MEDIATING FRUITFUL ENCOUNTERS WITH TRUTH, TRANSCENDENCE, AND DIFFERENCE BY TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING

Abstract: Curricular focus on critical thinking can provide a means of addressing troubling cultural trends like breakdowns in public discourse and misconceptions about the compatibility of faith and science. This paper expands the concept of critical thinking by engaging the work of J.H. Newman and B. Lonergan. The latter part of the paper narrates how one university has integrated Lonergan’s “generalized empirical method” into the curriculum and faculty development with promising outcomes for collaboration across disciplines, faculty spirituality, and facilitating difficult conversations on campus.

INTRODUCTION

On May 24, 2015 the Vatican released Pope Francis’s encyclical on the environment, Laudato si’. Some warmly embraced the Pope’s call to exercise greater conscientiousness and concern for the environment. Others lambasted the Pope for straying from matters of faith and morals and into environmental and economic matters of which they believe him to be ignorant.

On January 27, 2017 the Trump administration issued an executive order banning travel from seven countries. Many Americans celebrated the order as an overdue measure to prevent terrorists from entering the country. Many others decried the order as an act of racism that does nothing to improve national security.

The radically polarized reactions to these two events are in many ways indicative of the breakdown in public discourse presently obstructing mutual understanding and social progress in the United States. This state of affairs poses significant challenges to the work of religious educators, who aspire to hand on their religious traditions within this hostile cultural context. As a practical theologian and religious educator who addresses his work to the threefold audience of church, academy, and public, I perceive the following to be some of these challenges: First, for those who speak to and for the church, it is concerning that the church so often gets mired in these conflictual encounters and is sometimes the very source of the conflict, as in the case of Pope Francis’s Laudato si’. It is concerning because an important aspect of the Church’s mission is restoring the unity of the human beings with God and one another. Besides belonging to a

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faith community, many religious educators also belong to an academic community. One would think that, if anywhere, open-minded discourse is likely to occur in our institutions of higher learning. Yet for several decades the trend in our nation’s universities has been toward ever greater specialization and marginalization of liberal arts programs that inculcate integrative thinking and communication skills. Finally, American religious educators have abundant cause for concern insofar as we are citizens of a society experiencing a crisis of truth and meaning. The proper functioning of a society requires a degree of common understanding about what is true and real. Therefore, it does not bode well for the future of our society that some people are increasingly disposed to dismiss scientific research and well-sourced journalistic reporting and that an alarming percentage of current students are unable to distinguish fake news stories from real ones.4

How are religious educators to respond to these challenges? On what common ground can we stand to begin reunifying a divided nation? Acknowledging the benefits of other efforts like compassion training and courses in conflict management,5 in this paper I focus on how universities can promote fruitful encounters among their own faculty, staff, students, and the wider public through teaching critical thinking. Because not everything that passes as critical thinking today is equally helpful in this regard, I begin by offering an overview of some of the most popular definitions of critical thinking before exploring how the writings of John Henry Newman and Bernard Lonergan provide a more holistic foundation for the kinds of thinking that would promote more fruitful encounters in our universities, religious communities, and public spaces. In the latter part of the paper I describe how one university has operationalized a distinctive approach to critical thinking in its curriculum, instruction, and faculty development with promising initial results.

CRITICAL THINKING: MUCH INTEREST, MANY CONCEPTIONS

In recent years the value placed upon critical thinking has swelled tremendously in academic and employment settings. Surveys show that over the past 25 years college faculty have increasingly adapted their pedagogy in order to better promote students’ critical thinking.6 A growing number of universities are offering courses specifically on critical thinking.7 Accrediting agencies include promotion of critical thinking among their criteria for academic

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7 See, for example, the hundreds available from a variety of universities on Coursera: https://www.coursera.org/courses?languages=en&query=critical+thinking.
excellence. All of the above stands as evidence of the formal valorization of critical thinking in higher education. Statistics and surveys aside, the basic truth of the matter is that nobody wants to be considered an uncritical thinker. Given the virtual consensus on the value of critical thinking, current discussions of the topic might present an opportunity to get people of differing perspectives talking to one another at a time when Americans are otherwise deeply divided.

Of course, talking about and teaching critical thinking will not in itself heal social divisions. For one thing, despite general agreement on the value of critical thinking, it seems that the U.S. educational system may not actually be doing a very good job training students to be critical thinkers. Part of the problem may be confusion about the meaning of critical thinking among scholars, academic professionals, and students. With regard to this last group, I find that many of my students associate critical thinking rather reductively with criticizing the ideas of authors and their fellow students. It has also been my experience that professors often unintentionally reinforce this reductive understanding. Even professors who encourage students to find strengths in others’ positions sometimes end up rewarding and reinforcing faultfinding by means of verbal affirmation or by failing in the heat of the moment to insist that students acknowledge what is worthwhile in each other’s positions. Despite schools’ and professors’ best intentions, teaching critical thinking poorly may contribute to social division rather than healing it by training people who are quick to criticize and unpracticed in listening.

Fortunately, many institutions and scholars do in fact offer examples of thinking well about critical thinking. Scholars like Richard Grallo, Peter Facione, and Jennifer Moon offer a helpful basic definition of critical thinking as thinking that leads to judgments. Other scholars offer a variety of definitions. Mark Mason summarizes three categories that predominate in the literature: (1) substantial knowledge of particular content, (2) the skills of critical reasoning (e.g., assessing arguments properly), and (3) a disposition (e.g., a critical attitude or moral orientation). While all three are helpful, some are more helpful than others for promoting fruitful encounters. Basic content knowledge (#1) is a necessary foundation. However, substantial knowledge of a particular discipline (or even of critical thinking itself) does not necessarily help one to talk to others outside that discipline. It may even present an impediment.

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9 An analysis of data from the College Learning Assessment Plus found that at about half of the colleges examined large groups of seniors were unable to make a cohesive argument or interpret evidence. (See Douglas Belkin, “Exclusive Test Data: Many Colleges Fail to Improve Critical-Thinking Skills,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 2017, sec. US, https://www.wsj.com/articles/exclusive-test-data-many-colleges-fail-to-improve-critical-thinking-skills-1496686662.)


11 Ibid.


14 Grallo notes that “critical” comes from the Greek κρινειν, which means “to judge”.

Critical thinking skills (#2) are often emphasized in school proficiencies and competencies, but, if training in critical thinking goes no deeper than providing intellectual tools, those skills can be too easily instrumentalized (e.g., developing critical thinking skills primarily or solely for the purpose of preparing students for 21st-century jobs).\textsuperscript{16} Employing critical thinking for such narrow, self-serving purposes does little to promote mutual understanding.

These limits of critical thinking conceived as knowledge or a skill set make it clear that simply teaching some form of critical thinking does not guarantee that students will become more open to others’ views or that this common starting point will lead to more meaningful dialogue. I suggest that, if more meaningful encounters with difference are the goal, then the dispositional dimension of critical thinking (#3) is key. In order to substantiate this suggestion I now turn to the writings of John Henry Newman.

**NEWMAN’S “ENLARGEMENT OF MIND” AS A DISPOSITION FOR CRITICAL THINKING**

Based on a series of lectures occasioned by John Henry Newman’s founding of the Catholic University in Dublin, *The Idea of a University* articulates Newman’s vision of what a (Catholic) university should be. According to this text, “the end of a Liberal Education is not mere knowledge” but rather “the process of enlightenment,” which Newman identifies with an “enlargement of mind.”\textsuperscript{17} He characterizes this perfection or virtue of the intellect as a habit of reasoning well in all matters, of reaching toward and grasping the truth. It is “the power of viewing many things at once as a whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, and determining their mutual dependence.”\textsuperscript{18} This enlargement involves an openness to new ideas and experiences and the ability to understand them in relation to one another. The training of the intellect in this way, according to Newman, serves to train good members of society, for it teaches one to “throw himself into [another’s] state of mind… how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them.”\textsuperscript{19}

In Newman’s thinking, even though a university may be accomplishing many other laudable achievements, it betrays its fundamental purpose if it neglects to form its students in this habit of mind. Indeed, training students well within specific fields of study does not guarantee the absence of “narrowness of mind.”\textsuperscript{20} The educational trends that vexed Newman persist in the present day. Our modern universities often emphasize the acquisition of specialized knowledge and professional competencies while neglecting the dispositions that make for good citizens and neighbors. This kind of formation does little to curb tribalistic and egocentric thinking or to build

\textsuperscript{16} For an example, see Laura Billings and Terry Roberts, *Teaching Critical Thinking Using Seminars for 21st Century Literacy* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2014).


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 135.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 102.
up communities. It should therefore come as little surprise that today we often find ourselves in antagonistic encounters, for, rather than cultivating the enlargement of mind needed to engage the ideas of others with curiosity and equanimity, our education has trained us to think of others as competitors and opponents.

We might ask what kind of training would be required to enlarge students’ minds as Newman envisions. Newman suggests that, most basically, one should cultivate a familiarity with many different areas of study. He proposes that the first step of intellectual training is to impress upon the student the idea of method, order, and system (e.g., by the study of Grammar, Mathematics, History, and Poetry). Cultivating this sense of order and method allows one to compare ideas with one another, to work out of “their mutual and true relations,” and to connect new information with old understanding. Most importantly, Newman explains, one does not achieve enlargement of mind by passively absorbing lectures, for it is first and foremost the “work of discipline and habit.”

Given that Newman’s vision flies directly in the face of the prevailing winds of modern education, his pedagogical prescriptions might seem unrealistic to us today. Furthermore, given how highly specialized the various academic fields have become, we might doubt that any single method or system is capable of unifying them all. But, as we will see presently, such a method does in fact exist and one modern university has succeeded in using it to achieve many of the aims for which Newman hoped.

SELF-APPROPRIATION AS THE FOUNDATION AND FULFILLMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING

The Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan was greatly influenced by John Henry Newman. Lonergan builds upon the thought of Newman in order to articulate even more precisely how to develop the human subject in a way that makes one more open to truth and likely to serve as a catalyst in the progress of society. Lonergan takes as his starting point the observation that all human beings spontaneously ask questions about the world and experience a psychological tension until they find satisfactory answers to those questions. Lonergan describes this natural desire to know as humans’ “pure question” or “unrestricted desire to know.”

21 Ibid., 101. In his Grammar of Assent, Newman describes a related concept, which he calls the “illative sense” (”An Essay In Aid Of A Grammar Of Assent,” Project Gutenberg, 2010, 343 http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34022/34022-h/34022-h.html). He describes the illative sense as an intellectual counterpart to the Aristotelian virtue of prudence (phrenosis). More precisely, it is the intellectual virtue of judging what is true in the realm of the concrete where formal incontrovertible proof in favour of a decision is not possible.


23 For Lonergan's account of the role of the authentic subject in promoting social progress and reversing decline, see Method in Theology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 52–55.


25 Ibid., 376. bell hooks in writes in the same vein, “The heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—to understand how life works” (Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom (New York: Routledge, 2010, 7).
According to Lonergan, this “pure question” takes the form of questions on different levels. On the most basic level, we ask questions for understanding: What is the Pope talking about? In response to the tension created by such intelligent questions, the mind generates possible answers: He’s saying that human beings are the cause of global warming. On a second level we ask questions for reflection: Is he right? What evidence would prove him right? Does such evidence exist?26 Even after making the judgment that something is true or not, further questions remain, namely, questions of valuing and deliberation. The person who judges that human beings are in fact responsible for global warming is confronted with the questions Is that a good or bad thing? and What will I do about it? In answering these questions one decides how the matter affects them and what kind of person they want to be.

Lonergan’s account of this invariant pattern of cognitive operations not only provides the language for a precise understanding of critical thinking (namely, thinking that leads to judgments) but also contextualizes judgment (and thereby critical thinking) within the broader unfolding dynamic of human consciousness. Attending to these cognitional operations within oneself and striving to perform them deliberately enables one to understand how human beings generate knowledge, meaning, and values and how these become distorted; to correct these distortions; and to collaborate with others operating out of different contexts and disciplines. Such is the purpose of Lonergan’s “generalized empirical method” (GEM). Insofar as these patterned cognitive operations occur spontaneously for every human being, GEM is a method of thinking demanded of us not by the standards of any particular discipline but rather by the human mind’s innate drive for understanding, truth, and value.

In Lonergan’s cognitional theory we see a portrait of the human subject who utilizes their mental tools in a way that opens them up to self-examination, intellectual exchange with others, and openness to transcendent truth. According to Lonergan, a person is authentic to the extent that they consistently give free reign to questions as they arise and seek intelligent, reasonable, and responsible answers to those questions. Despite our innate desire to ask and answer questions, bias easily creeps into our thinking, causing us to ignore the questions and insights that we find inconvenient or uncomfortable.27 Given the constant threat of bias, we are more likely to achieve authenticity (and to be truly critical thinkers) to the extent that we understand and intentionally embrace this dynamic unfolding of consciousness within ourselves, that is, to the extent that we are “self-appropriated.”28

26 Both Newman and Lonergan grappled with the question of how truth can be known with certainty. Lonergan asserts, “The ground of absolute objectivity is the virtually unconditioned that is grasped by reflective understanding and posited in judgment” (Ibid., 305). In other words, for someone to know that something is true they must know the conditions that must be fulfilled in order for something to be true and they must know that those conditions have been fulfilled. Lonergan claims that this notion of the virtually unconditioned was inspired by Newman’s illative sense (“Theology and Man’s Future,” in A Second Collection: Philosophy of God, and Theology, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 273.) Therefore, Lonergan, like Newman, locates the criteria for truth not somewhere external but rather in the operations of the human mind.
27 Grallo analyzes some of the obstacles to critical thinking in the latter part of “Thinking Carefully”.
Situating development of critical thinking skills within the more holistic project of self-appropriation provides a vision of the kind of education that can train a citizenry with the desire to seek truth wherever it may be found and the corresponding capacity for engaging difference in a fruitful manner. Creating a culture of positive encounter requires not so much amassing critical thinking skills as forming authentic subjects, for there is no circumventing the role of the human person. No tools, techniques, or skills can guarantee apprehension of truth or mutual understanding because all of the above must be utilized by persons who are in varying degrees authentic or inauthentic. To the degree that a person is inauthentic, they are prone to instrumentalizing and abusing for self-serving purposes the resources at their disposal, including critical thinking skills. For this reason it should be a priority for universities who purport to serve the needs of society to train not merely critical thinkers but authentic subjects. Although this may seem a lofty goal, my own university offers proof of how training faculty and students in GEM can promote greater openness to engaging and learning from different disciplines, the differing perspectives of others, and spirituality and religion.

ONE UNIVERSITY’S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE MORE FRUITFUL ENCOUNTERS

Like most other institutions of higher education today, there is frequent talk of critical thinking at Seton Hall University, where I currently teach. What is interesting about Seton Hall, however, is the fact that alongside and intertwined with more typical discussions of critical thinking there are also many robust conversations about Lonergan’s generalized empirical method, which have been facilitated primarily by the presence of the Lonergan Institute and its director, Monsignor Richard Liddy. In addition, a distinct program was developed in 2013, which utilizes GEM to apply the mission of the University to the various disciplines. This Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission is co-sponsored by the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership and the Center for Catholic Studies, Bernard J. Lonergan Institute at Seton Hall University. Taking these intra-faculty conversations as my starting point, I begin below by describing how Seton Hall’s appropriation of GEM has promoted more fruitful encounters in the academic realm in which meaningful interdisciplinary conversations are increasingly rare. I will

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29 Inauthentic subjectivity has the same corrupting effect on scientific and medical research. See Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd enlarged (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970) on how scientists have frequently resisted new evidence that did not conform to preconceived notions. See also Dominic Fitzgerald and David Isaacs, “Seven Alternatives to Evidence Based Medicine,” BMJ 319, no. 7225 (1999): 1618 for a brief overview of similar trends in the medical profession.

30 For Seton Hall University’s most official statement on critical thinking see https://www.shu.edu/core-curriculum/upload/Critical-Thinking-Guidelines-2.pdf.

31 I offer special thanks to two individuals for their generous support of this paper and for our ongoing conversations—Linda Garofalo and Danute Nourse, Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission, the Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership and the Center for Catholic Studies, Bernard J. Lonergan Institute at Seton Hall University.
then describe how discussions at SHU scaffolded by GEM provide a model for facilitating more fruitful encounters with difference in the public sphere and with religion, respectively.32

Promoting More Fruitful Encounters Within the Academy

The potential of Lonergan’s GEM for promoting fruitful encounters among people of differing perspectives has been most evident at Seton Hall in faculty development efforts, specifically in the Praxis Program of the Advanced Seminar on Mission. The stated purpose of the Praxis Program is:

to engage faculty and administrators in a process of peer mentoring and curricular/co-curricular support designed to apply the mission of the University to their respective disciplines and departments, through a method which connects the disciplines to each other, to an integrated understanding of knowledge, and to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.33

The program aims to support the mission of Seton Hall University by promoting the intellectual, personal, and spiritual development of faculty and staff and, through them, the university’s students. Since its launch in 2013, the Praxis Program has drawn participants into conversations about truth, meaning, ethics, and method from the fields of Medical Education, Nursing, Law, Diplomacy, Business, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Sociology, Religion, English, and others as well as from the university’s senior administration. These conversations take place in regular seminars throughout the semester facilitated by local and visiting experts in Lonergan’s thought, as participants collaborate on projects applying GEM to their respective disciplines, and in several summer workshops. Although the program does not focus on critical thinking per se, there is ample evidence that studying Lonergan’s cognitional theory has enhanced participants’ capacity for critical, creative, and reflective thinking.

The first such evidence is the participants’ (commonly referred to as GEM Fellows) reports of how their training in GEM has clarified their thinking and enabled them to understand their respective disciplines more deeply. For example, a SHU sociology professor praised GEM for introducing greater discipline and a clearer methodology into his efforts to develop a unified theory of collective human behavior.34 Even more impressive than helping scholars clarify their intra-disciplinary thinking is the capacity GEM has given faculty for communicating and collaborating across disciplinary lines. As a physics professor remarked, “In the steps to develop a large integrated University community I absolutely agree that having a common language or

32 I write out of my experience in Catholic universities and therefore expect that these reflections will be more immediately relevant to other Catholic educators. However, I hope that non-Catholics will also find some benefit in what follows.


method to relate to each other is the key element.”35 He found such a common language in GEM through his involvement in the Praxis Program. Because all disciplined inquiry involves the cognitive operations of attending, asking questions, getting insights, and making and acting upon judgments, scholars in different fields are able to explain their methodology in these basic terms, which do not require specialized training to be comprehended.36

At Seton Hall this common language and methodology has facilitated collaborations in the form of peer mentoring relationships between participants in different disciplines, joint projects, and spontaneous collaborations that emerge organically out of the seminars, workshops, and participants’ ongoing conversations. Annual assessments have found that the Praxis Program has created a strong community among faculty and administrators who previously felt isolated in their respective silos and who lacked a sense of how their work fit within the university’s mission.37 Besides promoting collaboration across disciplines, GEM also provides faculty with a common language for teaching critical thinking and methodology across the curriculum. This makes possible a level of integration in undergraduate education to which many institutions aspire but that is seldom attained.

Promoting More Fruitful Encounters in the Public Sphere

A number of SHU faculty who have studied Lonergan, myself included, have in turn taught GEM to undergraduate students with positive outcomes. Although I am yet to encounter a student who does not want to be considered a critical thinker, students vary in their determination to develop traditional critical thinking skills like analyzing arguments and sources. By contrast, my students tend to exhibit more enthusiasm when discussing Lonergan’s “transcendental imperatives”—be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.38 In the context of Seton Hall’s Core I course, which centers on questions about happiness and the meaning of being human, the transcendental imperatives provide students with a framework for thinking about what human authenticity looks like in concrete terms. As much as students want to be critical thinkers, they are generally more interested in being authentic human beings.

More to the point of this paper, GEM helps students to identify something constant within themselves and within those around them. For all the diversity in human thought and for the myriad ways that culture and individual experience influence people’s mental structures, the dynamic pattern of attending, questioning, understanding, judging, and deciding are a permanent

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35 Liddy, “Transforming Faculty Development,” 388.
36 Although typical language about critical thinking may provide a common language, it does not provide a bridge of mutual understanding across disciplinary lines in the way that GEM does.
38 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 53.
fixture of human cognition. Recognizing this common feature of our thinking can serve as a foundation for dialogue among people of differing views. Coming to an awareness of how one’s own mind operates begets the realization that insights and truths are not simply “out there” to be found. Rather they are products of the subject’s intelligent and reasonable interaction with the world. This realization brings with it an awareness of the fragility of one’s knowing and a greater willingness to listen to others with differing viewpoints. Whether they lean left or right politically, people on both sides can affirm that they have arrived at their positions through a process of attending, questioning, understanding, and making judgements. This is significant because, once acknowledged, this pattern of cognitional operations can then provide an agreed upon process or method (viz., GEM) for discussing contentious topics.

These are not idle hopes. Faculty in the Praxis Program at Seton Hall have seen the results I describe here as they have allowed GEM to shape their teaching. For example, a law school professor observed that learning about GEM “has forced me to consider how others approach thinking, which has made me much more sympathetic towards the (often struggling) thinkers that I see in front of me during my classes.” Another GEM Fellow who teaches speech therapy reflected, “One of the greatest benefits of the GEM model for my students is ‘awareness’ - I see them beginning...to ask ‘Why? -- Why am I doing this?’ - and ‘When I do this, what does this mean I believe or know.’” The benefits of GEM were on full display one day this past November when I opened the floor for my first-year students to express their thoughts and feelings the morning after Donald Trump’s election to the presidency. Tensions were high in the classroom on account of the diversity of races, ethnicities, and political views present, but I began the conversation by reminding my students of what they had practiced all semester—patiently attending to what other people are saying and making the effort to genuinely understand the other’s perspective before making a judgment about its correctness. This required students to strain against the biases that often poison such encounters—the temptations to protect one’s own ego and to think with one’s group and write off the “other”. As a result, on a morning when emotions were at their rawest, this group of 18- and 19-year olds succeeded where our country as a whole seems to be failing, namely, engaging in civil dialogue about issues of importance with people of differing perspectives.

As new cohorts of teachers pass through the Praxis Program every year and apply GEM to their teaching, students will gain more consistent exposure to this method. We hope that this ongoing reinforcement will enable students to persevere in this practice when they depart campus and enter into the public square.

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39 To reject Lonergan’s cognitional theory is to implicate oneself in a performative self-contradiction. In other words, to deny that one understands intelligently and makes judgments would itself involve achieving an insight and making a judgment about one’s lack of understanding and judgment. See Lonergan, *Insight*, 352-3.
40 Liddy, “Transforming Faculty Development,” 387.
41 Ibid., 386-7.
Promoting More Fruitful Encounters with Religion

Catholic universities and colleges, insofar as they are institutions of the Catholic Church, seek to advance the Church’s mission of uniting human beings with God and one another. Besides promoting dialogue among individuals, this work also involves turning people to the transcendent ground of their being. That is not to say that Catholic universities exist to proselytize. Rather, to the extent the these school are faithful to the mission of the Church, they will present invitations to conversion and foster an environment that nurtures faith. But how to do this in a day and age in which not only many professors but also an increasing number of students are put off by traditional religion and its institutions?

Many people who reject traditional religion—particularly millennials—do so because of what they perceive to be signs of inauthenticity or hypocrisy—abuse of minors by supposed moral authorities, ostentatious displays of wealth by those who preach poverty of spirit, promises of eternal beatitude from the mouths of “sourpusses”.

In contrast, they are attracted to people and communities (and brands) who embody authenticity, even if they struggle to articulate what makes one authentic. In my experience most undergraduate students’ operative definition of authenticity is something along the lines of “being true to oneself” or simply “not fake”. Of course, this raises the question what it means to be true to oneself.

In the context of such conversations Lonergan provides those seeking authenticity with language for articulating its meaning at the same time as he provides Christian people and institutions with language for connecting with this disaffected demographic. Authenticity, asserts Lonergan, is achieved in self-transcendence. Our questions for intelligence raise us above the limits of immediate sensory experience. Judgments of fact expand our horizons beyond our narrow perceptions to what truly is. Judgments of value and decisions lead us to live not merely for personal satisfactions but for values, for God and others. In short, we transcend the limits of our sensitivity, biases, and moral impotence to the extent that we act attentively, intelligently, reasonably, and responsibly. Presented with a precise language and method for achieving the authenticity to which they aspire, my students have exhibited great eagerness to learn more and to embody these characteristics of the self-transcending subject.

According to Lonergan, this process of self-transcendence is not only a going out of oneself but also a rising up to God because anyone who gives free reign to their questioning will eventually come to the question of God. Herein lies the opportunity for Christian universities whose missions include presenting opportunities for spiritual growth. Faculty and students who might otherwise be reluctant to engage with explicitly religious questions may be more inclined

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to engage with GEM, which begins with innocuous questions about cognitive performance but inevitably leads to the question of God.44

In fact, we have seen just this at Seton Hall. GEM Fellows from a wide variety of disciplines have praised the program not only for helping to clarify their thinking and research methodology but also for providing a space for engaging colleagues in conversations about truth, meaning, and community. Numerous participants have also testified to how engaging Lonergan’s thought with other fellows has catalyzed personal spiritual growth. For example, one GEM Fellow with little religious background reflected:

絮 The Praxis pilot has been central to [my life here at Seton Hall University] by exemplifying and promoting things I value such as the friendship and support of colleagues, interdisciplinary conversation, stimulating intellectual questions, and a shared sense of purpose. I also find myself slowly rediscovering my faith and finding a greater appreciation and understanding of our Catholic Mission and its importance.45

Testimonials like this one witness to how teaching Lonergan’s GEM promotes a truly authentic subject. More than producing thinkers capable of criticizing arguments and opponents, thoughtful engagement with GEM promotes self-transcending, integrated human beings. Capitalizing upon the richness of this method, the Praxis Program at Seton Hall provides a viable model for how Catholic institutions of higher learning might bring more people into communion with God and one another by means of promoting faculty’s and students’ authentic cognition and self-transcendence.

CONCLUSION

How do we facilitate more fruitful encounters among people of differing perspectives in a time when there is such vociferous disagreement about fundamental issues of religion, values, and democracy and even about basic facts of reality? I have suggested that a first step might be to step back from the hardened positions that divide us and find some common ground. Especially for those of us involved in university life, the near universal valorization of critical thinking can provide this common ground. However, if that starting point is to lead to reengagement with the issues that divide us—this time on more productive terms—it will have to pass through the crucible of self-examination.

“Genuine objectivity is fruit of authentic subjectivity,” writes Lonergan.46 We might well add that genuine community is the fruit of the same. In order for a person to consistently escape the narrow confines of bias and self-interest and live in the realm of what truly is, one must yield to the internal imperatives to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible. Doing so necessarily involves becoming a critical thinker—a goal to which most Americans aspire today.

44 Of course, to raise the question of God is not yet to believe in God, but simply posing the question in compelling terms is a significant achievement in our increasingly secularized culture.
45 Liddy, “Transforming Faculty Development,” 389.
46 Lonergan, Method, 292.
Yet it involves something far more profound, namely, the transformation of the thinking subject. This transformation involves acknowledging the fragility of one’s own knowing, decentering one’s own perspectives and desires, and recognizing in others the same desire for truth, goodness, and meaning that one sees in oneself. Only such a fundamental transformation of the subject can ensure that critical thinking skills will not become one more weapon in the battle to preserve one’s ego or privilege.

For educators to facilitate this transformation requires a focus not only on proficiencies and competencies but more fundamentally on the persons in our classrooms. Indeed, training students to treat others as human beings requires that we act like human beings ourselves. We professors need not only reward students for lifting up the good in their peers but also embody ourselves compassion and readiness to learn from others. We ourselves must be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and also loving. For, as Lonergan says, although our questions for intelligence, reflection, and deliberation constitute our capacity for self-transcendence, that capacity only becomes an actuality when one loves. Rarely do we speak of love in relation to critical thinking. Nevertheless, critical thinking can lead to self-awareness of the context of one’s values and beliefs, which can lead in turn to recognizing the same in others. Insofar as this mutual recognition is often the first step in seeing the “other” as a human being who loves and needs love, critical thinking may very well prove a propitious starting point for more fruitful encounters with difference in our divided society.

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