Research Article

The Catholic School: Can The Centre Hold?

Brendan Carmody[1]

1. University College London, University of London, United Kingdom

The Catholic school today, when considered in a general sense, struggles to maintain its religious mission while its academic record remains commendable. This reflects a dualistic framework where the school's science curriculum is preponderant. To regain an integrated perspective, it is argued that Catholic education needs to adopt a more satisfactory perspective on learning, which it is contended that the philosopher Bernard Lonergan developed. It is argued that Lonergan's framework, with his notion of intellectual conversion, redeems the Catholic education, allowing it to be more satisfactorily inclusive of its scientific and confessional agendas.

Studies on the Catholic school reveal a spectrum from where the school operated as a direct instrument of conversion to Catholicism, holistically, to models that are dualistic and pluralistic (Arthur 1995, 225-227). For James Arthur, his holistic model described the school almost as an arm of the church largely in pre-Vatican II days. His dualistic and pluralistic models identify the British Catholic school in transition as he views them today.

The dualistic school appears to best locate what is currently happening in England and more widely (Grace & O'Keefe 2007, 2-3; Grace & O'Keefe 2007; Mesa 2013, 184; Groome 2021, x, 167, 190; Pring 2018,75; Grace & Wodon, 2022). As Arthur puts it, within the dualistic framework, school assemblies, liturgy, and religious events appear to have less relevance to the teaching of science, so that the church's religious mission is progressively separated from its secular practice. This has taken place in the shadow of widespread secularization, taken here generally to mean a reduction of religion in the face of science, leaving religion without significant content (**Lonergan 1974c,** 107, 109, 114; **Gallagher 2012, 65)**.

In a North American setting, Patrick Manning (2018, 26) describes how a young, highly accomplished student with an understanding of Catholicism is outstanding but incommensurate with his life and the

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world in which he lives. This instance helps indicate how post-primary students increasingly live with two brands of learning—what they find in the Physics and Religious Education classrooms. Generally, it appears that, like Thiomas, the student in question, the study of religion compares unfavourably with that of science. (Barnes 2014,13; Chapman et al. 2014,5; Morey & Piderit 2006, 6; Nord 1995, 296,328,378; Reiss 2023, 164; Rossiter 2022,159-160; Keefe 2021).

Today, the Catholic school, taken in a generic sense, often tends to ambivalently embrace a largely unquestioned approach to learning where the rational is characterized by measurement (Hart 2008, 236-7; Noddings 2005,20; Carmody 2021; Richards 2015,16). One might speak of parallel modes of learning—scientific and personal which rarely meet (Noddings 2010,103; Arthur, Gearon & Sears 2010, 24; Walker 2019,105; **Smart 1968)**.

In the pages that follow, this apparent disjunction between religious and secular knowledge will be critically explored through the writings of the late Catholic philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan, who addressed this issue in his book *Method In Theology*, which has become a key text in theology today.[1]

This discussion builds on Lonergan's philosophy of education as it is mined from his general writings because he wrote relatively little specifically on education (Lonergan 1993). Much of his direct contribution to education is outlined by Paddy Walsh (2018) and detailed, closer to the time, by James Sanders (1961, 88-108, 133-150). Walsh identified key aspects of what Lonergan considered to be necessary for an updated Catholic philosophy of education, namely, that it be Catholic, concrete, contemporary, existential, historical, and in conversation with modern scienc**e** (Walsh 2018, 135) while Sanders focused on Lonergan's concern with what Lonergan called new knowledge.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate how Lonergan's theory of knowledge helps resolve the dualistic element of learning to which we have referred and, as a result, to appreciate how this enables integrative learning to emerge.

The Question Contextualized

The split between religious and secular knowledge is rooted historically (Gifford 2019). Paul Gifford speaks of the transformation of cognition in the West as he recalls that Medieval Christianity was a world where the supernatural was tangible, as the understanding of life was largely based on patristic theology (Gifford 2019, 29).

With the advent of natural science (roughly from 1572 onwards), this world and the consciousness of its people changed. Reasoning ceased to be based mainly on principles but on measurement. Philosophy and theology were dethroned as this new form of scientific knowledge helped to inaugurate modernity. Concern with the supernatural was replaced with what was this-wordly (Groome 2021, 38,95; Pring 2021, 9-10; Manning 2018, 26-40).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Catholic church tended to resist modernity and adopted a form of thinking called neo-scholasticism (**Gilkey 1975**; Friday 2013,799; Carmody 2011, 115). Lonergan spoke of this mode of thinking as being enveloped by classical culture, which for centuries had provided normative criteria for evaluating knowledge (Gelpi 1997, 53; D'Souza 2013,850). This normative view of culture was rooted in an unchanging Medieval metaphysics.

Among others, Joseph Marechal attempted to address the split in knowledge. He linked the philosophy of Immanuel Kant to the older metaphysics derived from Thomas Aquinas. Lonergan, like Karl Rahner and others, at first found this approach to be promising (Gelpi 1994, 91). However, he came to realize that Marechal's hypothesis, though creative, was mistaken (Gelpi 1997, 94). It misinterpreted the old metaphysics and ended with a cognitive theory that was incorrect.

Lonergan's Review of Knowledge

Lonergan, however, concurred with Marechal's desire to enter into dialogue with modern philosophers, but his challenge was to do so effectively. With that in mind, in the 1950s, he wrote a book, *Insight*,[2] where he argued that objective knowing needs more than metaphysical principles; knowledge needs, in his words, to be the fruit of authentic subjectivity (Lonergan 1973, 292; D'Souza 2013, 849-850).

Insight emerged from Lonergan's attempt to bridge the gap between what he later called faculty psychology (neoscholasticism) and intentionality analysis (modern philosophy). This led him to revisit Catholic theology in his book *Method in Theology*. He perceived that Catholic theology had become overly theoretical, abstract, and alien. Similarly, he noted that the Catholic philosophy of education was rooted in philosophical ideas that were seen to be permanent (Redden & Ryan, 1956; Dupuis & Nordberg, 1964; Williams, 2010a, 169-170).

While Lonergan agreed that this perspective had value, he anecdotally relates why the old framework was outdated. At a meeting of the American Philosophical Association in the late 1950s, he was asked

by two Catholic priests why he was addressing the issue of contemporary Catholic education. As far as they saw it, Catholic education was fixed, changeless, and based on first principles (Lonergan 1993,22).

For Lonergan, this way of thinking was unsatisfactory mainly because it failed to address what he termed 'new learning,' the knowledge that modern science generated (Sanders 1961, 93; Noddings 2016, 38). The scholastic approach was out of step and incapable of providing the kind of vision that today's school requires (Lonergan 1993, 20). It focused on the application of a closed metaphysical unchanging theory to a time-framed practice.

In Lonergan's view, today's theory should not be philosophy simpliciter, a discipline complete and sufficient to itself. It needs to connect with the contemporary setting and be 'a philosophy of...' which entails a more intrinsic relationship between theory, whether that is theology or whatever, with what is taking place. The school needs to prepare students for a swiftly changing reality that philosophy simpliciter cannot give. Lonergan's emphasis came about, on his own admission, from his appreciation of the educational psychologist Jean Piaget (Lonergan 1974a, 78; Gelpi 1994, 107-108).

Since Lonergan was primarily concerned with theology, he questioned how pre-Vatican II theology linked with reality. He discovered that the tradition was intelligible but was embedded in an archaic way of speaking that had been largely superseded by science (Bellah & Tippon 2006,12; Gallagher 2010, 64,70). In a sense, the tradition overemphasized the text, overlooking what the text was meant to do. This resulted from a view of objectivity that almost excluded the subject, where reason puts a premium on detachment and objectivity, suppressing the context dependence of the first-person experience in favour of a third-person perspective (Dunne & Pendlebury 2003, 195; D'Souza 2013,850). As a result, the theologian and the scientist were operating with different perceptions of knowledge.

The Notion of Empirical Expanded

One could speak of theology analogously with science, but if the theological method is too closely allied with the scientific method, one would, as it were, study a person as one would study a rock; knowledge is narrowed (Hart 2018,337; Giddy 2011, 528: Buckley 1998,117; McGrath 2011, 86). How, then, could one verify something as imperceptible as the existence of God? (Lonergan 1974b, 120-121; Gallagher 2008, 437; Moore 2011,217). In the words of Phenix (1964, 116), the scientific method provides no knowledge of the mind.

As Lonergan (1974c, 107) put it, "the divine is not a datum to be observed by sense..." The challenge he faced was to show how theology could acquire a more satisfactory academic status. This led him to ask: Is knowing valid only when, as Dewey maintained, it is scientific in the sense in which natural science is scientific? (Dewey 1938/1963, 88)? In Lonergan's view, a reflective procedure quite distinct from those sanctioned by the success of modern science was needed in order to confront the contention that the only meaningful statements are those that are scientific (Lonergan 1974c, 111).

Evidently, scientific propositions constitute an important type of human knowing (Richards 2011, 12). Yet, despite science's high profile and often presumed metaphysical monopoly, for Lonergan, it is not the whole of knowledge. Conscious of the importance of having an empirical basis like that of science but keeping in view that the social sciences are concerned with meaning and value while natural science is not, Lonergan expanded his idea of what constitutes the empirical.

He argued that science is based on the data supplied by the senses, but there are data not immediately related to the senses--the data of consciousness. To include both kinds of data as the route to integrated knowing, he spoke of knowledge that is different from what is scientific, in the natural science sense, but which does not fly in the face of that rationality (Lonergan 1973, 4; Noddings 2008, 384; Pierce 2007; Townes 1966).

Interiority and Critical Realism

Lonergan's appreciation of the extended empirical basis of knowledge came initially from his study of John Henry Newman. Subsequently, this was developed from his study of Edmund Husserl, who focused on the data of consciousness (Lonergan 1973, 219; Friday 2013, 799-801). His concern moved beyond theory to interiority (Lonergan 1973, 81-99). This form of knowledge resembles theory and science, but it is distinct. As Tobin Hart (2009, 140) puts it, when awareness is turned inward, we find the world of subjective experience. It resembles the distinction between "I" and "me," where the me represents the contents of our consciousness, and the "I" is that part of us that can watch or witness those contents (Hart 2009, 140).

For Lonergan, interiority resembles what Carl Rogers spoke about in the area of feeling when he encourages his clients to advert to, distinguish, name, identify and recognize those that are latent (Lonergan 1974, 269, 274). It might be said that we develop spaciousness within us in order to take in what is before us (Hart 2008,235). Lonergan, unlike Rogers, focused primarily on our cognitive operations (Lonergan 1974a, 70).

Coming to know how we can say that we know requires awareness of our intentional operations (Lonergan 1973, 75). These intentional operations form a patterned process of experience, understanding, judging, and deciding, which, in Lonergan's view, is familiar to everyone and in that sense, this pattern is transcendental (Lonergan 1973, 7, 9, 11-12). The challenge is both to identify and objectify such latent operations (Lonergan 1974a, 76,79)

When speaking of how we reach objective knowledge, Lonergan identifies a major and pervasive oversight, which is that knowledge is often seen to be rooted exclusively in the senses (Lonergan 1974, 265; McShane 2001, 275; Allen 2016). Such misconception fails to penetrate the real. It delivers Andrew Wright's comprehensive liberalism where initial observation is not challenged by critical reflection (Wright 2007, 3,9, 177). It needs to move beyond the surface (Hart 2009, 1; Hart 2018, 338). In Lonergan's view, such half-knowledge results from failure to be faithful to the underlying self-transcending dynamic entailed in coming to truly know (Lonergan 1973,19; Friday 2013, 800-801; Gelpi 1994, 107-117; Mc Guckian 2009, 536-537; Hart 2009, 88-89).

Intellectual Conversion

Aware of the need for more than subjective knowledge, naïve realism, or comprehensive liberalism as Wright calls it, Lonergan does not ask the reader to accept his theory of knowledge without evidence. Drawing on his hypothesis of the universality of how we come to truly know, he invites each person to verify what is being said personally. This leads to what he describes as the rock on which knowing rests with a relatively sure conception of reality (Lonergan 1973,19; Friday 2013,800-801; Townes 1966).

For an affirmation of how we come to know, Lonergan bids the reader to say whether or not he/she is a knower. A negative answer to this question is self-contradictory. If I am not a knower, I can only make that judgment by knowing. This is pivotal for verifying the truth of what we know. Lonergan called this process intellectual conversion, where we experience:

> ...a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is what is out there now to be looked at (Lonergan 1973,328).

Lonergan elaborates in terms of what he calls worlds of immediacy and of meaning (Lonergan 1973, 328).

Knowledge Reconceived

He underlines that the criteria of objective knowledge are not the criteria of ocular vision. An act of ocular vision may be perfect as vision, but without understanding, it is mere gaping (Lonergan 1997, 381). Understanding depends on some sense data while it needs to be judged for its truth value. Knowing is thus a dynamic structure (Lonergan 1973, 238, 1997,382). The capacity to truly know emerges from self-affirmation of the knower in *Insight,* and it is termed intellectual conversion in *Method in Theology*. It provides a route to self-knowledge that is normative for objectivity.

More specifically, this experience of intellectual conversion emerges from a growth in awareness of knowledge as rooted both in one's senses and one's consciousness. The different kinds of knowledge lead to an internal confrontation or, in Lonergan's words, dialectic within consciousness. Knowledge-based on the senses tends to pervade, leading to what has been described as a very stubborn myth concerning objectivity. This so-called myth concerning the nature of knowledge fails to adequately recognize the distinction between the sense world of immediacy and the much larger world of meaning (Lonergan 1973: 238; Walker 2019, 97-98).

Because of the radical nature of the difference between the two perspectives on knowing and the pervasive tendency to confuse them, Lonergan named the potential resolution of such difference of perspective intellectual conversion. In this way, he wished to emphasize that true knowledge entailed a fundamental redirection of one's ordinary approach to reality. It does not reject but compliments the world of scientific knowledge.

Intellectual conversion thus intimates a profound personal change in how one encounters the real world—it entails, in Lonergan's words, a decision to create a new framework.

Self Knowledge

We have identified the dynamics of arriving at objective knowledge, as Lonergan outlined it, but how can we objectify our self-knowledge? How, for instance, do I apprehend my own perceiving in coming to know my own knowing?

Such objectification of one's subjectivity entails introspection that needs to avoid the trap of identifying consciousness with knowledge. As Fred Crowe put it, consciousness is infrastructural:

> We are all conscious of our sensing and feeling, our inquiring and our understanding, our deliberating and our deciding. None of these activities occur when one is in a coma or deep sleep. In that sense, they are conscious. Still, they are not properly known. They are just infrastructure, a component within knowing that, in large part, remains merely potential. It is only when we heighten consciousness by adverting not to the objects but to the activities, when we sort out the activities, to assign them distinctive names, to distinguish and to relate, only then we move from the mere infrastructure that is consciousness to the compound that is man's knowledge of his cognitional process. (Crowe 1985,117).

Objectification of one's subjectivity or, in Crowe's terms—the infrastructure--means adverting to our cognitive activities, naming, distinguishing, and relating them. Technically, it entails reduplicating the structure of knowing (Lonergan 1997:383-386). This resembles what we have noted earlier in terms of "I" and "me," where awareness of our consciousness is seen to be a developmental step beyond abstraction (Hart 2009,141). One's primary experience of coming to know—the "me" needs to be correctly understood by the "I."

Reduplicating the structure of knowing in the process of achieving self-knowing comes to (1) experiencing, *experiencing—understanding—and judging*, (2) understanding, *experiencing—understanding—and judging*, and (3) judging, *experiencing—understanding—and judging*, to be correct (Lonergan 1973,14). Objectifying our immanent conscious and intentional operations pivots upon the invariant structure of one's own knowing (Lonergan 1973,10; Walker 2019, 98). Such anchoring our knowledge on the structure of human knowing, not on first principles, becomes the bedrock and provides a foundation that is highly sought after but is frequently elusive (Lonergan 1973, 19; Noddings 2016, 77; Wright 2007, 8,12-13, 177).

Differentiation of Consciousness

In this self-reflective approach to knowing, Lonergan proposed that he discovered a key to evaluating the truth or falsity of one's perception of it because it focuses on oneself as a knower, which allows one to assimilate and to differentiate within his/her consciousness (Roy 1991, 156). Becoming

explicitly and critically aware of our intentional operations provides a base for the differentiation of consciousness.

Such self-awareness resembles where, for instance, the biologist acknowledges his/her special methods but at the same time sees the wider horizon where interdisciplinary problems arise. In the measure that special methods acknowledge their common core and foundation in transcendental method, a basis is attained for addressing interdisciplinary problems (Lonergan 1973, 222-223; Winch 2004, 467-484; Bellah & Tippon 2006, 15; Fowler 2021).

Similarly, this capacity can yield a confluential framework where each tradition's exclusive truth claims can be recognized and respected as proper norms in a framework of common norms. It recognizes the error of viewing reality through a single discipline or tradition but appreciates that great conversations can be enriched by the findings of specialists (Richards 2015, 19). As a person focuses critically upon his/her inner self, he/she is enabled, as it were, to stand back, break from the linear environment, and call upon his/her assimilative capacity, which can be enhanced through liberal education (Lonergan 1959, 8:27-28; Liddy 2000, 521-532; Walker 2019,101; Williams 2013; Sanders 1961,63). This should help graduates appreciate that scientific knowledge is valid, but it is not the whole and should be complemented with self-knowledge (Giroux 2011, 153). Otherwise, we risk what happened under Nazi occupation, where superb musicians like Hans Frank entertained guests with performances of Bach and Mozart in the evening and savagely murdered defenceless prisoners in the morning. We need to graduate learned but responsible engineers and physicians who will not build gas chambers and poison children (Pring 2019, 47; Gallagher 2003, 58-59; Noddings 1993,165).

Conversion: Religious, Moral, and Affective

For Lonergan, intellectual conversion is one of three or four experiences of conversion—the others occur in the area of religion, morality, and affectivity (Lonergan 1973, 238; Gelpi 1997, 63-69; Henchin & Hearlson 2020, 258). Each is a product of interiority, second order, knowing.

Like intellectual conversion, each entails assuming responsible decisions about the various distinctive yet interconnected dimensions of oneself (Lonergan 1973, 238; Gelpi 1997, 56-58). They can occur at different times and in different sequences. Ideally, a person will ultimately be converted on all the areas mentioned while their interrelationship is, in Lonergan's terms, sublational, which means that they retain their autonomy but enhance each other (Walker 2019,98).

Freedom to Choose

By focusing on intellectual conversion as the foundation of knowledge, Lonergan claimed to have moved from faculty psychology (neo-scholastic metaphysics) and its associated objectivity, which, as indicated, is largely detached and impersonal. Intellectual conversion provides an objectivity that includes the person (Lonergan 1973, 338)

Ideally, the self-transcendence developed through these conversions leads to when the person finds out for him/herself what one is to make of him/herself (Longeran 1988, 223; 1967, 225; *The Catholic School*, para 7,19, 26,31,56; Lonergan 1967, 234; Balin & Siegel 2003, 188). The person reaches the freedom from practical desire with capacity to live life as one has reason to value (Sen 1999, 14-15, 36, 292-297; Hart 2009, 120; Rossiter 2020; D'Souza 2013,851). This integrative view is evidently a key element in the education of a person as we learn through our bodies and spirits (Miller 2018, 6).

Conversion and Education

Educators largely agree that such freedom should constitute the aim of education (Reiss & White 2013, 6,14; Pring 2018, 87,114; McCowan & Unterhalter 2015, 207**).** This educational objective includes self-knowledge as the person becomes open-eyed and deliberate. Attainment of this capacity to encounter traditions, religious or other, in a way that is critically self-aware, combined with the ability to choose one's worldview freely, seems to be a commendable educational objective.

Pedagogical Issues

If the central focus of Lonergan's notion of conversion in education is accepted, how does one educate towards it at different levels? In a sense, one cannot. In line with John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Carl Rogers, among others, conversion, as Lonergan emphasized, is personal. It forms a tradition where objectivity is not primarily external and so casts a cold eye on much contemporary, large-scale league-table quantitative, somewhat soulless, education (Miller 2009, 581-588).

One might object that having the learner move towards intellectual conversion is unrealistic, particularly for students at the junior or even senior levels. It is more appropriate for those at higher levels (Perry 1970; Fowler 1981; Loder & Fowler 1982). This seems to be true. However, undergoing conversion is not an all-or-nothing task in what could be seen as a pilgrimage toward one's true self (Palmer 2010,36). As Patrick Giddy points out, knowing what knowing is remains a matter of fuller

appropriation of a capacity we already have but do not exercise to the full extent (Giddy, 2011:531; Williams 2010, 175).

While Giddy views the starting point to be easily accessible, gaining the horizon of intellectual conversion is, as we have intimated, a long-term, precious achievement (Sanders 1961, 103-108).

While the self-reflective approach outlined here could feature as an add-on course, perhaps as philosophy or methodology, given the increasingly overloaded curricula, however, it may be more feasible to stretch the subjects from within, combining self-reflectivity with academic delivery and moving what is largely informational to what is transformative (Hart 2009; Noddings 2013, 62; Morey & Piderit 2006, 314; Pring 2018, 86; Reiss 2023, 164).

Conclusion

We have centred on how the dualistic learning of Catholic education today can be addressed. It was argued that the student ought to become aware of these two distinct sources of knowledge so that he/she develops the capacity to be both proficient academically and be prepared to live his/her life responsibly. As students move from Physics to Religious Education in school or, more widely, from professional, scientific studies to religion, they need to develop the means to appreciate that scientific knowledge is valid, but it needs to be complemented with self-knowledge (Giroux 2011, 153; Noddings 2006, 250).

Through Lonergan's theory of knowledge, it has been argued that this clash of perspectives on knowledge can be satisfactorily addressed by a consideration of different forms of objectivity through what he terms intellectual conversion so that Catholic education is enabled to provide an integrative worldview.

Footnotes

[1] B. Lonergan, Method in Theology (London: Longman, Darton & Todd, 1972).

[2] Insight: A Study of Human Understanding. London: Longmans, 1957.

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