In their research on identity status and religion, Verhoeven and Hutsebaut (V&H) not only demonstrate that there is a significant relationship between identity status and religion, but they also establish its rather complex character. Identity crises are handled in various ways and it turns out that the practice of faith is not utterly independent of the way in which the crisis is carried through. This may not surprise us since faith does not present itself without social or psychological embodiment. In this reflection I pay attention to three issues, in the first place the conceptualisation of the research topic, secondly some aspects of the practice of faith that emerge, and in the third place a more general statement on practical theology.

1. Commitment and Faith

Does the way in which the identity crisis is handled by students of the K. U. Leuven have an effect on their religious development?

Considering the fact that inquiry pertains to students of a Catholic University and given the dimensions of religiosity that are under discussion, I think it is legitimate to take it for granted that the religious development at issue concerns the Christian faith. Thus, this research associates the identity formation on the one hand with faith on the other hand, and the reason for this juxtaposition is — according to V&H — that both ‘activities’ touch the inner core of the ego. I assume they are right, for faith is, among other things, an alignment of the heart, an orientation that proceeds from the soul, a personal commitment to God and his Kingdom.

The concept of the identity crisis, however, is still not clear. V&H start their article with a loose description of personal identity and they use concepts
such as 'exploring alternatives', 'commitment to binding positions', 'making decisions', and the like. Maybe a clear description or definition of identity-status is not necessary for the research project. After all the categorisation-model they used, turned out to be quite useful. Nonetheless, a certain vagueness remains with respect to the notion of commitment, especially when it is used in comparison with religious belief. Since V&H make use of Marcia's categorisation of Identity Statuses, the main category distinction is in terms of commitment (positive or negative) and, secondly, in terms of the occurrence or non-occurrence of exploring alternatives.

Commitment is also a very central concept in our understanding of faith. When we consider faith, it seems to me that it will always be paired off with commitment. One of the central elements of faith is trust in God, having a certain attitude, taking a certain stand. And, of course, one cannot have this fundamental commitment without its being realized in some specific and definite complex of action and belief. So the commitment of faith can be measured, as V&H have done, in terms of religious beliefs, religious practices and religious experiences. And yet we are still facing a certain vagueness with respect to commitment. Students categorized by a MOR-status and a DIF-status are said to be 'without commitment' to positions or attitudes. Consequently, if commitment is an essential characteristic of faith, we cannot expect much religiosity in these categories. And indeed, students with these statuses don't exhibit a rather pro-religious attitude. However, it turns out that, although there is a high percentage of doubters, they nonetheless exemplify some commitment. Should we conclude then that apparently commitment is not essential to faith? I don't think so. It shows that commitment is a rather complex notion. In fact, it is a property of degree, it signifies a quality. There is a great variety in commitment and it comes in different degrees, it ranges from a strong and firm involvement to a hardly measurable one. Church attendance on Christmas-eve, or participating in a single rite of passage is a measurable commitment, albeit incomparable in degree with being a core member of the University Parish. And I assume that the same scale of progressive intensity applies to the notion of commitment that defines the status-types.

Consequently, we might ask whether or not there is an intrinsic relation (a relation on the basis of the terms used) between the categorisation model and the dimensions of faith. As believers, by definition, do exemplify some form of commitment, one might be inclined to think that youngsters who do exhibit some form of commitment are relatively more religious. This does not follow, however. Commitment does not imply belief, while the reverse is true.