

# ***Paulo Freire and a New Curricular Framework for Catholic Religious Secondary Education***

**Joseph Stafford**

e-mail: [josephstafford7@gmail.com](mailto:josephstafford7@gmail.com)

*Queen's University, Canada*

**Abstract:** This paper argues that certain fundamental aspects of Paulo Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogical method should be integrated into a secondary Catholic religious education curricular framework in order to deal successfully with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, focusing on two of Freire's major works, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Pedagogy of Freedom*. The secondary religious curriculum for the Canadian province of Ontario is used as an example. Particular attention is given to two aspects of Freire's philosophy and method: the student-centred inquiry process and the life-long process of self-understanding and transformation. The curricular framework itself consists of distinct 'pillars of knowledge' that are designed to encompass the entire four-year program of secondary religious education with the students' knowledge and understanding increasing as they progress through the program. In this paper, Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogical method are connected to three pillars: the intellectual tradition of inquiry, faith and reason; the living tradition of Church doctrine and teachings; and Christian humanism in the context of contemporary ethical issues.

**Keywords:** inquiry; pedagogy; self-transformation; religious education; curricular framework

Recibido / Received: 13/07/2021

Aceptado / Accepted: 29/11/2021

## **1. Introduction**

This paper argues that certain fundamental aspects of Paulo Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogical method need to be integrated into a new curricular framework for Catholic religious secondary education in order to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ever since the long-sixties, after the abandonment of neo-Thomism as the official theology of the Church and the collapse of the classicist Catholic culture, a distinct Catholic culture that nurtures the faith, especially among young people, has ceased to exist.<sup>1</sup> Now that contemporary society is secularized,

---

<sup>1</sup> Before the Second Vatican Council Catholics shared a common culture, especially in North

with far fewer Catholics practising their faith, the all-important generational transmission of the faith has become difficult. Catholic high schools have likewise struggled to meet the challenges posed by the dominant secular culture, particularly the students' overall lack of understanding of their faith and the widespread belief in the irrationality of religion. This has resulted in what many observers consider a major crisis in Catholic secondary education, as Bishop Robert Barron, a leading Catholic theologian and educator, highlighted at the 2018 Synod of Bishops on young people:

We have experienced a crisis in catechesis these last 50 years. Why has it been the case that young people in our own Catholic secondary schools read Shakespeare in literature class, Homer in Latin class, Einstein in physics class, but, far too often, superficial texts in religion? The army of our young who claim that religion is irrational is a bitter fruit of this failure in education. (As cited in *The Catholic Register*, October 18, 2019).<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, the secondary religious curriculum in the Canadian province of Ontario will be used as an example of the challenges facing Catholic secondary religious education.

In order to overcome these challenges, and thereby strengthen the role of the Catholic high school in the transmission of the faith, one major aspect of Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogical method needs to be adopted in this new curricular framework: a student-centred inquiry process within the context of a dynamic classroom environment characterized by academic rigour and excellence.<sup>3</sup> The students need to be provided with opportunities to learn the essential content of their religion through inquiry and analysis, to question fundamental tenets of Catholicism, and to examine both the evidence and rational argument that support Christian belief. This is not to argue that such an approach should be the only one in

---

America. The Greco-Roman classical era influenced this culture considerably since Christianity had assimilated much of the learning from antiquity. In this culture the community, and not the individual, determined the shared beliefs and values. (Lonergan, 1974, p. 147).

<sup>2</sup> The contention that faith is irrational is now widespread in western culture. For example, in *The Idea of Canada: Letters to a Nation*, the Governor General of Canada, David Johnston, addressed this issue in his 'letter' to Andrew Bennett, Canada's inaugural ambassador of religious freedom: «While I leave religious doctrine to the experts, I still find myself having lively conversations about it [his faith] with my daughters. They usually win: Man made God; God didn't make Man. My response to their highly rational arguments usually ends up being a variation of «This isn't a question of reason, my dear; it's faith» (Johnston, 2016, p.124).

<sup>3</sup> Academic rigour is understood as «the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging.» The authors further argue that «all students need schools to provide both rigorous content and direct instruction in the skills needed to manage that content.» (Strong, Silver, & Perini, 2001, p.7). A vibrant and relevant religious secondary curriculum also needs to integrate the four types of excellence: the personal («human potential, self-actualization, and the search for authenticity,») the social (social responsibility and belief that «the good of the individual» is «inseparable from the good of the community,») the technical (the «rational production» that focuses on acquiring skills and competencies,) and the rational (excellence as the result of rational inquiry based on specific academic disciplines.) In this paper, the term 'academic rigour' will be understood in the context of these forms of excellence. (Bruno-Jofré & Hills, 2011, p. 338, 342).

the religion curriculum, but that it needs to be included in order to further strengthen the students' faith. This approach would complement the already well-developed focus on social justice in the curriculum.<sup>4</sup>

The other fundamental aspect of Freire's philosophy and method that needs to be embedded in the curriculum is the life-long process of self-understanding and transformation, which would also strengthen the students' faith and their already strong commitment to social justice, to the common good. By engaging in this process, the students would become aware of the extent to which the societal conditions in which they live have shaped their sense of self, including their religious understanding, and that powerful elites are responsible for this conditioning. In particular, students would analyse the impact of the contemporary cultural dominance of neo-liberalism. The students would come to understand that they do not have to accept such conditions, that they possess both the right and the ability to change these conditions in the cause of social justice. This process of self-understanding and transformation is intimately connected to, and to a large degree dependent on, a student-centred inquiry process in the context of a classroom environment of academic rigour and excellence.<sup>5</sup> They go hand-in-hand.

Within the curriculum both Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogical method also need to be understood as belonging to a specific intellectual tradition exemplified by Thomas Aquinas—an approach that encourages a spirit of inquiry and an intimate relationship between reason and faith.<sup>6</sup> Students should examine Freire's own lived experience as an example of this specific tradition as an individual who grappled with the major religious and societal changes of his era, especially those related to the Second Vatican Council and liberation theology. Even Freire's criticism of the all too frequent role of the institutional Church as an oppressive force needs to be a subject of study. Here context is critical: both the negative and positive impact of the Church must be examined in the context of the Jesus' mandate to

---

<sup>4</sup> A major shift in focus occurred in Catholic secondary religious education after the Second Vatican Council from a content-oriented approach that stressed Catholic doctrine to an approach that emphasized the sociology and social justice.

<sup>5</sup> Curriculum theorist, William Pinar, supports this contention. With his autobiographical approach, Pinar contends that students' self-understanding depends on a firm grasp of academic knowledge obtained after a process of critical analysis. In this way, the students understand how their lived experience, that is, the socio-economic conditions in which they live, has been shaped their sense of self. (Pinar, 2004, p.21).

<sup>6</sup> The term 'tradition' is not used not in strictly theological sense. It refers to a tradition that is well-recognized by historians who acknowledge the significant contribution to Western intellectual development. A leading cultural historian, Richard Tarnas (1991), refers to the «great Western tradition of Catholic learning.» (p.247). Historians have also acknowledged the Church's contribution to intellectual debate during the Middle Ages in the universities that it established: «Historians have marveled at the extent to which intellectual debate in those universities was free and unfettered...a commitment to rigorous and rational debate, a promotion of intellectual inquiry and scholarly exchange—all sponsored by the Church—provided the framework for the Scientific Revolution.» Furthermore, for several decades, «virtually all historians of science...have concluded that the Scientific Revolution was indebted to the Church (Woods, 2005, p. 4). One reason why Professor Woods wrote this book was to undermine the commonly held belief among Americans that the «thousand years prior to the Renaissance» was a «time of ignorance and intellectual repression in which vigorous debate and lively intellectual exchange did not occur» (p. 3).

establish the kingdom of God on earth—essentially the same pursuit for utopia that Freire urged.<sup>7</sup> Any secondary religious curriculum that does not seriously inquire into the entirety of the Church's impact does a disservice to the students and ultimately to the Church itself because nothing is gained by avoidance or denial in a secular society where the failings of the Church are well-documented and well-known.<sup>8</sup> An honest, open, and critical inquiry process that examines both the Church's positive and negative contributions to the common good needs to be adopted. Such a process must be combined with a process of self-understanding and transformation, based on the students' increasing understanding of the core Christian beliefs and the authentic message and mandate of Jesus as they become more knowledgeable of their own religion. Freire's educational philosophy needs to be adopted in order to facilitate this student self-understanding and transformation since he understood the human person as 'unfinished' in an historical process that was also unfinished. Students need to become active agents in this historical process, not only to transform themselves, but their society for the common good, adopting Freire's optimistic view of the future, a perspective based on hope.<sup>9</sup>

Both Freire's pedagogical method and his educational philosophy should therefore be integrated into the secondary religious curriculum. A successful four-year secondary religious program also needs to be designed so that the students understand and remember the significant content, and become engaged in a life-long process of self-understanding and transformation. It is argued here that a new curricular format should be adopted that is based on specific «pillars of knowledge» upon which the curriculum is built. These pillars would not be limited to one grade level, but extend throughout the entire four-year program with the students examining the content in an increasing degree of in-depth analysis as they progress through the program. Such an approach is based on pedagogical research indicating that student understanding of difficult content deepens with increased exposure.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> According to John P. Meier (1994) in his in-depth study of the historical Jesus, the historical evidence supporting Jesus's use of the term, 'Kingdom of God,' is considerable: there are 13 sayings in Mark, 25 in Matthew, 6 in Luke, and 13 in the document known as 'Q,' a lost document but with multiple references to it in the Gospels (p. 238). Meier contends that the historical evidence strongly suggest that Jesus understood the kingdom as present in himself, but also as a future transcendent event (p. 450-451).

<sup>8</sup> Before Vatican II, such avoidance and denial were commonplace in Catholic secondary schools. For example, in a lengthy section on indulgences in the mandatory 1940s textbook, the author contended that Luther had a «wrong notion concerning indulgences,» commenting further that «enemies of the Church have also accused her of selling indulgences. This is a gross calumny; such an act would be simony. As a matter of fact, the Church excommunicates anyone who makes money by means of indulgences.» (Cassilly, 1934, p.271).

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that Freire has not had a major impact on Catholic religious secondary education in North America. According to Donaldo Macedo (2000), one of major reason why was Freire's reputation as a Marxist intellectual. (pp. 15-16).

<sup>10</sup> Jerome Bruner's notion of «spiral curriculum» is used here. Bruner argued that learning should be continuous and that subject content needs to be based on a foundation from grade to grade. The same holds true for the students' cognitive or skill development. (Orstein & Francis P. Hunkins, p.104). Furthermore, Bruner (1959) argued that learning in terms of both content and mental operations can be «continually deepened by using them in a progressively more complex

Accompanying these pillars would be a skills continuum with students practising and honing their analytical skills each school year—an approach that includes Freire’s pedagogical method with its insistence on methodological rigour within the classroom. Opportunities to reflect upon what they have learned, to analyse the societal conditions that contribute to shaping their sense of self, and to evaluate the impact of these conditions on themselves and on the common good, should be provided so that the students begin a process of self-understanding and transformation. In this paper, Freire’s educational philosophy and pedagogical method will be examined in the context of three of these pillars: the Catholic intellectual tradition of inquiry, faith, and reason; the living tradition of church teachings and doctrine; and Christian humanism in the context of contemporary ethical issues. After four years of study, the students’ understanding of significant content would therefore be enhanced, better remembered and more likely to influence how they live their lives as adults as they hopefully remain engage in life-long process of self-understanding and transformation. Catholic secondary schools would then graduate more informed and active Catholics committed to the promotion of the common good with an optimism based on hope.

## **2. The Catholic Religious Secondary Curriculum in Ontario**

The Catholic religious secondary curriculum in Ontario exemplifies the difficulties educators have had in dealing with the challenges facing Catholic education. After the Second Vatican Council, Catholic educators in Ontario abandoned the traditional philosophy and methodology associated with Neo-Thomism, adopting the sociological approach with a strong emphasis on social justice that was becoming popular throughout North America (Stafford, 2019, pp.67-74). Less attention was given to Church doctrines and teachings at a time when the society was becoming more secularized. With fewer Catholics practising their faith, a result of the secularization of consciousness<sup>11</sup>, the transmission of the faith to the next generation became extremely difficult.<sup>12</sup> According to Monsignor Denis Murphy (2007), the founder and first director of the Institute for Catholic Education, established in 1984 to defend and promote Catholic education, many secondary students and their teachers are «quite blissfully unaware» of even the basic Catholic «story» to the extent that «there is a huge question as to whether or not one can call them believers as they enter a Catholic school classroom» (p.17). Catholic secondary schools have struggled to meet the challenges of secularism because of two fundamental flaws. First of all,

---

form.» (p.13). My own extensive experience in teaching and curriculum design lends support to Dewey’s and Bruner’s arguments.

<sup>11</sup> The secularization of consciousness refers to the process whereby Catholics, including teachers and students, unconsciously adopted secular values that were often opposed to Catholic values, which were based on a world view centred on God and Christian belief. (Arthur, 2009, pp. 228-229).

<sup>12</sup> According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), in 2007, only 10 percent of Millennials (ages 18–25) regularly attended Sunday Mass; for Generation X (ages 26–46) it was 13 percent; for the Boomers (ages 47–64) 20 percent, and for the Builders (ages 65+) 45 percent (Weddell, 2012, p.38).

religion courses are not taught at an academic level equal to that of other courses, resulting in a curriculum that lacks academic rigour and depth.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the overall approach is essentially catechetical with the underlying assumption that the students are ‘believers’ who know the Christian ‘story.’<sup>14</sup> Catholic educators have failed to realize that what is needed is an apologetic approach in which teachers must «prepare the ground before ever announcing the Christian message» (Murphy, 2007, p.17). This preparation must allow students to participate as inquirers in the intellectual tradition of the Church, in the living tradition of its teachings and doctrine, and to begin a process of self-transformation—a preparation that the current curriculum fails to provide.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Freire’s Educational Philosophy and Pedagogical Method

One fundamental aspect of Freire’s educational philosophy that needs to become a major focus of a secondary religious education curriculum is his recognition of the power of the elite in any given society to construct a dominant cultural hegemony that serves its own needs, and thereby denies the needs of others (Miedema, 2005, pp.7-8). At times in history this dominance is overt and supported by state oppression—a dominance that Freire denounced in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. At other times such dominance is more subtle as in the case of contemporary neo-liberalism. A growing consensus exists among scholars that public rituals and symbolism are often used as powerful cultural tools of dominance (Miedema, 2005, p.117). Such tools also include educational systems, which can be used as powerful instruments of social control both to shape and reinforce the existing cultural hegemony (Curtis, 1988, p.13). As a result, students are denied the intellectual freedom to think for themselves since their education occurs within certain government-imposed parameters that uphold the dominant cultural hegemony established by the elites.

---

<sup>13</sup> In Ontario, grade 9 and 10 courses are offered at different levels depending on the students’ ability: academic for university bound students, applied for college-bound students; and open courses for both academic and applied students. Religion is only offered at the open level, meaning that the academic expectations are not very demanding or rigorous. At the senior level, grade 11 and 12, religion is offered at the open level and the ‘M’ level, a designation for courses that may be used to qualify students for college or university. These courses are not as academically challenging as university-preparation courses. According to the American theologian, George Weigel, Catholic students in general lack the «intellectual apparatus to frame an argument as to what is good or bad for themselves» (as cited in Murphy, 2007, p.61).

<sup>14</sup> A careful reading of the 2016 Ontario Catholic Secondary Curriculum Document for Religious Education reveals that the underlying premise is that the students are already prepared to accept Church teachings. The focus is on the need to develop a new way to express the Christian message in order to promote the «new evangelization» initiated by Pope John Paul II. Quoting from Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel), the document identifies the essential challenges to secondary religious education as related primarily to communication (p. 4).

<sup>15</sup> Nowhere in the Ontario curriculum are these traditions (and their very nature) examined in a concerted fashion as topics deserving in-depth analysis. In the grade 12 textbook, Vatican II is not even listed in the index.



Another fundamental aspect of Freire's educational philosophy was the process of self-learning and self-transformation.<sup>16</sup> Central to this process was the development of a critical consciousness, an awareness of the reality in which one lived and an ability to analyse the various social, economic, and political conditions that sustained this reality; in other words, the dominant cultural hegemony. Building upon his earlier work, Freire emphasized in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* the need for a «deepened consciousness» that would result in a «drive for transformation and inquiry» (Leopando, 2011, pp. 14-15).<sup>17</sup> Such a developed consciousness would lead people to work towards the transformation of the world as they discovered the injustices inherent in the existing cultural hegemony, whether it be overt political oppression as in Brazil during the 1960s or the more nuanced dominance of contemporary neo-liberalism. Believing that the capacity to be critical to be innate, Freire insisted that pedagogical methods must be designed to develop this capacity (Freire, 1998, p.37). Students needed to become «beings for themselves» and then they could become «transformers of the world» for the common good (Freire, 2000, p.74).

Freire connected self-transformation and transformation of the world because of his hopeful optimism concerning the future of humanity and the human capacity to transcend oneself—an optimism that underpinned his educational philosophy. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, when explaining the importance of «problem-posing» education as essential to creating critical thinkers, he argued that human beings were engaged in a process of «*becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality....people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness....The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity» (Freire, 2000, p.84). He further articulated this philosophical position:

Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity. Hence it is prophetic (and, as such, hopeful). Hence, it corresponds to the historical nature of humankind. Hence, it affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build for the future. Hence, it identifies with the movement which engages people as beings aware of their incompleteness—an historical movement which has its point of departure, its Subjects and its objective. The point of departure of the movement lies in the people themselves (Freire, 2000, pp.84-85).

---

<sup>16</sup> It is important to note here that Freire did not develop his educational philosophy in an 'intellectual vacuum,' but was influenced by the 'progressive school of education,' particularly the ideas of John Dewey (1897) who understood education as key to the development of a «social consciousness» that would lead to social progress (p.11).

<sup>17</sup> According to Leopando, much of Freire's thought on critical consciousness was articulated in his earlier work, *Education for Critical Consciousness*. This critical consciousness begins to develop when an individual's understanding of reality goes beyond the naïve stage or what he called «magical» (Freire, 2000, p. 85). Freire developed this concept of 'magical' in an earlier work, *Education for Critical Consciousness*. By magical, he meant naïve, but also superstitious and fatalistic (Leopando, 2011, p.46).

This hopeful philosophy remained fundamental to Freire's educational philosophy since he remained convinced that human beings were agents of their own transformation and that of the world. In all of his works, Freire affirmed his conviction that human beings possessed an innate capacity to analyse and to criticize necessary for such transformation (Leopando, 2011, 29). In *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998), he emphasized this fundamental optimism:

There is no theory of socio-political transformation that moves me if it is not grounded in an understanding of the human person as a maker of history and as one made by history. If it does not respect men and women as beings of decision, rupture, option. As ethical beings who in their ethicality are capable of being unethical, of transgressing the ethical code indispensable for human living. Of this I have spoken insistently in this text. I have affirmed and reaffirmed the extent to which I rejoice in knowing that I am a «conditioned» being, capable of going beyond my own conditioning (pp.115-116).

For this reason, Freire rejected what he called the «fatalism» of any ideology which insisted that human beings, unable to change the world, were destined to be fatalistic and simply accept their existing reality. The best they could hope for was to adapt and to survive. Instead of such fatalism, Freire understood history and the future as intimately linked as «time filled with possibility and not inexorably determined—that the future is *problematic* and not already decided, fatalistically» (Freire, 1998, p.26). What students needed to possess, and not only students but anyone «in a place marked by the betrayal of our right «to be», was «the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined.» In a world that is always 'becoming,' students must understand that they are capable of intervening in «what happens in the world» as subjects who have «an input into what happens» (Freire, 1998, pp.72-73). A fundamental aspect of his educational philosophy, then, was the development of critical thinkers, optimistic in their ability to transform both themselves and then their world, as active citizens working for the common good.

In terms of this development, the dynamism of the classroom environment—where educational philosophy and pedagogy meet—was of critical importance. In order for this dynamic environment to be established, the traditional approach to education, what Freire termed as «banking education», had to be abandoned. With the banking system of education, the teacher-expert transfers knowledge to the students who then memorize it in a non-analytical fashion, becoming «containers» or «receptors» of knowledge and the teacher the «depositor» (Freire, 2000, p.72). The teacher projects upon the students an «absolute ignorance», which Freire considered as characteristic of «the ideology of oppression» (Freire, 2000, p.72). This 'ignorance' is replaced by the teacher's 'deposit' of the required knowledge. As passive bystanders in their own education, the students accept «arguments based on authority» without the opportunity to ask a fundamental question of inquiry: why? (Freire, 2000, p.86). Insisting on their passivity, the goal is to control the development of the students' consciousness as they receive the 'deposits' of what the teacher considers «true knowledge» (Freire, 2000, p.76). Education therefore becomes the «exercise of domination» with the «ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating» the students in a process Freire called domestication (Freire, 2000, p.78). As a result, the students are conditioned to accept their existing



socio-economic reality, and their subsequent oppressed position within society, as normative and immutable.

In order to overcome this conditioning, Freire offered an alternative pedagogical method that would establish the needed dynamic classroom environment. Basing his teaching praxis on the students' critical ability, curiosity, and autonomy (Freire, 2000, p.33), Freire focused on developing the necessary classroom conditions in which the students' critical consciousness could develop. One essential condition was to remove any imposed intellectual parameters, and any imposed knowledge, so that their curiosity could be given as much free reign as possible (Freire, 2000, p.19). Students must be permitted to engage in the «construction» of knowledge, a process that did not simply involve the «game of transferring knowledge» (Freire, 2000, p.49). Student learning must take place in the «context of rigorous methodological curiosity anxious to explore the limits of creativity, persistent in the search, and courageously humble in the adventure» (Freire, 1998, p.33). In such a classroom the teacher and the students engage «continuously in the process of acquiring new knowledge» that is not merely «transferred to them,» but rather imbedded in a «continuous transformation through which they become authentic subjects of the construction and the reconstruction of what is being taught» (Freire, 1998, p.33).<sup>18</sup> All forms of knowledge, including ideologies, must be submitted to this method of academic rigour, a method based on the students' innate curiosity to ignite its «critical capacity» for analysis (Freire, 2000, p.80). Academic rigour is essential. Without such an intellectually rigorous environment students engage with the content in a superficial manner, unlikely to become aware of both their own 'incompleteness' and that of the world.

Two essential elements of this academic rigour are inquiry and dialogue. Convinced that the need to inquire was fundamental to human nature, «for apart from inquiry, individuals can not be truly human» (Freire, 2000, p. 80), he called for a student-centred pedagogy in which the student participated with the teacher as co-inquirers. (Freire, 2000, p.80). In such an inquiry process, the students are allowed to ponder, to question, and to be curious with the teacher no longer the 'expert' and the voice of an unquestioned authority. Arguments based on «authority» alone are no longer accepted (Freire, 2000, p. 80). An inquiry process is essential if the students are to be given the freedom to develop a critical consciousness, to develop this innate quality of a human being. Dialogue between the teacher and the student as co-inquirers, and among the students themselves, is also crucial. Even if the teacher possesses more knowledge about a topic than the students, which often would be the case, the teacher must not impose this knowledge on the students, but rather respect the students' autonomy by permitting them to analyse the topic through inquiry and dialogue. They must have the freedom to ask the question 'why' in order to assure that they develop the habit of an inquiring mind.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> John Dewey again influenced Freire's thought. For instance, Dewey understood education as a «process of reconstruction of experience, of the shaping of habits...and of the reflective establishment of values». (Shea, 1991, p.309).

<sup>19</sup> Recent pedagogical research has identified four critical habits of mind that students need to develop, all of which align with Freire's pedagogy: the ability to «read to infer/interpret/to draw conclusions; support arguments with evidence; resolve conflicting views encountered in source

For this reason, Freire insisted on dialogue and inquiry in the context of «problem-posing» education, which allows the students to analyse authentic problems in their own lives and in their community, to determine the root causes of these problems, and to arrive at solutions: in other words, to transform their own world. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire articulates the essential differences between problem-based education and banking education:

Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the *intentionality* of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take the people's historicity as their starting point (Freire, 2000, p.83-84).

With problem-posing education, then, the students are presented with the possibility of becoming active agents of social change, a process Freire called «conscientization» (Kane, 2001, p. 37, 40). The students become engaged in a process of self-understanding and transformation as they become more aware of their own reality through a process of dialogue and inquiry, and therefore more aware of the different ways «subscribed values» (Freire, 2000, p.76) have been instilled in them and shaped their understanding of their lived experience. They also become conscious of their own critical capacity to participate in the transformation of their own reality—of the world, as they increasingly understand their own autonomy as ‘transformers’ in a process of historical possibility.

#### 4. Freire's Pedagogy and Educational Philosophy within the Catholic Intellectual Tradition Pillar

Such an academically rigorous classroom would also allow students to participate in the Catholic intellectual tradition of inquiry, reason, and faith—a tradition that needs to become a fundamental pillar of secondary Catholic education, a pillar that includes Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogy. This does not mean that the Church was always faithful to this tradition. At times, particularly during the long 19<sup>th</sup> century (1800-1960) when the institutional Church developed a ‘bunker mentality’ with regard to modernity, intellectual freedom and a spirit of inquiry were not at all encouraged. During such periods, despite considerable official opposition, many Catholic scholars remained nonetheless steadfast to this intellectual tradition that can be traced to Jesus himself. Jesus did not leave any precise instructions as to how organize the Church or how to formulate its theology: he expected his followers to think for themselves, to ponder, to inquire, and to use their own reason in the context of their faith in him.<sup>20</sup> Even when people inquired as to his identity, Jesus

---

documents; solve complex problems with no obvious answer» (Schmoker, 2011, p.38).

<sup>20</sup> In terms of faith, Jesus did not ‘abandon’ them, but sent the Holy Spirit to guide them. In

did not simply say, «I am the Messiah.» In one of the earliest documented instances of such an inquiry, when some followers of John the Baptist asked Jesus «Are you 'He who is to come' or do we look for another?», Jesus answered: «Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blest is the man who finds no stumbling block in me'» (Meier, 1994, pp.400-401). Jesus respected his followers' autonomy to examine the evidence, to inquire and to decide for themselves what to believe based on both reason and faith (Pitre, 2016, p.152, 195-196).

One of the best examples of an individual who embodied this tradition was Thomas Aquinas, who lived during a period of crisis in theology, religious life and education (McCool, 1989, p.27). Possessing a brilliant mind and endeavouring to reconcile Medieval Christian thought with the new intellectual challenges that had resulted from a growing awareness and understanding of classical Greek thought, particularly Aristotle, Aquinas adopted an inquiry approach.<sup>21</sup> He used the Church Fathers of the Patristic period as one of his major sources—a approach later adopted by Catholic intellectuals of the *ressourcement* movement before Vatican II—in a 'return to the sources' of Christianity for both inspiration and understanding (Royal, 2015, p.147).<sup>22</sup> In other words, Aquinas belonged to an intellectual tradition that has long celebrated the «dignity of the intellect and the freedom that comes from pursuing truth through knowledge» (D'Sousa, 2016, p.6). In his 1893 encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, On the Study of Holy Scripture, Pope Leo XIII also drew upon this tradition in encouraging the use of scientific criticism and intellectual freedom, articulating a foundational principle of Catholic thought whenever a scientific truth contradicted a religious 'truth': «truth cannot contradict truth, and we may be sure that some mistake has been made either in the interpretation of the sacred words or in the polemical discussion» (Osiek, 2006, pp.10-11). Furthermore, this tradition emphasizes the importance of the Catholic educational mission that is «always situated in a particular social and historical environment, a specific culture, and must therefore respond to ever-changing contexts, thus reading the 'signs of the times' (D'Sousa, 2016, p.13)—a mission Thomas Aquinas best exemplified.

The particular 'social and historical environment' for Freire's educational philosophy was the post World War II period, an era marked by an intense intellectual

---

other words, it is not argued here that Jesus did not 'guide' them in a sense, but that as beings with free will, they were expected to use their own inquiring minds to make reasonable judgements and decisions in the pursuit of the common good.

<sup>21</sup> This intellectual tradition encompasses the Patristic tradition, which is based on the belief that the human person, gifted with faith and endowed with reason, possessed the ability to understand a world that God designed to make sense: «Understanding can be brought about if the liberal arts, science and philosophy are unified by a sound and believing mind under the light of faith. Once human knowledge has been integrated by a coherent education, it will enable the believing mind to understand God's revealed word» (McCool, 1989, pp. 27-28).

<sup>22</sup> In his masterful study of the western intellectual tradition, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View*, Richard Tarnas devotes an entire chapter to «The Quest of Thomas Aquinas», an indication of Aquinas' importance, not only to the Catholic intellectual tradition, but to the intellectual tradition of western civilization.

ferment within the Church as it grappled with modernity, ultimately leading to the Second Vatican Council.<sup>23</sup> Freire's educational philosophy belongs to this tradition as he was very much influenced by his deeply felt Catholic faith, and much of his 'educational mission' was in line with that of the Vatican II Church.<sup>24</sup> This is of course not to argue that his Catholicism alone shaped his thought, but only that it played a major role in the development of his educational philosophy.<sup>25</sup> It is also contended here that educators need to recognize the Catholic roots of his philosophy along with the Catholic intellectual tradition to which he belonged. In the Ontario secondary religious curriculum, for example, neither Freire nor the larger intellectual tradition are at all emphasized. Freire is not even mentioned. In the curriculum itself Freire needs to be examined as a leading Catholic educator who was influenced by some of the major Catholic intellectuals such as Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, both of whom should also be discussed in terms of the Catholic intellectual tradition that they represented.<sup>26</sup>

In the secondary religious curriculum Freire's educational philosophy should also be examined in the context of the encyclicals of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council—both of which greatly influenced Catholic scholars, including Freire. Two encyclicals were particularly impactful in terms of modern Catholic thought, *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher) and *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth). In the former, the pope discussed the issue of the disparity between wealthy and poor countries, denouncing international aid programs that perpetuated neocolonialism and failed to address the root causes of such disparity. The encyclical also emphasizes the total well-being of the person—both the spiritual and human dimensions—in denouncing as well ideologies and political-economic systems that «neither encompass man, whole and entire, nor...affect his inner being» (Leopando, 2011, p.83). In *Pacem*

<sup>23</sup> A key event in this 'road' to Vatican II was Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, in which he encouraged scholars to return to Thomas Aquinas, to what he considered the «fountain» for Catholic thought: «take precautions that the wisdom of Thomas be derived from his very own fountains, or at least from those streams which, drawn from the fountain itself». (Pereira, 2002, p. 155). In doing so, Leo opened an 'intellectual door' that could not be closed.

<sup>24</sup> The influence of Freire's Catholicism on his thought has not received the attention that it deserves. Leftist scholars have tended to downplay this influence, focusing much more on the Marxist influence so prevalent in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Yet Freire himself declared that «my love for Christ and hope that He is the light...led me to Marx». (Leopando, 2011, pp.2-3).

<sup>25</sup> Educational scholar Daniel Schugurensky argues that in Freire's pedagogy, «We find... elements of Socratic maieutics, philosophical existentialism, phenomenology, Hegelianism, Marxism, progressive education, and liberation theology...» According to Leopando (2011), this diversity of sources is a prime reason for Freire's appeal to a broad audience to this day (p.2).

<sup>26</sup> Freire was particularly influenced by Jacques Maritain's major work, *Integral Humanism*, in which he argued that any philosophical or political system which rejected human spirituality was alienating and dehumanizing. Maritain espoused a Christian humanism that understood the human person as a being situated between the «twin modern distortions of individualism and collectivism», as a being with specific rights but also fundamental duties to the common good (Royal, *A Deeper Vision*, 53). Mounier also influenced Freire's thought. Adopting an optimistic view of history, Mounier contended that God invited human beings to participate in the «adventure» of transforming the world, and that Christianity was conceived as a revolutionary force that challenged the accepted status quo based on wealth and power (Leopando, 2011, p.71). Mounier was the «primary inspiration» for Freire's life-long optimism in terms of historical possibility (Leopando, 2011, pp. 75-76).

*in Terris*, the pope recognized the individual's dignity and person freedom, and permitted Catholics to join non-Catholic groups, even if some members were atheists, if the ultimate purpose was the common good (Leopando, 2011, 85). With the Second Vatican Council, and its deliberate purpose of *aggiornamento*, 'bringing up to date,' the pope continued to emphasize the common good in furthering a major shift in Catholic thought. Unlike before Vatican II when earthly existence was usually understood as a mere «transitory phase» on the way to the far more important final destination of heaven, Catholic social teaching now emphasized the significance of transforming the world through social justice—in establishing the Kingdom of God (Leopando, 2011, p.137).<sup>27</sup> Freire's educational philosophy, with its focus on the common good, in particular on the needs of the deprived and oppressed, was in line with the overall philosophy of the Catholic Church under the leadership of Pope John XXIII and needs to be integrated in the secondary religious curriculum in this context both as a major topic to be studied and as a guiding philosophy for the curriculum itself. It is in this context as well that Freire's strong criticism of the institutional church as an oppressive force needs to be included in the curriculum in order to provide an accurate portrayal of the Church as an institution that often utterly failed to pursue Jesus' mandate to establish the kingdom of God, and that is in constant need for renewal. Freire therefore belonged to an enduring Catholic intellectual tradition of inquiry, reason and faith., and like Thomas Aquinas, was very much attuned to the 'signs of the times' in which he lived.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Freire's Educational Philosophy/Pedagogy and the Living Tradition Pillar

Freire's educational philosophy should also be integrated into another essential pillar of knowledge needed in a secondary religious curriculum, the 'living tradition' of Church teachings and doctrine, a pillar that is closely linked to the Catholic intellectual tradition, but is distinct nonetheless. According to Yves Congar, the term living tradition refers to the manner in which church doctrine and teachings develop over time rather than become reified (O'Malley, 2008, p.39). During the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period that ended with the Second Vatican Council, the official position of the Church dictated that doctrine was unchanging and best articulated in the works of Thomas Aquinas. At the Second Vatican Council this position was abandoned and the concept of the 'living tradition' was adopted as the idea of 'development' was emphasized in many of the subsequent conciliar documents (O'Malley, 2008, p.39). In other words, Church teachings and doctrine were 'unfinished.'

Freire's pedagogical method also belongs to this living tradition in that his overall approach was similar that of the 'new theologians' who helped pave the way for Vatican

---

<sup>27</sup> Pope Paul VI later emphasized the importance of this transformation in his 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, On the Development of Peoples, calling for the «transition from less human conditions to those which are more human» (Leopando, 2011, p.137-138).

<sup>28</sup> According to Liam Kane (2001), one of the reasons Freire's philosophy, as well as his pedagogical method, was so popular in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was because its «close relationship» to Catholic thinking of the era (p. 48).

It by insisting that Church doctrine and teachings be subject to critical inquiry.<sup>29</sup> Other Catholic scholars supported this position, such as Bernard Lonergan who contended that all texts and intellectual claims should become open to inquiry: the «given has become the questioned.» He considered an inquiry approach essential in order to allow individuals to decide for themselves whether or not to accept the teachings and doctrine of the Church, arguing that human beings possess the capacity for insight, the ability to reason and to make judgements themselves concerning theological ‘truths.’<sup>30</sup> What became normative in this living tradition was not imposed Church teachings and doctrine, but the individual’s capacity for understanding, for critical thinking, and thereby for the possible «critical appropriation of the tradition.» Both Freire’s educational philosophy and pedagogical method belong to this tradition.

In terms of this tradition, Freire’s concept of the domestication of knowledge needs to be understood in a wider context—likewise his belief in the unfinished condition of the self in a society pregnant with historical possibility. A new understanding of the fundamental nature of Jesus’ call to follow him supports this contention. N.T. Wright (2016) argues that this calling has been misunderstood for centuries as being focused mainly on the goal of going to heaven, and not on establishing the kingdom of God on earth—a misunderstanding that the Catholic Church acknowledged at the Second Vatican Council. As a result, the nature of sinning has also been misunderstood. This misunderstanding of sin granted Christians ‘permission’ to ignore injustice and oppression since the earthly existence was considered transitory, relatively unimportant, as the real goal was going to heaven, achievable as long as the moral code was followed (pp. 97-98). Sin, according to Wright, should not be understood simply as the ‘breaking’ of a moral code, although this is part of sinning, but as the human failure to be «image-bearers» of God in this world because human beings have replaced God with ‘idols’ such as wealth and power (pp.74, 77-80, 84-86, 103-106). This misunderstanding needs to be rectified. Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection should be understood as the beginning of a revolution in human society. In this wider context, the concept of «forgiveness of sins» refers, not only to personal sins, but to the sins of humanity and thus to a new reality that began on Good Friday, the beginning of the kingdom of God «on earth as in heaven» (p.156). Jesus expected his followers to continue this ‘unfinished’ revolution, yet it was «domesticated,» leading to the moral justification of continued injustice and oppression in human society (p.115). Freire’s educational philosophy, with its fundamental focus on the domestication of knowledge, needs to be understood in this wider context. A Catholic religious secondary curriculum must therefore place his educational philosophy at

---

<sup>29</sup> Among the most prominent new theologians were Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Jean Daniélou, and Henri de Lubac. The influence of the new theology was profound: Vatican II «ultimately appropriated the central features of the ambitions of the new theology» (Mettepenningen, 2010, p.36).

<sup>30</sup> Lonergan’s educational philosophy was grounded in the tradition of Marechal Thomism and in the study of St. Thomas’s own texts. This is clear from Lonergan’s understanding of the «act of insight» that occurs when the intellect is confronted with «scraps of information». An insight is «the mental act by which these different scraps are grasped as cohering in an orderly and intelligible whole». Lonergan identified three essential steps in the «process of knowing»: experience, understanding, and judgement (Meynell, 1991, pp.2-3).



its core both in terms of teaching philosophy, but also as a major topic of the course content. With this approach the students, after four years of study, would come to see themselves as participants in the living tradition of the Church as they examine contemporary issues from the lens of the kingdom of God, taking the oft repeated words of Our Father seriously, «on earth as in heaven».

## **6. The Pillar of Contemporary Christian Humanism: Freire's Lived Experience, Pedagogical Method, and Educational Philosophy.**

Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogical method therefore also belong to another pillar of knowledge, the pillar of contemporary Christian humanism. Adopting Jacques Maritain's Christian-humanist understanding of the human person as endowed with natural rights, but also with fundamental duties to the common good, as the guiding principle, this pillar of knowledge focuses on contemporary controversial ethical issues that students face in their daily lives as members of a specific community. It is here that the intellectual and living traditions coalesce as the students grapple with such issues. By the time the students reach grade 12, they should have an overall understanding of Freire's educational philosophy and should have honed their analytical skills—both of which should have become 'habits of mind.' In other words, since grade 9 they should have engaged in a process of self-understanding while they analysed the socio-economic conditions of their own lived experience, recognizing the complexity of the issues that they are discussing. In this pillar, Freire's lived experience should be highlighted as an example of an individual who dealt with such issues.

Freire's work should be examined especially in the context of one specific issue, the liberation theology movement of the 1960s and 1970s, a topic that the secondary curriculum ignores, at least in Ontario. At the senior level of secondary school, liberation theology should be discussed in some depth, so that the students appreciate the complexity of the issues involved when the church actually attempts to improve the existing social and economic conditions, especially of the poor, and continues to work towards establishing the kingdom of God. This complexity is evident in Freire's declaration that «my love for Christ and hope that He is the light... led me to Marx....My relationship with Marx never suggested that I abandon Christ» (as cited in Madera, 2015, p.125). Such a statement should be the focal point for a student analysis of the complex relationship between Catholicism and Marxism as many Latin Americans adopted Marxism as a legitimate framework in which to understand the root causes of oppression and co-operated with Marxists in different initiatives. Even though liberation theology essentially remained faithful to Church teachings and those of Jesus, the relationship between liberation theology and Marxism led to a major crisis within the Church. Students should examine this crisis as an example of Christian humanism in action, as an example of the complexity inherent in the intellectual tradition of the Church and the living tradition of its teachings and doctrine. Students would be intrigued by the intensity of the liberation theology controversy and how people's understanding and attitude changed over time, as reflected in Pope Francis's recent light-hearted comments: «Today, we old

people laugh about how worried we were about liberation theology...»<sup>31</sup> Liberation theology is a prime example of the complexity of many ethical issues and as to how human understanding of these issues evolve over time.

Another ethical issue that the students need to examine is the dominance of neo-liberalism in contemporary society and how it has affected their lived experience.<sup>32</sup> They should also become cognizant of the role that the educational system plays in facilitating this dominance, and of the current debate concerning the ultimate purpose of education: informed and active citizenship or market-oriented skill development (Biesta, 2013, pp.4-7). Freire's educational philosophy should be discussed in this context, keeping in mind his own emphasis on the «balanced judgment of facts» and the need for «methodical and rigorous analysis» (Freire, 1998, pp. 22, 48). By the senior level of high school, students should possess the 'habit of mind' needed to examine the extent to which neoliberalism has shaped their sense of self and their position within society. Students therefore should analyse Freire's own strong opposition to what he considered as «the scourge of neoliberalism, with its cynical fatalism and its inflexible negation of the right to dream differently, to dream of utopia». This analysis should also take into consideration the increasingly fragmented nature of modern society, and how this has diminished the collective sense of identity and community to the detriment of the common good.<sup>33</sup>

Care, however, must be taken that the teacher does not impose any particular viewpoint, but allows the students to determine their own personal viewpoint by examining both sides of the debate. An important distinction however needs to be made. A teacher must not «falsely claim impartiality or objectivity» and therefore never take any ethical position, as Freire famously commented: «teaching is never a neutral act» (Freire, 1998, 22). On the other hand, both the teacher and the students must not become dogmatic about their point of view to the extent that they naturally assume that it is always «ethically grounded» (Freire, 1998, p.22). In a Catholic religious education program, the students' right to self-determination needs to be respected, but also the legitimate anger of both the teacher and the students towards injustice and the treatment of the poor (Freire, 1998, p.45). At the end of a four-year program, with its emphasis on academic rigour and on self-transformation, it would be hoped that the students would have arrived independently at the same conclusion as Freire: «There is a lot of fatalism around us. An immobilizing

---

<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis made this comment on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2019, during the World Youth Day, in front of 30 Jesuits from Central America. (Wooden, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Relying on the human capital theory that emphasized the productive capacity of individuals in the marketplace and the role of education as an «investment» in this capacity, neoliberalism became a significant mode of thinking in North America and throughout the world. Neo-liberalism focused on developing economic efficiency and competitiveness, not on developing good citizens within the context of a caring community (Strike, 1985, 411).

<sup>33</sup> According to Daniel Rogers (2011), this process of fragmentation began in the 1960s, «a period of deep transformation in social thought» (p.13). As a result, the social norms and social structures that provided a shared «social imagination» and helped shape an individual's sense of self gradually fell apart. This transformation led to an increased emphasis on the individual than on the common good in an increasingly fragmented society in terms of thought and culture (Rogers, 2011, pp.5-6).

ideology of fatalism...which insists that we can do nothing to change the march of social-historical and cultural reality because that is how the world is anyway. The most dominant contemporary version of such fatalism is neoliberalism» (Freire, 1998, pp.26-27). In reaching such a conclusion, they would be in good company. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis (2013) also condemns this ideology in the strongest term: «the worship of the golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose» (section 55).<sup>34</sup> Any form of 'education' that «tranquilizes» the poor, «making them tame and harmless» is also condemned (section 60). Hopefully, then, the students would reject this fatalism, this ideology, and this type of education, understanding that they are participating in a process of 'historical possibility' in which they can improve their own reality by continuing to strive to establish a 'utopia,' the kingdom of God.

## 7. Conclusion

In order to deal successfully with the contemporary challenges in Catholic religious secondary education, Freire's educational philosophy and pedagogy need to be integrated into a religious curriculum founded on distinct pillars of knowledge. Three of these pillars were discussed in this paper: The Catholic intellectual tradition of inquiry, faith, and reason; the living tradition of Church teachings and doctrine; and Christian humanism in the context of contemporary ethical issues. These pillars would not be restricted to one specific grade level, but rather extended throughout the entire religion program with the students' understanding of the content deepening as they progress through the program. At the same time the students' capacity to inquire, to criticize, to evaluate and judge would continue to develop, becoming a fundamental habit of mind. Freire's pedagogical method with its focus on 'methodological rigour' should be adopted since it would further this development, particularly the students' ability to understand how their sense of self is conditioned by their existing reality and how they can become cognizant of this conditioning. With this method the students are open to the possibility of a self-transformation that could lead to transformation of the society for the benefit of the common good. Rather than accept the fatalism of ideologies based on the premise that the present existing reality is normative and immutable, as with neo-liberalism, the students understand themselves as participants in an 'unfinished' process as they themselves are 'unfinished.' Hope for a better future is always an 'historical possibility'—the possibility of utopia, the kingdom of God.

A Catholic religious secondary curriculum suitable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century also needs to allow free reign to the students' curiosity—a freedom that Freire considered

---

<sup>34</sup> In his new book, *Values: Building a Better World for All*, Mark Carney, the former Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England, also condemns the neo-liberalism that led to the international financial crisis of 2008-2009, commenting that «We have moved from a market economy to a market society, and this is now undermining our basic social contract of relative equality of outcomes, equality of opportunity and fairness across generations». He argues for a «rebalancing» of values so that the market place works for the common good. Heather Scoffield, «Carney focuses on Canada's future, not his», *The Toronto Star*, March 14, 2021.

essential to the human person. In doing so, the students should be introduced to the intriguing possibility of a new world view emerging that extends beyond the horizons of the Enlightenment concept of the universe conceived by modern day science. Over the last several decades, research in astrology, depth psychology, and science has led many scholars such as Richard Tarnas (2007) to question the «gradual disenchantment» of the cosmos that began with the Copernican Revolution. As a result of this disenchantment, «any ground of transcendent values—spiritual, moral, aesthetic—has been eliminated, allowing the subsequent «vacuum» to be filled by «the reductive values of the market and the mass media to colonize the collective human imagination and drain it of all depth» (p.32).<sup>35</sup> Arguing that this conception of the universe is fundamentally incorrect, and emphasizing the growing evidence that human existence isn't simply a «curious accident» in a universe without meaning, Tarnas contends that the cosmos are indeed 'enchanted' and possess a spiritual dimension—an all encompassing energy (p.28). Students should explore the possibility of this new emerging world view from a Catholic perspective. A «new language»—a new way to communicate this perspective—is needed in order for the students to be able to read the 'signs of the time' in which they live.<sup>36</sup> Steps have already been taken in this direction with some theologians exploring this 'enchanted' world view. Intriguingly, Robert Barron (1998) speaks of Jesus in terms of energy: «The Gospels want us, not outside the energy of Christ, but in it, not wondering at it, but swimming in it» (p.4). Likewise, the Gospels are understood as proclaiming the kingdom of God, «not as something to be admired from the outside, but rather an energy in which to participate», a place where the human and the divine meet (p.4) Self-transformation is understood as immersing oneself in the divine energy (p. 6). According to Barron, cosmologists and physicists «remind us that every action of ours...has implications for every other reality in the universe», and that the «cosmos is a blur of energy fields...a concentration of energy whose boundaries and borders are virtually impossible to specify» (p.59). Thus, «we are connected to all things» and to the «creative energy» that is God (p.6). As students explore this new emerging world view, they may be intrigued to discover that Freire's understanding of the 'unfinished' nature of human beings and their world extends to our understanding of the entire mystery of the cosmos, that the «larger meaning» of Copernican revolution «has been transformed with each succeeding age, and is, today, still unfolding» (Tarnas, 2007, p.10).

---

<sup>35</sup> Tarnas argues that a «universal intelligence and creative principle» exists, and «what distinguishes the contemporary astrological view is the additional factor of human co-creative participation in the concrete expressions of this creative principle, with the human being recognized as itself a potentially autonomous embodiment of the cosmos and its creative power and intelligence» (p.86).

<sup>36</sup> There is a strong need for new words and terminology to explain Christianity to students since it is evident that «our language, our words, our teaching, do not seem to have the power to communicate that they once possessed». We are mired in the 'uncertainty« of «between times» (Murphy, 2007, p.17).

## 8. References

- Arthur, J. (2009). Secularisation, Secularism and Catholic Education: Understanding the Challenges. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 1 (2), 228-239. DOI: 10.1080/19422530138226.
- Barron, R. (1998). *And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing.
- Biesta, G. (2013). Interrupting the Politics of Learning. *Power and Education*, 5 (1), 4–7. <https://www.wwords.co.uk/power>.
- Bruner, J.S. (1959). *The Process of Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bruno-Jofré, Rosa, & Hills (Skip), G. (2011). Changing Visions of Excellence in Ontario School Policy: The Cases of Living and Learning and For the Love of Learning. *Educational Theory*, 61 (3), 335–4.
- Cassilly, F.B. (1934). *Religion: Doctrine and Practice*. Chicago: Loyola University Press.
- Curtis, B. (1988). *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871*. London, England: Althouse Press.
- D'Sousa, M. (2016). *A Catholic Philosophy of Education: The Church and Two Philosophers*. Montreal & Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's Press.
- Daniel Rogers, D. (2011). Age of Fracture. *Historically Speaking*. 12 (2), 12-14. doi: 10.1353/hsp.2011.0018.
- Dewey, J. (1897). My Pedagogic Creed, *School Journal*, 54, 77-80. <http://dewey.pragmatism.org/creed.htm>.
- Francis, Pope. (2013). *Evangelii Gaudium*, section 55. [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Freire, P. (2000). *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum International.
- Johnston, D. (2016). *The Idea of Canada: Letters to a Nation*. Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart.
- Kane, L. (2001). *Popular Education and Social Change in Latin America*. London, England: Latin America Bureau.

- Leopando, I.R. (2011). *A Pedagogy of Faith: The Theological Dimension of Paulo's Freire's Educational Theory and Practice*. (Unpublished Thesis). University of New York, NY.
- Loneragan, B. (1974). The Future of Christianity. In S.J. In Ryan, W. & Tyrrell, R.B. *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan* (p. 127-140). London: Darton & Todd.
- Macedo, D. (2000). Introduction. In Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (pp.11-28). New York: Continuum.
- Madero, C. SJ (2015). Theological dynamics of Paulo Freire's educational theory: an essay to assist the work of Catholic educators. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 7 (2), 122-133. DOI: 10.1080/19422539.2015.1072953.
- McCool, G. (1989). Spirituality and Philosophy: The Ideal of the Catholic Mind. *Sacred Heart University Review*, 10 (1), 26-43. <http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/shureview/vol10/iss1/3>.
- Meier, J.P. (1994). *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume Two: Mentor, Message, and Miracles*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Mettepenningen, J. (2010). *Nouvelle Théologie New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*. New York, NY: T&T Clark International.
- Meynell, H.A. (1991). *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Bernard Lonergan*. London, England: Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD.
- Miedema, G.R. (2005). *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Murphy, D. (2007). *Catholic Education: A Light of Truth*. Toronto, ON: Catholic Register Books.
- O'Malley, J.W. (2008). *What Happened at Vatican II*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Orstein, A.C. & Hunkins, F.P. (2013). *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues*. Toronto, ON: Pearson Education Inc.
- Osiek, C. (2006). Catholic or Catholic? Biblical Scholarship at the Center. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 125 (1), 5-22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27638344>.
- Paulo Freire, *Letters to Cristina*, quoted in Cristobal Madera (2015). Theological dynamics of Paulo Freire's educational theory: an essay to assist the work of Catholic educators. *International Studies in Catholic Education*. 7(2), 122-133. DOI: 10.1080/19422539.2015.1072953



- Pereira, J. (2002). Thomism and the Magisterium: From Aeterni Patris to Veritatis Splendor. *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 5 (3),147-83. <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2002.0043>.
- Pinar, W. *What is Curriculum Theory?* (2004). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Pitre, B. (2016). *The Case for Christ: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*. New York, NY: Image.
- Rogers, D. (2001). *The Age of Fracture*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University.
- Royal, R. (2015). *A Deeper Vision: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Twentieth Century* San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press.
- Schmoker, M. (2011). *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Scofield, H. (2021, March 14). Carney focuses on Canada's future, not his. *The Toronto Star*.
- Shea, W. (1991). From Classicism to Method: John Dewey and Bernard Lonergan, *American Journal of Education*, 99 (9), 298-319. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1085788>.
- Stafford, J. (2019). *Vatican II and Catholic Religious Secondary Education in Ontario: Changes within a North American Context*. Kingston, ON: The Theory and History of Education International Research Group.
- Strike, K.A. (1985). Is There a Conflict Between Equity and Excellence? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 7, (4), 409-416. <https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy.queensu.ca/doi/pdf/10.3102/01623737007004409>.
- Strong, R.W., Silver, H.F., & Perini, M.J. (2001). *Teaching What Matters Most: Standards and Strategies for Raising Student Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Tarnas, R. (1991). *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped Our World View*. New York, NY: Ballentine Books.
- Tarnas, R. (2007). *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View*. New York, NY: Plume.
- Weddell, S.A. (2012). *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division.
- Williams, R. (1980). *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*. London, England: Verso.

- Wooden, Cindy. (2019, February 14th). Pope Francis reflects on changed attitudes toward liberation theology. *Catholic News Service*.
- Woods Jr., T.E. (2005). *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*. Washington, DC: Regnery.
- Wright, N.T. (2016). *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*. New York, NY: Harper One.