

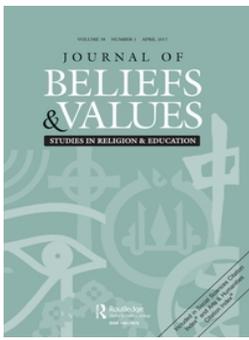
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# Good education, the good teacher, and a practical art of living a good life: a Catholic perspective

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## ABSTRACT

What is good education? We value education for reasons connected to the good provided by education in society. This good is connected to be the pedagogical aim of education. This article distinguishes five criteria for good education based on the concept of ‘Bildung’.

Next, these five criteria are used to develop the idea of the good teacher. The rationale behind the analysis is that the good teacher should be able to realise what we consider to be good education. There are different traditions of religiously affiliated schools in the world. This article gives insight into the idea of the good teacher in two documents of the Catholic Congregation of Education on the lay teacher. Finally, the article focuses on the formation of a practical art of living a good life. Again, the five characteristics of good education structure the analysis of this type of educational formation.

## KEYWORDS

‘Bildung’; good education; the good teacher; art of living a good life

## 1. Introduction

Education is a ‘public good’ in society. Public goods are open equally to all. ‘That is, people cannot be prevented from using a public good, and one person’s enjoyment of a public good does not reduce another person’s enjoyment of it’ (Mankiw 2011, 211). From an economic perspective, public goods are difficult to deal with because it is difficult to put in a cost-benefit analysis. Put simply: education is free of charge, and if you let one person enjoy education in society you cannot exclude another person from enjoying the same education. Societies struggle to provide basic education of the right quality to all citizens. The fact that money is involved does not contradict the fact that we regard education to be a public good. In a deep sense, education escapes any monetary calculation. We value education for reasons connected to the good provided by education in society. This ‘good’ is connected to the pedagogical aim of education which in the European context is informed by the concept ‘Bildung’. What does it mean to be educated? We will draw on the concept of ‘Bildung’ as developed by the German scholar Karl-Ernst Nipkow. For readers unfamiliar with the theological field of the pedagogy of religion, it might be considered unusual to start with a pedagogical concept. I do this in the tradition of what is called the critical-dialogical convergence model between theology and pedagogy (Nipkow 1975, 173–177). The idea is that

there is but one reality of education in society based on a cultural-political understanding of what education should be. This convergence is considered critical-dialogic which means that pedagogical ideas could be criticised from a theological perspective and vice versa. But never could the dialogue end with a one-sided conclusion in which for example theological arguments end a pedagogical debate.

In the next step, I will formulate characteristics of the good teacher based on an analysis of two documents published by the Congregation of Catholic Education since Vatican II on the teacher in Catholic schools. In line with my convergence approach, I will use the five dimensions identified in the pedagogical concept of 'Bildung' to frame the analysis of both documents. The rationale behind this approach is to ground the idea of the good teacher in pedagogical concepts in convergence with Catholic theological concepts. The notion of the good teacher generated by this method is accessible for discussion by people who do not share the Catholic theological background. This is important in a public discourse about the good teacher within a plural society, but also within Catholic schools which include teachers who do not belong to the Catholic community. At the same time, the formulation of the idea of the good teacher is framed and enriched by Catholic theological notions, like 'reading the signs of the time'. The reader will therefore not see the same headings in the second section of the good teacher as in the first section of '*Bildung*'. In order to strengthen the symmetry, we added between brackets the dimensions of '*Bildung*' when we formulate the characteristics of the good teacher.

In line with the first two steps, I will finally formulate a concept of a practical art of living a good life. One can distinguish three general tasks of education: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. The last task refers to education of the subjectivity or personhood of those whom we educate (Biesta 2014, 4). We will connect this formation of the human subject with the idea of a good life and label it the formation of a practical art of living a good life. In this section, we will draw on the later work of Harry G. Frankfurt (2004, 2006), who is considered to be one of the main ethicist of the US of our era. Frankfurt's theory are grounded on ideas of care and love in the formation of the human will to live a good life. In educational and practical theological theory, there is little reception of the ideas of Harry G. Frankfurt. With this article we propose to rectify this unfortunate neglect.

## 2. 'Bildung'

The concept of 'Bildung' is a contested concept. The different conceptions of 'Bildung' go back to philosophical and pedagogical representatives, and (sometimes) even schools of educational renewal which continue until today (such as Montessori schools, and Freinet schools). The different concepts present different ideas on the aim and content of education which reflect different societal conditions and different historical periods. If we cannot escape a historical and societal bias in our conception of 'Bildung', the best thing we can do is to distinguish criteria which need to be incorporated in any historical-contextual conception of good education. An author who has offered such a proposal is the theologian and pedagogue Karl Ernst Nipkow (1975, 81–89; 1990, 32–38). He distinguishes five criteria or characteristics of 'Bildung' which we will elaborate below.

### **2.1. Responsible in and for society (political dimension)**

For the citizens of Athens 'Paideia' was the ideal of formation, which incorporated the idea of becoming citizens who can participate in deliberation and decision-making in the 'polis' (Nipkow 1990, 33). The education of the whole person (Paideia) focused on the integration of the personal sphere of life and the public sphere. Education leads to freedom in the sense of a critical stance to the given situation, but on the other hand it demands free life-conditions in order to be able to take this critical stance. In Athens, this was in reach of the elite of the citizens, but in history there is again and again pressure of education to conformity to the dominant cultural and political system. In reaction to this societal pressure, one can also observe a tendency to decouple education and society and to create education into a 'pedagogical sanctuary' for the development of children and youth. Both conformity, and pedagogical sanctuary are undesirable positions. The school is a social space of practice to understand what it means to be a responsible person in society. Society is not just the place of cohesion and cooperation, but also the place of diversity and conflict. The school is not just an institution of society but also *for* society, that is a practice situation to learn what it means to live in and to take responsibility for democracy (Biesta 2015, 61).

### **2.2. Human fullness (utopian dimension)**

'Bildung' focuses on what is possible in the development of the child or young person, on what transcends the given. The just order of society, but also the true human order of the soul, is not yet given, according to Plato (Nipkow 1975, 83), and the Christian gospel proclaims that the fullness of life in justice and love which became historically manifest in Jesus Christ, is an eschatological fullness that wants to emerge in the life of every person and in society as a whole. This utopian dimension is an emancipatory characteristic of education. What is given is not the criterion of human fullness. Human fullness as normative criterion refers to an ideal of perfect happiness. What a good person or a just society is, is something which transcends us. It is not something which educators 'control' or 'create'. Educators are like watchmen on the out-look for a human fullness that wants to emerge.

### **2.3. Moral character (ethical dimension)**

'Bildung' aims at a process in which a self-reflecting and sensing subject emerges which in a self-responsible way can act and shape his or her own life (Nipkow 1975, 85). The question of a full, just and loving life presupposes a subject who can speak and act, and can be held responsible for his or her speaking and acting (Arendt 1998). The people who are educated are not to be seen as objects of education, but as subjects of action and responsibility. The subject is source of freedom and personal maturity, and therefore also a morally responsible self. Human dignity (according to Kant), in a moral sense, is grounded in free ethical decision-making (Nipkow 1990, 33).

### **2.4. Critical interpretation and tradition (mimetic dimension)**

The process of 'Bildung' presupposes memory and tradition (Nipkow 1975, 85–86). Memory includes not only successful and good examples of human living with and for others, but

also bad examples which need not to be followed. The twentieth century has been an age of massive human self-destruction on a large scale. Memory and tradition are treated with suspicion in an era characterised by emancipation and freedom (Nipkow 1990, 36). Traditions can be destructive or evil (such as fascist nationalism in Italy or apartheid in South Africa). Interpretation needs to be critical, including a hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970, 356). ‘Bildung’ includes learning to participate in an ongoing process of critical interpretation of living with and for others in view of the question regarding what human fullness is.

I like to label this criterion as the mimetic dimension of ‘Bildung’ based on the hermeneutic process of ‘mimesis’ of Ricoeur (1990, 1991a, 1991b). ‘Mimesis’ is the narrative process of emplotment by which a person exercises ‘the power of self-designation that makes the person not only a unique type of thing but a self’ (Ricoeur 1990, 32). According to Ricoeur, ‘mimesis’ starts in the world of life events in which a person is involved. Interpretation starts by participating in practices of our culture: by reading, taking part in rituals and festivals, by living in the spaces of our cultural life, by sharing language, etc. Ricoeur calls this mimesis 1 or pre-figuration. Emplotment is part of the world of the text. In narratives people share reasons for acting and reasons in acting. What does it mean to be human with and for others? What characterises the good life? Ricoeur calls this mimesis 2 or con-figuration. In traditions of cultural texts (such as the Christian traditions), we can imagine the meaning of life in the heterogeneity of life events. In the third stage of the hermeneutic process of ‘mimesis’, we apply the text to the existential situation of our life. In what way does the interpretation of the text help me as a person to understand myself? Ricoeur calls this mimesis 3 or re-figuration. Self-interpretation needs a detour in the narrative understanding of texts of cultural traditions:

The refiguration by narrative confirms this aspect of self-knowledge which goes far beyond the narrative domain, namely, that the self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly by the detour of the cultural signs of all sorts ... (Ricoeur 1991b, 198)

## **2.5. Mutual understanding (socio-communicative dimension)**

‘Bildung’ presupposes a social dimension, namely living with and for others in a just and sustainable society. Human living emerges where people come together in their capacity to speak and act. What is more, maturity and freedom is only realised in the social space of appearance. This space of appearance is characterised by freedom and plurality (Arendt 1998: 198). Other people can always do something or make some utterance which I do not understand. ‘Bildung’ needs to incorporate mutual understanding, because education needs to prepare students to deal with the plurality of speaking and acting in the social space. Mutual understanding implies more than skills of communication, but aims at coordination of actions and sharing worlds.

## **3. The good teacher**

What is a good teacher? We will formulate a Catholic perspective based on an analysis of two documents published by the congregation of Catholic education:

- *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses of Faith*, published in 1982; and
- *Education Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* published in 2007.

We will refer to the documents in the text by using the acronym: SCCE referring to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. In this analysis, we use the five criteria of ‘*Bildung*’ as frame for the defining characteristics of the good teacher. The rationale behind the analysis is that the good which education offers to learners and society as a whole should be the aim of the good teacher. The good teacher contributes to the realisation of good education. The good teacher needs a strong professional preparation in order to have the skills and methods of teaching (SCCE 1982, 16). But the perspective of professionalism is not the same as that of the good teacher. The focus of professionalism is the realisation of goals, effectivity, methods and techniques. The focus of the good teacher is an ethical and spiritual perspective on what we understand to be good education,

### **3.1. Educating in communion and for communion (political dimension)**

In a Catholic view, becoming a responsible individual is always embedded in community life.

Every school, and every educator in the school, ought to be striving ‘to form strong and responsible individuals, who are capable of making free and correct choices,’ thus preparing young people ‘to open themselves more and more to reality, and to form in themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life’ (SCCE 1982, 17).

The good teacher should live communion and in this way make the entire educational sphere a place of communion open to external reality and not just closed in on itself (SCCE 2007, 43). By *educating in communion*, the good teacher becomes also a visible sign *for communion* in terms of a responsible attitude towards others: in the educational community, in the other communities to which they may belong, and “with the entire human community’ (SCCE 1982, 39). This interconnectedness of *educating in communion and for communion*:

... aims at directing students to grow authentically as persons who gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life» that will help them to open their views and their hearts to the world that surrounds them, able to see things critically, with a sense of responsibility and a desire for a constructive commitment. (SCCE 2007, 43)

Two orders of motivation, anthropological and theological, form the basis of this opening towards the world in responsibility. The anthropological foundation is given in the idea that ‘the human being, as a person, is a unity of soul and body that is dynamically realized through its opening to a relation with others. A person is formed for *being-with* and *for-others*, which is realized in love’ (SCCE 2007, 43). The theological foundation has an intra-ecclesial dimension and an opening into a service that is universal. The intra-ecclesial dimension refers to the Church as place of communion and image of Trinitarian love:

When Christians say *communion*, they refer to the eternal mystery, revealed in Christ, of the communion of love that is the very life of God-Trinity. At the same time we also say that Christians share in this communion in the Body of Christ which is the Church (cf. *Phil* 1: 7; *Rev* 1: 9). (SCCE 2007, 10)

The Spirit acts as an ‘interior power that harmonises the hearts of believers with Christ’s heart and transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father’ (SCCE 2007, 45). Becoming a witness of the love of the Father, the good teacher shows that charity, of its nature, gives way to a universal service to every human being.

### **3.2. Vocation for the fullness of life (utopic dimension)**

The good teacher is characterised by a vocation for the fullness of life (SCCE 1982, 37). This commitment for human fullness determines the importance, the richness, and the responsibility of this vocation. All education is influenced by a particular concept of what it means to be a human person. The Christian concept of the person is a concept ‘which includes a defence of human rights, but also attributes to the human person the dignity of a child of God; it attributes the fullest liberty, freed from sin itself by Christ, the most exalted destiny, which is the definitive and total possession of God Himself, through love’ (SCCE 1982, 18). This idea of fullness of life of each person entrusted to the care of teachers is not something abstract, nor something which can be created by the teacher. The good teacher is sensitive towards the growth of humanity in the educated person, sensitive to the possibilities of what emerges as truly human in the educated person. The good teacher:

... must attain a special sensitivity with regard to the person to be educated in order to grasp not only the request for growth in knowledge and skills, but also the need for growth in humanity. Thus educators must dedicate themselves «to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. (SCCE 1982, 24)

To grow in this vocation for the fullness of life, the good teacher needs a ‘formation of the heart’ (SCCE 1982, 25). The reasons of the heart are a heartfelt concern of love towards the fullness of life emerging in the educated person. It demands a faith which becomes active through love (cf. *Gal* 5:6). And even ‘care for instruction means loving’ (*Wis* 6:17). It is only through a loving care and sensitivity that the good teacher can support the educated person to experience the fullness of their humanity.

### **3.3. Witness of the model of moral dignity (ethical dimension)**

The integral formation of the human person, which is the purpose of education, includes the development of all the human faculties of the students, together with preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, becoming aware of the transcendental, and religious education. The good teacher ought to be striving:

... to form strong and responsible individuals, who are capable of making free and correct choices, thus preparing young people to open themselves more and more to reality, and to form in themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life. (SCCE 1982, 17)

The more completely the good teacher can give concrete witness to the model of the ideal person that is being presented to educated people, the more this ideal will be believed and imitated. When teachers are a witness of the model of moral dignity the more it will be seen as something reasonable and worthy of being lived, something concrete and realisable:

... the most important element in the educational endeavour is always the individual person: the person, and the moral dignity of that person which is the result of his or her principles, and the conformity of actions with those principles. (SCCE 1982, 32)

### **3.4. Interpreting the signs of the times (mimetic dimension)**

The good teacher should always be alert for opportunities to initiate the appropriate dialogue between culture and faith. In a Catholic view, culture and faith are not seen as contrasting or conflicting elements, but as things which are intimately related. The good teacher is

able to present class materials in such a way that it facilitates a dialogue between faith and culture, in this way gradually helping students to a personal synthesis of these elements (SCCE 1982, 64). It is not so easy to facilitate this dialogue. The good teacher need to do more than communicate in an abstract way what is considered to be important gospel values. What is needed is a deep understanding of human culture in order to discern ‘the signs of the times’ which have a deep intrinsic relationship to evangelical values and to the opposite values (SCCE 2007, 31):

Because of the experiences that lay people acquire in their lives, and through their presence in all of the various spheres of human activity, they will be especially capable of recognizing and clarifying the signs of the times that characterize the present historical period of the People of God. Therefore, as a proper part of their vocation, they should contribute their initiative, their creativity, and their competent, conscious, and enthusiastic labour to this task. In this way, the whole People of God will be able to distinguish more precisely those elements of the signs that are Gospel values, or values contrary to the Gospel. (SCCE 1982, 10)

### **3.5. Spirituality of communion (socio-communicative dimension)**

Every human being is called to live in a community:

Everything that the Catholic educator does in a school takes place within the structure of an educational community, made up of the contacts and the collaboration among all of the various groups - students, parents, teachers, directors, non-teaching staff - that together are responsible for making the school an instrument for integral formation. (SCCE 1982, 22)

What does this imply for a concept of the good teacher? The good teacher should be a living mirror of the values implied in a community life fostering mutual understanding and welcoming everybody, including:

Professional commitment; support of truth, justice and freedom; openness to the point of view of others, combined with an habitual attitude of service; personal commitment to the students, and fraternal solidarity with everyone; a life that is integrally moral in all its aspects. (SCCE 2007, 52)

But this is not all because there is also a plurality in gifts of the Spirit in the educational community. It is not just about commitment, freedom, openness etc. but room needs to be made for:

... the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit in the educational community and to acknowledges this diversity as wealth. (SCCE 2007, 17)

It is not just what we do, but we also need an openness for the gifts of the Spirit in the educational community. Because of this diversity of the gifts of the Spirit, the 2007 document *Education Together in Catholic Schools* also refers to a spirituality of communion, which the good teacher needs to have. The motivation for ‘spirituality of communion’ is intra-ecclesial:

Spirituality of communion means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in the faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as those who are a part of me and the Christian community’s ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit in a relationship of reciprocity. (SCCE 2007, 16)<sup>1</sup>

In the context of an educational community, made up of the collaboration of the various groups which have a plural understanding about schooling as an instrument for integral formation, a *spirituality of communion* needs to include all members of the educational community. This does not make life easier for the good teacher, but certainly more challenging and probably richer.

#### **4. The formation of a practical art of living a good life**

What would the formation of a practical art of living a good life include which the good teacher should be able to provide as part of good education? This type of formation should pass the criteria of ‘Bildung’ as formulated in the beginning of this article. The five criteria will also structure this section. In our development of this type of formation, we will draw on the work of Harry Frankfurt as put forward in the introduction.

A practical art of living a good life includes a life with and for others in just institutions and in a sustainable society. It is not about knowledge or making things, but about ‘praxis’ in the Aristotelian sense of the word: actions which have their meaning (‘telos’) in themselves. Human living is more than survival (although for human beings in some situations it is experienced as just survival!). It is an art to live well which implies a normative stance on how to live. We evaluate how we live using normative criteria about what we consider to be the good life. How do I live a good life for myself? How should I live with and for others whom I know by name? How should I live with and for others who live in my society but whom I do not know by name? How should I live with and for the whole of nature in general, and specifically all living creatures? His distinction of self, others and anonymous is derived from the so-called little ethics of Paul Ricoeur (1992). We add a fourth type of relationship namely to human nature in general, and specifically to living creatures (see Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Laudate si* (2015)). We come to understand what the good life is by bringing it into practice. That is why I like to call it a practical art of living a good life.

##### **4.1. To connect to the world and connect to the self (political dimension)**

What does it imply to act in a responsible manner in and with the world as a human subject (Nipkow)? Humans have three capacities: cognitive, affective and volitional capacities. They are all at stake in a practical art of living a good life, but the very heart of this formation is the formation of the will. ‘In my view, then, the ultimate source of practical normative authority lies not in reason but in the will’ (Frankfurt 2006). We do not ask the question ‘how to live’ from a position of disinterested curiosity. In this question we are deeply involved ourselves. Practical art of living starts with the care that we have towards things that we care about. To care is a fundamental human activity that binds human beings to the world outside them and at the same time it binds us to ourselves. If we care for or about nothing, anything will do. Responsibility implies a connection to the world outside (‘*ex-istere*’). In that same process of connecting to the world, our identity as a unique self emerges. The things that we care about, are not just things that happen to us, but they express a desire or longing concerning what belongs to us. I accept my desires or longings as expressions of myself.

Responsibility develops by the reflective competence to build higher order attitudes about our desires about our object of care and love. ‘Developing higher order attitudes and responses to oneself is fundamental to achieving the status of a responsible person’

(Frankfurt 2006). This reflexive competence strengthens our stability and the continuity of the desires which express our connectedness to the world around us. This reflective competence does not replace the importance of what we care about. Without our connection to the world, our reflection is empty. Reflecting on our desires helps to build desires about our desires. In this way, we can strengthen our will, and in doing so, strengthen our responsibility.

#### **4.2. Ultimate value (utopic dimension)**

What does a focus on human fullness (see ‘Bildung’) imply for a practical art of living a good life? There are many goals which express what we care about. When one goal is realised, we focus on another goal. Everything is temporal, nothing is permanent. This raises the question of the permanence of our identity. What is the self if it binds itself only to objects that are transient? Is there nothing in life which we value and have permanence in time? According to Frankfurt, human beings can experience this in love, as a special kind of care. Characteristic of love is the acceptance of something valuable in itself. For example, the love of parents for their child is a kind of care which is unconditional. Love is a specific kind of care because it does not feel like a free choice, but we feel overwhelmed by the object of our love. Love happens to us. It emerges. We cannot make it happen or control it. In a person who loves, the desire emerges to act in the interest of the object of our love. The will cannot but give itself wholeheartedly to the object of our love. It is in coming to love that we become bound to final ends:

By its very nature, loving entails both that we regard its objects as valuable in themselves and that we have no choice but to adopt those objects as our final ends. Insofar as love is the creator both of inherent or terminal value and of importance, then, it is the ultimate ground of practical rationality. (Frankfurt 2004, 56)

These final ends are not first in me and then attributed to the object of our love. What is of ultimate value is in the object of our love. In the act of coming to love, these final ends are given to me as if they were my own interest. The experience of love is not to be apprehended without an awareness of ultimacy, unboundedness or transcendence. In the gift of love, human beings will give themselves to desire something that is considered to be an ultimate value.

#### **4.3. Wholeheartedly or freedom to act (ethic dimension)**

A practical art of living a good life presumes a freedom to act or autonomy. Freedom is sometimes misunderstood as absence of any external power or cause which influences the human will. Apart from the fact that humans are always entangled in practices, events and life histories with other people, the problem is that the absence of antecedent causes does not tell us anything about the freedom of the will to act (Frankfurt 2005).

What precisely is the experience of ‘freedom’ of the will? Where is the will ‘free’ of which experience itself as ‘free’? The optimal experience of the free will is the experience to give oneself wholeheartedly to the desire to act (or not to act). Imagine the love of parents for their child. This love motivates the parents to act wholeheartedly towards the realisation of the happiness of their child. Of course, there will be situations in which parents experience resistance in themselves to act, because of the life choices that the child is making.

The relationship between parents and children is not always harmonious. Love for human beings has its limits (which is different to the love of God which is without limits!). But this human condition of limitedness does not change the heart of the experience of love. It is a form of willing, that does not feel like willing in the sense of enforcing the will to act. The intention to act emerges wholeheartedly as in a *flow*.

Also, autonomy should be interpreted in this way. Autonomy is not the freedom to give an opinion about how (not) to act. This would contradict the demand of reflexivity which aims at the formation of (meta-)desires about our desires (not) to act in order to create stability and continuity to our actions. Autonomy implies the will to be congruent as a human person with one's own desires (not) to act.

#### **4.4. Interpretation and memory (mimetic dimension)**

The formation of a practical art of living a good life needs to include the interpretation of tradition(s) of models of a good life in life narratives, texts, practices, spaces, social media, et cetera. New generations are already informed by interpretations of a good life in the practices in which they are involved at home and the social networks in which they live. The reasons and desires (not) to act are created by the practices in which they are involved. The formation of the art of living a good life needs to be enriched by other traditions, so that their object of care and love can be enlarged and deepened. At the same time, we need to be aware that young people have also contrast-experiences of not being free and of self-estrangement. Or they desire to act in way which contradicts the idea of a good life of teachers (schools), for example some forms of street culture which are characterised by masculinity and violence. Teachers (schools) need to decide what they consider to be pedagogically desirable for the art of living a good life.

#### **4.5. Difference and dialogue (socio-communicative dimension)**

Humans differ in the object of care and love, and seek recognition for their art of living a good life. What is more, we experience that others act and speak in ways which we do not understand in terms of living a good life. We need to understand other human beings because we share a social space of acting and speaking together. We need to keep in mind that the focus is a practical art of living a good life with and for others in just institutions and a sustainable society. Our understanding and dialogue should be focused on a mutual understanding of the motives (desires, concerns, values) of (not) acting. Can students understand these motives as expressions of care and/or love, which may be different than the one's we have, but express a gift of ultimate value?

### **Conclusion**

There are different voices in society about the good teacher. One voice (in many cases the political voice of control and malleability) speaks about 'qualified teachers who can teach the core curriculum'. Other voices speak about the virtues and moral character of the good teacher (Arthur et al. 2015). What I set out to do in this contribution, is to frame this debate in the perspective of '*Bildung*' which reflects the pedagogical 'why' of good education. Only in this perspective we can communicate and argue about the good teacher in a coherent

and comprehensive manner. And we can also bring in our specific notions as I have done from a Catholic perspective, which can enrich the debate without losing a common ground. We need ‘good teachers’ in view of the contribution which education can make in the lives of young people. Yes, we need to teach the core curriculum and be involved in character formation, but we need good teachers because we need to educate our students in a practical art of living a good life.

## Note

1. This term is introduced by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (6th January 2001); <http://www.stucom.nl/pub/0020uk/0020uk.htm> The Pope uses this concept in an intra ecclesial sense. To use it in the context of a pluralistic school with different groups seems to broaden the scope of this concept. It is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate this idea further.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

*Chris Hermans* is a professor in pastoral theology, especially empirical theology at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands and a research fellow at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. His areas of interest are religious education, spiritual biography, foundational questions in practical theology, empirical research methodology in theology, spirituality and leadership and quality of good education.

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