

## 2021 AUSTRALIAN LONERGAN WORKSHOP

*Authentic subjects transforming cultures: regenerative farming, a parable for our times.*

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### **“THE EDUCATION MOMENT: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR A FOUNDATION IN EDUCATION”<sup>1</sup>**

Geoffrey Brodie

*Catholic education requires a foundation and principle from which to critique its authentic mission in the Kingdom of God. Church teaching requires a true and Christian education to be faithful to the full truth of the human person, creation, and Jesus, engaging with the insights from all human enquiries. This paper applies Lonergan's realm of interiority to propose that a shared commitment between curriculum, teacher and student is the principle of an authentic moment in Catholic education. It discusses whether the higher viewpoint of gift, presupposing and anticipating the finality framed by interiority, explains how a moment of education may transform a culture and participate in God's Kingdom.*

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is derived from a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a Master of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame Australia (Fremantle). The title is “*Exploring the foundation and principles of Gravissimum Educationis: Applying Bernard Lonergan's realm of interiority to frame the principle of the education moment.*”

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## Introduction

Our theme is “*Authentic subjects transforming cultures*” and my focus is secondary education. My starting point is a moment of education derived from Lonergan’s explanation of cognition, and my development is through the notion of gift that unites an educational anthropology and a curriculum’s ontology with God’s loving and wise plan. My conclusion is that an education committed to the student experiencing, understanding, and judging being as a gift, unfolding through the student’s acceptance of their gift for intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving commitment, participates in the development of authentic subjects concerned with the transformation of their culture within the Kingdom of God.

I will offer three points:

1. A definition of the education moment.
2. The proposal of education as a cultural activity.
3. The conclusion that education’s transformation of culture is potentially a participation in the Kingdom of God.

## The education moment

The education moment is the immediate horizon of education. The education moment is implicitly defined by the terms of Lonergan’s cognitional theory. It is defined as the unification of a curriculum, a teacher, and a student at a fourth level of human consciousness, the level of commitment.<sup>2</sup> The commitment at the fourth level of consciousness anticipates diversity in its historical occurrence because the education moment:

1. occurs in at least one of four anthropological dimensions of the human person<sup>3</sup> as knower, chooser, actor, and lover.<sup>4</sup>
2. occurs in at least one of four dimensions of the ontological curriculum: common sense, theory, interiority, and transcendence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The first three are Lonergan’s *experience, understanding and judgment*. Commitment is used here to refer to the decision to live consistently with the judgments that bring the prior three levels to a finality.

<sup>3</sup> A suggestion for education’s first question: what is a human person?

<sup>4</sup> In this schema, the subject is fulfilled through conformity with a gift. The knower anticipates fulfilment in knowing what is real; the chooser anticipates fulfilment in choosing the truly valuable over the merely self-satisfying; the actor anticipates the authenticity and integrity of living their capacity for truth and goodness; the lover anticipates the fulfilment of making an unconditional gift of the self to the other.

<sup>5</sup> The ontological curriculum is prior to and grounds the traditional curriculum of subject areas. The four dimensions of the ontological curriculum are derived from Lonergan’s four realms of meaning. Each realm is distinguished by a set of questions and anticipated answers that mediate being through a particular focus. There is the aim of philosophy derived from the curriculum of interiority. Philosophy seeks the attainment of knowledge terminating in self-knowledge. There is the aim of training derived from the curriculum of common sense. Training seeks the attainment of knowledge terminating in the achievement of practical competence and a descriptive knowledge of the real. There is the aim of

3. occurs in the combination of one anthropological dimension with one dimension of the ontological curriculum.

The education moment:

1. derives its capacity from the teacher imposing an object from the curriculum into the horizon of the student, proposing a commitment by which to live.
2. has its fulfilment in the student's free and responsible commitment to expand their horizon to better conform with the curriculum and freely choosing to live by the proposed commitment.

Consequently, progress in education occurs in two ways:

1. the movement towards the shared commitment within the combination of one anthropological and one ontological dimension. This may be understood as participation in the creation of a culture.
2. the movement from the commitment within one combination of anthropological and ontological dimensions to another commitment in another combination of anthropological and ontological dimensions. This may be understood as participation in the development of a culture.

The role of the teacher is to expand the horizon of the student to better equate with being. The teacher formed in the realm of interiority recognises and imposes the next-best question into the student's horizon. Pedagogical wisdom comes from knowing when and how to impose selected differentiations of being into the student's horizon in ways that increases the student's self-knowledge as a free and responsible subject of human consciousness.

### **Education is a cultural activity.**

The transformation of culture is the mediating horizon of education. Culture is defined as the shared set of beliefs and values motivating and directing human cooperation through the appeal to human freedom and responsibility.<sup>6</sup> Culture is a development in human affairs sublating the enforceable imposition of social institutions by raising freedom and responsibility as the organising principle. Education is a cultural activity because the anticipated growth and change of the student find their fulfilment in the flourishing of the student's freedom and responsibility.

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science derived from the curriculum of theory. Science seeks the attainment of knowledge terminating in the achievement of the intelligent grasp and reasonable explanation of the real. There is the aim of religion derived from the curriculum of transcendence. Religion seeks the source of all being, terminating in the free and responsible commitment to the source of goodness and love. All areas of the traditional curriculum possess the potential to ground an encounter framed by the ontological curriculum.

<sup>6</sup> Dulles, *The Splendour of Faith: The Theological Vision of John Paul II*, 119-20. "... culture is the self-expression of the human spirit, and is essentially orientated to truth, goodness and beauty. Although culture is always objectified in products of one kind or another, it is also constitutive of the human subject".

A brief account of four implications follows. First, if a goal of education is the future achievement of attaining and responsibly transforming one's cultural inheritance,<sup>7</sup> it is the mature and noble wholeness of the human subject as free and responsible that is the criterion for judging the nature of the goal.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, a society cannot arbitrarily impose a student's self-knowledge without violating the student's freedom. That is, a cultural education resists demands for the student to conform to society's expectations without any mediation through student's knowing, choosing, acting, and loving.<sup>9</sup> Such imposition contradicts the unity established by culture's mediation of vital and social values with personal and religious values. Thirdly, education as a cultural activity engages the person as an integrated whole.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, there must be no exclusion of any aspect of human living from education's concern. Fourthly, education mediates historical achievement and future aspiration for the whole person and the community. Education limited to the past is in danger of falling into indoctrination. Education limited to the practicality of the present is in danger of being reduced to mere training. Education looking only to the future risks imposing ideology on contemporary questions. Both indoctrination and ideology truncate human freedom and are contrary to a cultural vision for education, whilst training is concerned with compliant performance without reference to the vertical unfolding of freedom into new and better ways of cooperation and fulfilment. It is education as a cultural task that recognises and avoids such reductions in human formation.

Holding education accountable to the wholeness and dignity of personal and religious values as a gift unfolds the responsibility of education the student's ultimate end and the good of the community. To desire freedom and pursue it in the absence of responsibility rejects being as a gift. The student is denied the higher viewpoint of personal and religious value in the integration of their horizon with the field of being. Freedom understood as participation in being shares being's nature as a gift. Cultural education is a source of progress and development<sup>11</sup> because it develops the student's freedom and responsibility so the "whole" student may commit their "whole" self to the gift of their ultimate end and the good of the community.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, Introduction. This challenges the well-used adage that the young are the future. Rather, it is the educational project to assist the young to attain the noble wholeness, so requiring a change in the person, that is the future.

<sup>8</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1. "acquire gradually a more mature sense of responsibility toward ennobling their own lives through constant effort and toward pursuing authentic freedom."

<sup>9</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1. Footnote 8 in Abbott (ed) (1966) p.640: "The theme of personal responsibility which has dominated so many of the deliberations of VII comes out very clearly here. Note the insistence on children and young people and their own development in contradistinction to a previous attitude of education as if it were imposed from above. There is an interesting connection between this paragraph and the Declaration on Religious Freedom."

<sup>10</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1. Footnote 4 in Abbott (ed) (1966) p.638: "The Council here states its basic position with regard to the Declaration on Christian education. Although the Church is concerned primarily with the spiritual and supernatural destiny of man, it recognises the intimate connection between that destiny and 'the whole of man's life'."

<sup>11</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1

<sup>12</sup> The growth and change towards one's ultimate end are not some versions of cause and effect as perhaps modelled by mathematical proof. There is instead a notion of eternal return. The acknowledgment of an ultimate end, in turn,

The person “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself”<sup>13</sup> given and received in the cultural relationships of self, neighbour, and God.<sup>14</sup> Education as a cultural task proposes the wholeness of the “I” because freedom is essential if education is to be faithful to the unrestricted desire to know seeking responsible judgments and commitments to the superabundance of being. Education as a cultural task derives its authority from its appeal to the interdependence and mutual mediation between freedom, responsibility, consciousness and being all as unconditional gift.

### **Education and the transformation of culture in the Kingdom of God.**

Participation in the Kingdom of God is the remote and mysterious horizon of education. Education unfolds its transformative power when curriculum, teacher and student are united in the commitment to truth, goodness and beauty known through the gift of authentic human subjectivity.

Lonergan's realm of interiority differentiates the invariant set of terms and relationships that explain and relate human subjectivity and being. The integration of the set of terms proposes everything as a loving gift from God. From this vantage point, education's horizon presupposes and anticipates the Kingdom of God, without ever and in any way diminishing the autonomy of human reason and human freedom. Interiority frames education as a responsible invitation into wholeness and holiness. That is a worthy criterion for the transformation of culture. Interiority makes explicit the full range of related commitments proposed by a truly transformative cultural education, and in this way, offers a genuinely universal invitation into God's Kingdom.

When a student, adhering to the invariant structure of their consciousness, asks a question and pursues a satisfying answer, he or she anticipates the fulfilment of knowing the real and choosing the good. The unrestricted desire to know unfolds, under the guidance of education, to lead him or her to ask for themselves, freely and responsibly, the question of God: Is there a transcendent and loving source and fulfilment of all these gifts of self, reason, freedom, responsibility, and creation? This is the question that frees culture from being self-referential and directs cultures in the development required for its fulfilment.

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increases the capacity of the person's horizon to include that end. The expansion in the horizon allows the person to grasp even more fully the mystery of their ultimate end and the values by which one is to live to achieve the end. This creative tension stands in contrast to a closed cause and effect model of instruction that perhaps is appropriate in training, but not adequate for education.

<sup>13</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

<sup>14</sup> The importance of these relationships is discussed in the reading of *Gaudium et Spes* 24, under the Greatest commandments to love: Love God and neighbour, and to love neighbour as self. Commitment is, therefore, a loving gift, given and received, of the very self. Education aspiring to the formation of the free and responsible gift is another way of proclaiming the faith in the God who is love. True and Catholic education must be completely formed by and for this commitment.

The education moment is existential as one must decide what to make of oneself.<sup>15</sup> With this, the student will have to decide for herself or himself if they wish to take up their cultural responsibility for one's community. The student will have to decide if they wish to take up the commitment to the value of every person and respond with the radical self-gift of love. The student conforming their historical living with the invariant value of each person will require the higher viewpoint establishing that commitment as real, good, and authentic. The higher viewpoint is the religious value that raises the question of God.

Some discussion about counter-positions on education as a cultural task may be one way of approaching the integral nature of the God question and avoid the appearance of pulling the God-card from the bottom of the deck. If these counter-positions may be understood as problems, then they anticipate solutions co-existent with the fact of the problem.

First, if the horizon of the teacher is limited only to the common sense and theoretical dimensions of the ontological curriculum, then the teacher will be plagued by their inability to contribute to the existential questions of their students. The teacher will not have the wisdom to offer experiences of genuine freedom because they cannot select from the fully differentiated encounters of being to impose the next best question into the student's horizon. At worst, the teacher does not love the freedom of the student, despising the questions emerging from the student's unrestricted desire to know. They may even fear they are unworthy of the student's trust. In any case, the teacher may tragically model the distortion of freedom that narrows horizons into protective self-interest and the rejection of being as a gift. Proper teacher formation in religious value lessens the probability of this sad event occurring.

Secondly, if the student understands the fulfilment of freedom as the priority of self-interest over self-gift, they virtually worship the self as fully self-constituting, instead of the worship that first accepts the self as a gift to the self. In separating freedom from responsibility, the student believes the authority of their story is the radically autonomous "I" freed from any notion of a given human nature. The cultural tragedy is that the foundational reality of God's loving gift is ignored or denied, distorting the very cognitional dynamic that expands the student's horizon into being. Only the appearance of education remains.

However, any ossification of the teacher or student's horizon does not dislodge the desire for fulfilment. Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.<sup>16</sup> The human subject still feels the drama of being the protagonist of their existential drama, despite the inability to account for such feelings. The

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<sup>15</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 38-40.

<sup>16</sup> St Augustine

protagonist desires the knowledge of the real, unfolding into the desire for a sufficient philosophy of life that engages the questions of ultimate meaning and value. Even if a truncated horizon with its diminished criteria for success tries to suggest a successful education, the unrestricted nature of human wondering and desire will emerge as the lingering doubt that what happened 'at school' was not worthy of the title 'education.' God's patience is infinite.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is motivated by one concern: that present commitments in education do not reflect what is at stake. Do we operate from a sufficient anthropology, ontology, and Christology worthy of our students? My personal experience points to evidence that the glory of God in the person fully alive is a regular occurrence in education. Our unrestricted desire for the true, good, and beautiful will not be denied its proper objective. However, do we have the cultural authenticity to transform present notions of the human good and forms of social cooperation with the light of the invariant gifts of human dignity and the love of God? Can the Greatest Commandment to love God and neighbour motivate our sense of freedom and responsibility and so possess the cultural authority to reverse any counter-positions in education and seek progress in an education that transforms us through the acceptance of the gift of God's love: a gift that is the invitation constitutive in every moment of education.