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Catholicity and Faculty Seminars

Richard M Liddy, *Seton Hall University*



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Faculty Seminars at Seton Hall

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CONVERSATION AND CATHOLICITY: FACULTY SEMINARS AT SETON HALL

Msgr. Richard M. Liddy

Everyone will have his own difficulties. There is an advantage, then, to having a seminar on the subject. It gives people a chance to talk these things out...to talk them out with others. There is a set of concrete opportunities provided by the seminar that cannot be provided by any mere book. The more you talk with another and throw things out, the more you probe, and the more you express yourself spontaneously, simply, and frankly, not holding back in fear of making mistakes, then the more quickly you arrive at the point where you get things cleared up. (Bernard Lonergan)¹

In 1996, while on a two-year leave of absence from the Religious Studies Department at Seton Hall University, Monsignor Robert Sheeran, the President of Seton Hall, asked me to return to work on “the Catholic identity” of the university. It was certainly a hot-button issue and, although at the time I said “yes,” I must confess that the emotion I experienced at the prospect was fear. For I knew what I would experience. As a priest faculty-member at a Catholic university, I felt I would be considered by many as reactionary, opposed to progress, heavy-handed, obscurantist, etc. For after all, I was one of “them,” that is, the Catholic clerical establishment. At the same time, one of the reasons I experienced fear was that I feared that at least some of these charges were true! Some Catholics at the university indeed seemed reactionary, heavy-handed, obscurantist, etc.

But before recounting my actual experience of working on the Catholic identity of the university these years, let me give some background.

1. Autobiographical Antecedents

Although I come from a very devout Irish-Catholic family and was ordained in Rome in 1963, I have for much of my life tried to look at the Catholic faith “from outside,” that is, I have tried to see what Catholicism looked like to others. As a young high-school and college student in the 1950s, I enjoyed reading “conversion stories” – Thomas Merton’s **Seven Storey Mountain**, for example – because these were stories of people who had not grown up Catholic and had made their way to Catholicism “from the outside.” These stories helped me to glimpse what Catholicism “looked like” to others and why anyone would ever want to become a Catholic in the first place.

Later on, as a seminarian and young priest, it was a delight to be in Rome for the five years of that great “opening of windows” that was the Second Vatican Council. It was an event that seemed to electrify not only Catholicism but also the whole world. At a time when I was reading

¹ Bernard Lonergan, **Understanding and Being, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 5**, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 18.

Sartre, Camus and others who came from a frankly secular viewpoint, the Council declared:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the persons of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. (*Gaudium et Spes*)

At the time I became quite interested in the conciliar theme of “the Church of the poor” and enjoyed visiting priests and sisters working in the “baracche” or shanty-towns around Rome and Naples.

Still, as the Second Vatican Council ended, it became evident that many problems remained and disillusionment quickly began to set in on many of my generation. Some of my priest friends began to leave the priesthood. Fortunately, at a time when I was feeling quite low, I met another student priest studying Scripture in Rome, Father Jim Doyle from Chicago. Jim listened to my story, became a friend, and encouraged me to encounter Christ through prayer and an imaginative reading of the Scriptures. I remember one conversation in particular. The two of us went out one night in Rome for pizza. On the way home I was complaining about the leadership in the church. Suddenly, after letting me go on for a while, Jim said: “I need a man to save me – someone who knows what it is to be a man – but I need someone more: I need Jesus.”

I was stunned. Here I was talking “politics” and he brings up “religion!” I was so stunned that I walked home mostly in silence. And it took me some time before I began to “hear” what he was saying. He was pointing me to a whole different level from my normal way of thinking and speaking: a whole new horizon.

It was at that same time that I was reading Bernard Lonergan’s **Insight** and during that reading experienced what was for me a remarkable “insight into insight.” Lonergan had been one of my professors in Rome, and his vindication of the human spirit opened me up in an explicit way to the drive for authenticity – one might say, the drive for “catholicity” – at the core of my own spirit. That insight was not unconnected to my own basic moral and religious life and my search for where the Spirit of God was leading me. It was not unconnected to my life in the institution of the Catholic Church.

At the same time, as I reflected on Lonergan’s philosophy, I wondered, “Would this stuff fly in a non-Catholic context? – at Rutgers, for example, the State University of New Jersey?” And I would day-dream of teaching at such a university just to test whether my appropriation of Lonergan could pass the test of secular criticism. This was one reason I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the philosophy of art of the American empiricist philosopher, Susanne K. Langer: I really did want to compare what I knew and appropriated from Lonergan with what outstanding secular philosophers were holding. Not only did Lonergan seem to me to hold his own, but in many respects he seemed quite superior.

When I returned from Rome to New Jersey in 1967, I taught philosophy at our diocesan seminary for a number of years but also gradually took on other administrative roles. While continuing to teach, I became spiritual director of the seminary and then, in 1980, again back in

Rome, spiritual director of the North American College. Returning to New Jersey in 1985, I became rector of Immaculate Conception Seminary, and for a short time in 1990, Acting Chancellor of a Seton Hall University. It was then that I took the advice Jim Doyle once gave me: “At a certain age you begin to do what you want to do, not what you have to do.” And what I wanted to do was return to academic work and write a book on Bernard Lonergan. Which I did. The book was published in 1993 as **Transforming Light: Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan**.

2. Catholic Identity

All of this is background to the fear I felt in approaching work on the Catholic identity of the Seton Hall University. Not only did I sense hostility on the part of many to the whole idea of Catholic identity, but I truly sensed difficulties in the Church’s practice as well. Such difficulties did not add up to doubt; for as Newman put it, “a thousand difficulties do not make one doubt.” Still, there were difficulties.

For Catholicism was not – and is not – popular among many academics. I had been at enough faculty meetings to know that. Furthermore, actions of churchmen often seemed defensive, short-sighted and “behind the times.” The feeling among many – not always articulated – was that Catholicism did not appear able to hold its own in the academic world. Indeed it seemed “tribal,” totally identified with its leaders, and using its power over minds and hearts to oppress specific people: gay people, women, human rights activists, progressive thinkers in general.

And, as the years have gone on, at least to some extent my fears have turned out to be justified. Resistance to “things Catholic” at the university came not just from adamantly secular persons, but quite often from other Catholics - who sometimes called themselves “recovering Catholics.”

So mine was an inner conflict reflecting an outer conflict. Specifically, it was rooted in my being both a Catholic priest and a faculty member at a Catholic university. In one respect I “represented” or instantiated the Church and “the word” of the Church’s authority. In another respect I was a member of the academy with its tradition of unfettered academic freedom.

Some of my fears circled around just being a Catholic priest. Seton Hall University was founded by the first bishop of Newark and the present Archbishop of Newark is President of the Board of Trustees and chair of the Board of Regents. All the bishops of New Jersey are on the Board of Regents and most of the presidents of Seton Hall, including the current president, have been priests. So...I feared that my working on the Catholic identity of Seton Hall would be painted not only with any anti-authoritarian brush there might be at the university, but by any anti-clerical bias there might be as well. As a priest I would certainly be considered to have more access to the powers that be at the university than most others (not always a fact) but I would also be identified with any and all policies emanating from the university administration as well from the Archdiocese, the American bishops, the Vatican, the Pope, etc. It can be gratifying to have access to the seat of power, but one can pay for it!

In addition, I was not always in agreement with some other Catholics on campus. I did not always agree with their manner of speaking, even though we agreed on basic faith commitments.

In meetings some Catholics often came across “like a ton of bricks” and I felt myself cringing as I was identified with a tribalism that made no concessions to dialogue with “the other.” And so my personal dialectic was rooted not only in a fear of “the cultured despisers of religion” – to use a term from the 19th century writer, Friedrich Schleiermacher – but also in a fear of the operative theology of many of my fellow Catholics. Still, there did seem to be among some a definite anti-Catholicism. Recently it has been dubbed “the last respectable prejudice.”² An off-handed remark by one of the faculty at the appearance of the university President captured this attitude, “look at him coming in here with his collar on.” I feared such prejudice, of being in a position of not being given the benefit of the doubt.

Nevertheless, in 1996, in spite of my fears, I said “yes” to the President of the university and was appointed “University Professor of Catholic Thought and Culture” - a mostly honorific title that allowed me to initiate some activities pertaining to the Catholic mission of the university.

3. Interdisciplinary Conversations

I have outlined to some degree the fears and hesitations I felt in beginning to work on the Catholic identity of Seton Hall University. I believe those fears reflected a back-and-forth, a “dialectic” of positions and counter-positions going on within me and around me. Were my fears rooted in an actual bitter anti-Catholicism? An anti-clericalism? Were they justified? Or were they rooted in actual problems in the church and church authorities? - my fellow Catholics? - myself? Or, in some sense...all of the above?

At this point let me briefly outline what my working on the Catholic identity of the university has involved in actual fact. For the fact has been that, contrary to unilateral resistance, I have experienced a surprising amount of acceptance of my work on the Catholic identity at the university. I have discovered a de facto openness to a “catholic” or “capacious” Catholicism among many faculty – both Catholic and non-Catholic.

Concretely, the first thing I did when I arrived back at Seton Hall in 1997 was to create a “Center for Catholic Studies” whose mission was to foster interdisciplinary dialogue in the light of Catholic faith. The establishment of the center enabled the initiation of many activities which would not have taken place at all if they had gone through the ordinary university channels. The center represents a center of funding that can support activities that otherwise would not take place. Let me recount some of those activities.

Among the activities initiated by the center has been an undergraduate major and minor in Catholic Studies. Such a program has enabled students to take courses in “Catholicism and Literature,” “Catholicism and Art,” “Catholic Social Teaching,” etc., thus linking theology with the various disciplines in the university. It has also enabled faculty in non-theological areas – sociology, history, etc. - to teach theology-related courses which otherwise they would not have been able to schedule and to teach. I see this academic program in Catholic Studies as a

2 Cf. Philip Jenkins, **The New Anti-Catholicism**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Also, Mark Massa, **Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice**, New York: Crossroad, 2003.

dimension of Lonergan's functional specialty, "communications," that is, the specialty which is concerned with "theology in its external relations."

These are of three kinds. There are interdisciplinary relations with art, language, literature, and other religions, with the natural and the human sciences, with philosophy and history. Further, there are the trans-positions that theological thought has to develop if religion is to retain its identity and yet at the same time find access into the minds and hearts of men of all cultures and classes. Finally, there are the adaptations needed to make full and proper use of the diverse media of communication that are available at any place and time.³

The program in Catholic Studies has enabled Seton Hall to do some "mission hiring," that is, hiring faculty whose specialties involve the link between Catholicism and specific disciplines: Catholicism and history, Catholicism and communications, etc. The center has also sponsored numerous lectures on the Catholic intellectual tradition. In addition, faculty connected with the center have participated in and supported many of the particular initiatives of the university, such as a large Lilly grant on "theological reflection on vocation" and presently, the initiation of a new core curriculum.

In my estimation, however, the most significant work of the Center for Catholic Studies has been its direct work with the faculty, especially through faculty seminars. For the faculty are at the core of the university. I was struck many years ago by a line from Bernard Lonergan's earliest article on the Catholic university in which he wrote that the "constitutive endowment" of the university

lies not in buildings or equipment, civil status or revenues, but in the intellectual life of its professors. Its central function is the communication of intellectual development.⁴

Virtually the first activity of the Center for Catholic Studies was the organization of faculty seminars that allowed faculty from various disciplines to ask questions and converse on broad humanistic themes. The first of these seminars, facilitated by John Haughey, S.J. in 1998, was entitled "Knowledge and Wisdom" and focused on the distinction between information, knowledge and wisdom. The second seminar in May of 1999 was facilitated by Jerome Miller, professor of philosophy at Salisbury State University and was entitled - taking a phrase from Plato - "Divine Madness," and focused on human self-transcendence. The successive seminars have been:

2000: Elizabeth Johns: "Spirituality and the Academic Vocation"

2001: Michael Stebbins: "Reflections on the Core Curriculum"

2002: Patrick Byrne: "Religious Horizons and the Vocation of the University"

2003: Michael Naughton and Helen Alford: "Faith at Work"

2004: Paul Mariani: "The Call of Poetry"

2005: John Cavadini: "Augustine and Culture"

These seminars have taken place for the last eight years for three or four days every May.

3 Bernard Lonergan, **Method in Theology**, 132-133.

4 Bernard Lonergan, **Collection, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 4**, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, 111.

Over one hundred faculty members have participated. Broadly speaking they have been on the subject of “faith and culture” and have allowed faculty to gather, to get to know one another, and to wrestle together with the meaning of being human. All the seminars have been facilitated by an outside facilitator, academics with their own expertise, many of them familiar with Lonergan. The participants at the seminars – usually about 15 to 18 at each - agree to write a short essay on the subject of the seminar from their own point of view and their own discipline, and for such participation they receive a stipend.

Let me present a smattering of evaluative comments on the seminars. One faculty member wrote on the specifically academic fellowship created:

The faculty seminary hosted by the Center for Catholic Studies has been the best faculty development program at Seton Hall...The time frame gives it the right level of informality and intensity. It is a good mix of intellectual stimulation and personal reflection. The strength of the seminar is that it builds community among the faculty in the common pursuit of knowledge. There are very few occasions to experience this fellowship of learning that is the ideal of university life. Hats off to the Center for Catholic Studies for providing the taste of the best of academic life.

A Jewish participant wrote:

Regarding the Catholic seminars, I attended “Divine Madness” with Jerry Miller in 1999, and please know that to this day, that week remains the most intellectually stimulating week I’ve had with colleagues to date. We faculty in attendance came from diverse backgrounds, and the discussion crossed religious boundaries, yet helped us all see that within the Catholic philosophy discussed was core content that not only applied to all of our lives but enriched our perceptions of Catholic thought. The faculty bonding during that week, even 6 years later is still alive among so many of us.

A more theme-oriented evaluation was the following:

I have immensely enjoyed and been enriched by the Catholic Studies seminar that I participated in last year when Paul Mariani presented a workshop on several poets titled “The Call of Poetry.” This was an opportunity for a rather jaded writing instructor to remember that she was deeply interested in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, a striking late-Victorian poet whose intense religious perspective was brought to the fore in the readings and extended discussions, so much so that she could bring it to her Freshman class of writers pursuing interdisciplinary studies. I loved reading with my peers in these sessions and then bringing my renewed interest in Victorian religious poetry to my student-writers in class...

Another faculty commented on the methodology of the seminar:

Looking back at my eight years at Seton Hall, this seminar has been one of my most memorable and “integrating” experiences...The success of the seminar owes much to its colloquium-style format that offered a balanced interplay of readings, short lectures, discussions, and the concluding writing experience (essay for seminar publication). In concert, these modules provided the right chemistry for a truly meaningful collective learning experience...the seminar presented a learning model that has also inspired my own teaching in manifold ways.

One faculty member commented on specific concrete changes that have taken place at the university as a result of the seminars:

Through the years, the Catholic Studies Seminars on Seton Hall’s campus have captured the imagination of faculty and administrators, creating the germ for new endeavors. In particular, there were two Catholic Studies Seminars - one on the core curriculum and the other on vocation – which sparked the development of two major initiatives on campus. The campus-wide discussion about developing a signature experience – a core curriculum – began in the small classroom setting where two dozen or so members of the community met, discussed, and dreamed about the possibility of a new core curriculum. That fall, the Faculty Senate voted to create a Core Curriculum Committee, which worked for several years on creation of a new core. This dream of a new core – shared by those of us at the seminar many years back - will soon come to pass as we are now in the implementation phase of the project. Likewise with the development of the Center on Vocation and Servant Leadership, where we had the opportunity to meet for several days to discuss our passions, our skills and the world’s deepest needs. Immediately following these discussions, many of us continued this dialogue, which resulted in an application to the Lilly Foundation. Many of the ideas and initiatives in this successful application grew out of the Catholic Studies seminar discussions.

Finally, a faculty member made the specific link between the seminars and her religious faith.

For me, the Catholic Studies seminars have been a wonderful opportunity to deepen the link between my faith life and my work life, thus making me more complete and whole in both areas...I especially enjoyed the most recent seminar on St. Augustine, led by John Cavadini of Notre Dame. I thought I “knew” *The Confessions*, but I found myself thinking and re-thinking them and Augustine as a result of the seminar...I found the seminar spiritually moving, offering insight not only into the thinking of Augustine, but also into Scripture and the nature of our relationship with Christ...Another meaningful seminar was “The Call of Poetry,” led by Paul Mariani...Finally, “Spirituality and the Academic Vocation,” led by Elizabeth Johns, helped me to re-consider my own job as a professor in terms of vocation. It also came at a key time for me personally, as both of my parents died within about 9 months of the seminar...After the seminar, with the encouragement of the seminar leader, Elizabeth Johns, I began again the habit of daily Scripture reading and prayer, a practice I had let slide through the demands

of work and motherhood. The daily habit of prayer and Scripture reading helped me to have the spiritual strength I needed to get through this difficult time.

In my estimation and, it seems, in the estimation of the participants, the seminars have been quite successful. All kinds of faculty have responded: Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Moslems, Hindus and those professing no faith. Faculty have responded, community has been built, deep issues vented and good will generated.

People have often asked me about the secret to the seminars and my flippant answer has been: “It’s not rocket science: just get people into the same room, have a good facilitator and ask some good questions.” At the same time, there is a theological dimension. The Hebrew word for church is *Qahal*, meaning the assembly “called forth” by Moses. Previously those journeying in the desert were a motley crew and now they were called forth, gathered together, inspired by a common word, called to be in touch with the word within them – in Augustine’s terms, “the teacher within” - so that they could become “a people.” I am convinced that this process takes place very simply by calling people together and sharing with them an interesting, inspiring, open and up-building word.

High points for myself have involved listening to a fellow faculty member tell his or her personal story; listening to a faculty member from the art department describe how certain art works can express depths of feeling; or a person from communications describe the difficulties of balancing family life with academics; or an accountant describe a humanistic vision of accounting; or just sitting at lunch with participating faculty and saying to myself “I’m glad I’m here – this is what it’s all about.” Peter’s words come to mind, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.”

4. Conversations and Commitments

What is a “conversation?” From a Lonerganian perspective it is a sharing of intelligibility, of truth, of values. Presumably, it is a remedying of the lack of intelligibility, of error, of the lack of value. Any genuine conversation has this “transcendental” dimension in which the notions of meaning, truth, being and value guide the participants to ever deeper levels: beyond their own worlds of immediacy into the far wider world of meaning and value. In a Christian sense a conversation is a means of speaking and hearing “the word” and “repenting” the lack of intelligibility, the error, the sin. Sometimes this takes place through the ordinary give-and-take of ordinary conversation. Sometimes it takes place in a more structured way, as in these seminars. As in the quotation that began this article, Bernard Lonergan once spoke of the value of a seminar precisely because it is a conversation in which one is not afraid to volunteer how things look to me, while being open to having one’s opinions challenged, modified, perhaps even radically changed, by the in-input of others. An openness is needed for such conversation, a willingness to “change one’s mind.”

Sometimes this might happen in the conversation itself; sometimes it might take place later as a word or phrase from the conversation “sticks in one’s craw,” or jars one to such an extent that one is willing to question one’s own basic commitments. Sometimes it is the very presence of another person of intelligence, of truth and wisdom, of moral stature and religious love, who calls us to change our basic attitudes. Their very presence – not just their words but their whole

incarnate meaning - is a call to conversion. Thus, Jim Doyle's word to me as a young man turned my grudging attention from church politics to the Lord. It was a call that initially I did not want to hear. The "word" is the tool of the symbolic animal and more often than not that word is shared through personal encounter and largely in conversations.

Such reflections relate to our faculty conversations because these conversations do indeed surface our differences. Obviously, although over a hundred faculty have responded to these invitations to conversation, not every faculty member has responded. Some, as we indicated earlier, are still very alienated from the Church and the university. Some could not care less. Some are somewhere in-between. And even among those who have participated, there are deep differences. Some of those differences have to do with objections to Catholicism and the actions of Church leaders. Some are obviously deeper.

How can this dialectic of positions among us be addressed? One way would be through "prayer and fasting." After all, we are a religious university! Another would be through the conversion involved in continuing conversation with one another. In other words, through genuine encounter. Lonergan speaks of such encounter as taking place when we let our own personal opinions be challenged – from our toes, as it were.

It is meeting persons, appreciating the values they represent, criticizing their defects, and allowing one's living to be challenged at its very roots by their words and by their deeds.⁵

Patrick Byrne has made some very acute observations on the dialectic at the core of these faculty conversations. In an article entitled "The Good Under Construction and the Research Vocation of a Catholic University" Byrne presents a vision of the meaning and purpose of these faculty conversations.⁶ His article has helped me to reflect on my own experience at Seton Hall. For as Byrne brings out, the mission of Catholic universities is not just, as is often claimed, about teaching students, or "the formation of the whole person," or service, or social justice - as worthy as such aims might be. Rather, the mission is to enter into the redemptive role of Christ and to contribute to the historical healing of the world through the research, publication and teaching of the faculty.

Within that context, self-appropriation for individual faculty members must come to terms with the various "structures of inquiry" characterizing our various disciplines and with our fundamental commitments, that is, our basic ways of being-in-the-world. These fundamental commitments are deeper than the doctrines we hold on this or that subject; they reflect our fundamental horizons.

In their living people embody tacit assumptions about what can or cannot be real, about what could or could not be known, about which values outweigh all others, about the ultimate meaning of life, and about how they align themselves with respect to religious issues. Such fundamental commitments are also embedded in the methods of the disciplines as well as in the recesses of personalities. They

⁵ Bernard Lonergan, **Method in Theology**, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, 247.

⁶ **Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice**, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 2004, 320-338.

affect how people observe, how they read, how they think and argue, what they choose to teach and publish, and ultimately what they choose to pass on and thereby affect the course of history. Eventually, self-appropriation of university vocations will lead to reflection on and discussion of such fundamental commitments and their ultimate consequences for faculty members themselves and for their impacts upon human history.⁷

As Byrne brings out, conversations about such personal commitments are very difficult for they have to take seriously “the depth of the personal loves and resentments that underlie fundamental commitments, one’s own as well as those of others.”⁸ Consequently, it is a real challenge to be open to such conversations, for they involve the basic levels of our being. For this reason, Byrne feels, such conversations succeed best when they operate in an indirect mode; that is, when they do not involve confrontation or “frontal assaults.” He also notes the importance of an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in which departmental barriers begin to be replaced by personal familiarity and where personal familiarity grows into friendships.

Real conversation about fundamental commitments works best when diverse groups of scholars come together and talk in an atmosphere of respect and love, not about their fundamental commitments, but about topics and issues of interest and concern to all involved. There is nothing automatic about these interpersonal processes, however. A great deal depends upon the personal qualities that the participants bring to these conversations. Such conversations work best when the participants come with genuine intellectual interests in learning about something from people outside their own specialties. They also depend upon the presence of participants for whom unconditional love is really operative, whether named as such or not.⁹

Such unconditional love implies a self-denial in terms of our own ego in conversation, our own “need to be right,” our own offended sensitivities – elements so prominent in the academic arena. An article on Saint Ignatius’ reflections on conversation brings this out:

True love begins and is witnessed mainly in our relational thrust, in our way of conversing. In Christian anthropology, this way of edifying conversation that tends to be constructive, implies a deep sense of self-denial that has to do with the other’s growth. More than other rigors of the apostolic life, what I have called self-forgetfulness of the ego becomes the core of the Jesuit’s true mortification. In a permanent and general way, this makes us live focused on what most suits the other’s growth. This will be true in the entire aspect of daily conversations, these being casual or more methodical.¹⁰

7 Ibid., 331-332.

8 Ibid., 335.

9 Byrne, 335.

10 German Arana, “Spiritual Conversation: A Privileged Apostolic Instrument of the Society of Jesus,” **Review of Ignatian Spirituality**, Vol. XXXVI, no. 1 (2005), 42.

Ignatius' reflections concerned when to be silent and patient in conversation, when to be simply attentive to the other, when to be briefly assertive, etc.

“To get converted” and “to converse” etymologically have the same roots. In its more radical and deeper sense, to converse is to get converted to the mystery of the other; it is to get converted to alterity. It is to go beyond the fence of one's own interior cloister and its defense mechanisms and become the servant of the other. The “word” as mediation becomes a more human, more subtle, more immediate and more universal, more illuminated and stronger weapon....To know how “to converse” supposes a deep and permanent self-denial....It is a permanent turn toward the good of all with whom we are daily related.¹¹

Of course, there are substantive issues involved, especially in academic conversations. As Byrne brings out, these conversations can often serve only to “surface” the differences in fundamental commitments; they do not automatically lead to the next step, that is, reflecting on the fundamental commitments themselves. And it is here that Lonergan's functional specialty of dialectic comes into play. For the study of the opposed viewpoints can take us beyond the fact of the conflict to the reasons for conflict. As Lonergan writes, comparing viewpoints

will bring to light just where differences are irreducible, where they are complementary and could be brought together within a larger whole, where finally they can be regarded as successive stages in a single process of development.¹²

He goes on to add the critical function of dialectic:

[B]esides comparison there is criticism. Not every view-point is coherent, and those that are not can be invited to advance to a consistent position. Not every reason is a sound reason, and Christianity has nothing to lose from a purge of unsound reasons, of ad hoc explanations, of the stereotypes that body forth suspicions, resentments, hatreds, malice. Not every irreducible difference is a serious difference, and those that are not can be put in second or third or fourth place so that attention, study, analysis can be devoted to differences that are serious and profound.

Such a critical confrontation of positions can concern, not just conflicts among theological positions, but also conflicts in psychology, physics, literature, communications, etc – indeed all the various disciplines and professions taught in the university. Lonergan once wrote that there is a perennial materialism, a perennial idealism or Platonism and a perennial realism, but these fundamental philosophical positions are realized differently in each age. So the materialism of today can be incarnated in empiricist assumptions about modern science or modern psychology. Similarly, Plato's ancient rejection of materialism can be analogous to more adequate assumptions about modern science and psychology: found in Heisenberg's quantum mechanics or personalist and “third force” researchers in psychology. The point is that there are more or

¹¹ Ibid., 46.

¹² Lonergan, **Method in Theology**, 129.

less adequate understandings of the various disciplines and faculty conversations can be seen as helping to highlight those differences.

One of the aims of the faculty seminars at Seton Hall has been to raise questions from various points of view, using facilitators from various disciplines so as to ask questions about the operative horizons in the disciplines and their openness to the further questions. It seems to me that this has been one of the goals of Lonergan's method and of his suggestions on the uses of dialectic in broader social contexts. For central to his work is the outline of a specific method for clarifying contradictory fundamental commitments. Inasmuch as scholars assemble, complete, compare, reduce, classify and select among these fundamental commitments, they bring out into the light the central dialectical oppositions and their manner of handling such oppositions provides other scholars with the evidence for the presence or absence of their own self-transcendence and conversion. .

Such an objectification of subjectivity is in the style of the crucial experiment. While it will not be automatically efficacious, it will provide the open-minded, the serious, the sincere with the occasion to ask themselves some basic questions, first, about others but eventually, even about themselves. It will make conversion a topic and thereby promote it. Results will not be sudden or startling, for conversion commonly is a slow process of maturation. It is finding out for oneself and in oneself what it is to be intelligent, to be reasonable, to be responsible, to love. Dialectic contributes to that end by pointing out ultimate differences, by offering the example of others that differ radically from oneself, by providing the occasion for a reflection, a self-scrutiny, that can lead to a new understanding of oneself and one's destiny.¹³

5. Conclusions

A number of the people who have facilitated the faculty seminars at Seton Hall have been familiar with Bernard Lonergan's thought. The value I see in this has been the treating of topics from an objective or disinterested point of view; not certainly in the sense of not involving people's subjectivities, but precisely in the sense of giving people the room to exercise their subjectivity. It begins with taking people "where they are at," that is, the real questions they have beneath their formal positions. It reminds me of Lonergan's method in metaphysics: do not begin with people's explicit philosophies – which often enough are tinged with biases and counter-positions - but begin with the pure desire to know prior to explicit philosophies.¹⁴

Thus, faculty development seminars can aim at asking questions that genuinely connect with people's fundamental "Ur-questions," the questions that come from their depths. Beginning there, the seminars can give persons the freedom and leisure to have new insights and to test such insights in community. Freedom is important, then, freedom from having to defend one's own opinions, etc. And so we can ask: What makes for a meaningful conversation among faculty? And we can note a number of characteristics:

¹³ **Method in Theology**, 253.

¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan, **Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan**, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, 421-426.

1. Hospitality: that is, a welcoming atmosphere. At Seton Hall the seminars are held in hospitable settings with food available and the possibility of casual socializing. We aim at having some meals together. More important than a hospitable place and food, however, are hospitable persons – persons open to others.
2. History: taking into account the “stories” that each person brings. Someone once spoke of “Law School as Conversation,” that is, the conditions for getting to “the story” of people: the stories of particular persons and how their meanings contribute to the meanings of events. Just as this article involved my story of faculty conversations, so every person’s meaning and the meaning of every event takes place within merging and conflicting stories.
3. Dissent: leaving room for dissenting voices. Certainly, we are most aware of those who are angry - as I was in returning to work at Seton Hall. Feelings are naturally responsive and anger is a feeling arising from perceived injustice. The problem is that anger is often myopic, seeing only part of the picture. Meaningful conversations can set such anger within a greater context.
4. Fear: leaving room for fear. Closely connected to anger is fear; the fear I experienced in returning to Seton Hall to work on Catholic identity; the fear that I would be the object of many sentences beginning with “No offense, but...” or “Don’t take this personally but...” Another aim of meaningful conversation is to create a safe and loving place that “drives out fear.”
5. Hence, the value of having conversations on other topics - playful topics, topics in which we do not necessarily treat fundamental commitments directly. If, as Joseph Pieper said, leisure is “the basis of culture,” then there should be an element of leisure in our conversations.
6. A central aim, then, is our own growth in what Lonergan calls “self-appropriation,” our own growing knowledge of ourselves, our own defensiveness, etc.. As the saying goes, “Arguments with others yields rhetoric; arguments with ourselves yields poetry.”
7. Finally, one can ask “What is ‘the whole’ that is being birthed through these faculty conversations?” It is this question that is the focus of the identity and mission of the Catholic university.

If the Catholic university is able to enter into such interdisciplinary conversations, it will perhaps contribute to fulfilling Bernard Lonergan’s dream in the last chapter of **Method in Theology** of theologians entering into dialogue with other scholars for the good of the world. In this the church herself will be entering into collaborative and creative contact with people in various walks of life for the good of all.

In conclusion let me say that such integrated studies correspond to a profound exigence in the contemporary situation. For ours is a time of ever increasing change due to an ever increasing expansion of knowledge. To operate on the level of our day is to apply the best available knowledge and the most efficient techniques to coordinated group action. But to meet this contemporary exigence will also set the church on a course of continual renewal. It will remove from its action the widespread impression of complacent irrelevance and futility. It will bring theologians into close contact with experts in very many different fields. It will bring scientists and scholars into close contact with policy makers and

planners and, through them, with clerical and lay workers engaged in applying solutions to the problems and finding ways to meet the needs both of Christians and of all mankind.¹⁵

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15 **Method in Theology**, 367.