation, must surely have gone a long way towards muzzling Australian advocates of a lucid and highly specific Catholic social teaching on such a matter. Such an intervention somewhat reduces the influence as well as the logic of the Archbishop when he opposes government positions on incarceration of asylum seekers and embryonic stem cell research.

Not simply ethicists but economic rationalists readily agree that it is the poor who bear the burden of indirect taxation rather than the well-cushioned, whose philanthropic intention on such a matter is presumed to promote renewed economic activity and flow-on effects in terms of growth and employment.

The 'official' Catholic position, therefore, if there is one, may well be pragmatic and expedient, but it is hardly principled, nor does it exude evidence of deep moral reflection, bearing little resemblance, if any, to a Catholic sentiment that could be called 'just' with its attendant location in a discourse of human rights, and which has remained steadfastly impervious to and critical of the charitable Protestant philanthropic tradition (Greeley & McManus, 1987) with particular regard to education.

At best, such changes signal a withdrawal of the Australian Church to a preoccupation with matters of Church authority and a determination to focus on personal morality issues. In this respect, while the new Archbishop of Sydney, like John Paul II (1981; 1987), has the reputation of speaking out on social as well as personal issues, in fact his construction of religious intention and identity serves the purpose of reimposing a conservative rather than a socially activist discourse in relation to the public expression of Catholic opinion in Australia.

In itself Dr Pell's aura and public image have all the makings of a New Times moment: he demonstrates none of the quietist cultural cringe reminiscent of Anglo-American Catholic prelates of yesteryear, being palpably able to 'mix it' on his own in a most forthright manner with anyone who will hear him and rejecting the plethora of alliances and inherited prejudices from Old Times, whose unshackling has given noticeable strength and a new voice to many groups in postcolonialism (2002).

However, his determination to anchor Australian Roman Catholicism to a pre-Vatican II position on several matters exposes him to have many characteristics in common with fundamentalist Protestants, whose rejection of liberalism and the social justice project he evidently enthusiastically shares (Almond, 2002).

The question then is not that a religious leader should speak but to whom and what about. In this enterprise, Archbishop Pell is as much influenced by new global directions in Catholicism as the Pope, whose evidently close association with the Republican Right since the Reaganite era, has reinvented the papacy as a kind of unofficial voice of global Christianity.

In this regard, Dr Pell is a frequent contributor to the discourses promoted by several neo-liberal 'think-tanks' in Australia as well as overseas, including the H. R. Nicholls Society and the Centre for Independent Studies (1996), whose social conservatism and economic liberalism are not easily reconciled with a Catholic social justice sentiment.

The presence too in the Liberal Party, once the bastion of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment, of several prominently positioned conservative Catholics, is evidence also of the extent to which Australian Catholicism has shed its working-class Anglo-Irish pro-Labor roots and now seeks to reinvent a role for itself in the New Australia without reference to some of the defining moments in Catholicism that formerly made it an enemy of neo-liberalism.

In all of this there is evidence that the fortress Catholicism of yesteryear has engendered in some of its adherents a way of acting and thinking that is quite out of sympathy with common good aspirations.

To a degree the well-known Catholic penchant for secrecy in relation to its funding deals (Grace, 2001) has also identified the need for a form of collaboration that is sadly lacking in the polity and which has been replaced by adversarial and argumentative ways of resolving disputes, usually by overpowering and demolishing one's opponent through combining an abstract and completely *a priori* logic with the supposition, candid or otherwise, that one's adversary must be a fool or else dishonest.

Such a policy process is hardly congruent with common good sentiments which acknowledge that concepts like truth and wisdom are to be found in all contributors to a debate. The *raison d'être* of the common good therefore is to promote compromise and conciliation in the interests of all rather than the few, and in this sense there is an identifiable common good policy process, rather than a common good ideology, that this essay applauds.

At best, therefore, the muddled policy sense borne of an atrophying of a common good discourse in *New Times* gives *carte blanche* to neo-liberal forces in the Australian state to do what they want, thus depriving the Australian polity of a once important and vibrant voice on social questions in the public domain, while locking it into a microeconomic paradigmatic policy scenario in which Catholic schools are cleverly intended to provide a model for the eventual application of neo-liberal devolutionary programs to all Australian schools.

Some Countervailing Solutions to Problems of the Occlusion of Common Good Ideas

Given that the advent of *New Times* makes it impossible to set the clock back on funding, there are several funding policy solutions, alternative to those employed at present in Australia, that offer advantages similar to those that currently exist in that polity, but without some of the attendant difficulties mentioned above.

In some polities, such as New Zealand, where Catholic schools chose to become part of the provision of public education, there has been a vibrant debate about the deregulation of school funding, with opportunities for the emergence of Catholic and other discourses on the role of the common good in relation to education that have been missing in Australia (Williams, 2000).

While New Zealand, with its much smaller Catholic population than Australia's, exudes all the characteristics of a neo-liberal *New Times* policy moment, in fact the existence of several discourses of what it means to pursue the common good in education, while preserving parental choice, provides an enviable contrast to the equivalent Australian situation. So also

does the fact that a much higher percentage of New Zealanders attend government schools: New Zealand's private school sector is very small and contains no Catholic schools at all.

While constitutional differences, such as Australia's federal government structure, may determine the technical difficulty of transplanting a New Zealand model of Catholic school funding to suit Australian conditions, several other examples of similar arrangements in various United Kingdom and other European and Canadian jurisdictions may beneficially be explored to ensure their viability to support the introduction of a common good discourse to Australian public education.

Essential to any change will be the relocation, argued implicitly in this paper, of Australian Catholic schools and similar others into a diversified and deregulated public sector that is committed to serving the common good, with severe limits set on the outflow of public revenue to schools not committed to such an undertaking. All schools in the public sector will be marked by open enrolment policies, an absence of fees and by accountability practices linking parents with schools. Church bodies will retain ownership of schools and be responsible for preserving their religious ethos by requiring staff and parents to subscribe to the special character of the school.

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (2001) has to a degree foreseen such a development by arguing that equity and access policies pursued by Catholic schools are not altogether different from those relating to government schools though a closer scrutiny of the enrolment policies of Catholic schools reveals major ground to be traversed before this becomes a reality.

Meanwhile schools funding policy continues to irritate and divide the polity along ideological lines, while Catholic education, having trialed and streamlined the Coalition government's SES funding model, is now thought to favour a return to the ERI as a basis for funding its schools.

The unpublished nature of this information, verified from within Catholic education (Lorenz, 2001), highlights the poverty of a funding policy process that is secretly conducted, made on the run and dusted down for ideological updating each time the pendulum swings from one end of the political spectrum to the other.

A return to stop-gap measures, ignorant of New Times contexts and opportunities, reminiscent of a modernist approach to funding policy, and unacceptable to one or the other side of politics, will hardly work. Consequently, a resolution to the perennial stand-off between the public and private sectors, as reflected by the outdated ideological posturing of both sides of politics, needs to be developed as a stable foundation for future funding policy.

In all of this transition the voice of the Catholic Church as to what constitutes the common good in relation to school funding has been largely and embarrassingly mute, giving the impression that it seeks to quarantine itself from the ideological fray by emphasising its systemic isolation from the mainstream of policy discussion on schools funding in Australia, precisely at a time when its social justice agencies struggle to critique neo-liberal public policy shifts, of which educational funding is logically a part, from the perspective of the extent to which such shifts offend against common good principles.

Conclusion

Since it is not enough in a postmarxist age to posit collectivism as the panacea to rampant individualism, a New Times opportunity appears to offer itself in order to articulate Catholic education and indeed all schooling as serving and developing the common good as opposed

to private interest, a neo-liberal, corporate managerialist construction that has driven Australian schools funding policy direction to favour the private provision of schooling for Australian children at the expense of the public purse and which has relocated schooling from the social policy sphere into the realm of economic policy.

Such a relocation has made any discussion and potential resolution of the re-emerged state-aid debate anachronistic and unworkable because the rationale driving both government and private schools is corporate managerial and neo-liberal, and the rules in such a game favour competition and little else. Moreover the role of the state as a referee to ensure that intervention will deliver compensatory and redistributionist mechanisms has become much more parsimonious and focussed on differentiating winners from losers. A silent but critical sleeper in such an ideologically fraught battle-field is the notion of education as a common good with an ethical capacity to contribute to the political process to resolve state-aid problems.

The guardians of this tradition, in the main the Catholic Church, who were brought into the mainstream of funding discourses a quarter of a century ago to enhance the agenda of needs rather than wants, now have the opportunity to make their voice heard. A practical and effective example of an alternative to the dominant neo-liberal discourse in public policy is the health care service of the Catholic Church, which is now the only sector providing a common good model for the provision of a social service that has otherwise been restructured to align with the purely economic ideological imperatives that govern health care provision elsewhere.

The renewal and redefinition of a common good discourse in education would pose a much greater threat to the rampant individualism and cut-throat competition of twenty-first century global capitalism than a discredited and now moribund appeal to state-centric wealth redistribution policies. Indeed without such a rearticulation, the utopian welfarist prognoses of modernism, such as expressed by common good adherents like Keynes (1932), will hardly hold up. Writing nearly three quarters of a century ago, this is what he forecast.

When the accumulation of wealth is no longer of high social importance, there will be greater changes in the code of morals. We shall be able to rid ourselves of many of the pseudo-moral principles which have hag-ridden us for two hundred years, by which we have exalted some of the most distasteful of human qualities into the position of the highest virtues.

We shall be able to afford to dare to assess the money motive at its true value.....All kinds of social customs and economic practices, affecting the distribution of wealth and of economic rewards and penalties, which we now maintain at all costs, however distasteful and unjust they may be in themselves, because they are tremendously useful in promoting the accumulation of capital, we shall then be free at last to discard (pp 369-372, *passim*).

The subsequent reversal of the Keynesian experiment in New Times, and collateral damage to the notion of the common good, presents new challenges to ethicists and philosophers, who, as guardians of a value system that puts spirituality above the acquisition of material goods, are entrusted with articulating a message for New Times that is at one and the same time consistent with and contesting of the trend towards individual and global power to which neo-liberalism is highly committed and sleekly adaptable.

The way ahead, for there are undoubted opportunities within globalisation to develop the kind of narratives that mediate and reconcile globalisation with social justice, is for the

standard bearers of such values to support discourses that recognise and promote equal rights. The pursuit of these ends, in the words of the Canadian cultural theorist, C. B. Macpherson (1965, p. 67), 'will bring an enlargement of individual power...not the powers of individuals over others or at the expense of others, but their powers to realise and enjoy their fullest human capacities', a New Times opportunity and a challenge, if ever there was one!

The common good notion of the human person with needs and rights to be met, rather than wants and appetites to be satisfied by the market, presents a New Times view of a humanity that is alive and interdependent, diverse, collaborative, communitarian and built upon a sense of concern for the needs of the weakest.

Catholic schools, with their powerful common good tradition, have much to contribute in New Times Australia to the sort of society and consequently the kind of education that is desirable. This analysis casts doubt on their capacity to do so from the position into which they are locked by current Commonwealth funding policy, demonstrating its rationale to coerce them into pursuing directions that will make them ever more privatised and supportive of quietist and conservative curricular agenda.

The research on which this paper is based calls for the relocation of Catholic systemic schools into a deregulated Australian public sector educational provision, offering parents an effective schooling choice without sacrifice to the notion, perilously endangered in New Times, of an education for the common good.

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