

Spring 2016

Negotiating a Culture of Encounter and Disruptive Discourse in Catholic Higher Education

Laura Leming

University of Dayton, lleming1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/soc_fac_pub

 Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Social Work Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

eCommons Citation

Leming, Laura, "Negotiating a Culture of Encounter and Disruptive Discourse in Catholic Higher Education" (2016). *Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work Faculty Publications*. 67.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/soc_fac_pub/67

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

Integritas 7.2 (Spring 2016), pp. 1-16.

doi: 10.6017/integritas.v7i2p1

Negotiating a Culture of Encounter and Disruptive Discourse in Catholic Higher Education

Laura M. Leming, F.M.I.

Any brief attention to global, national, and local news underlines the urgency for education that leads to knowledge about and action for the common good.

Catholic institutions of higher learning have a dual history of encouraging students to speak and act on behalf of the common good while also pursuing the good life. As those who can readily access a Catholic education have increasingly come from the upper middle class, how are we introducing our students into the culture of encounter that Pope Francis called the U.S. Bishops to promote in September 2015? This essay explores ideas and examples related to teaching and research praxis that give priority to compassionate dialogue and to discerning the strategic use of disruptive discourse.

The mission statements of our universities commit us to “the pursuit of a just society” (Boston College), “building a more humane, just, and sustainable world” (Santa Clara University), using “knowledge creatively to meet human needs” (University of Dayton), and “contribute to the societal, economic, cultural and ethical quality of life” (DePaul) among other phrasings. All of these intentions resonate with the common good, described in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* as “to will good” for the other and seen by

Laura M. Leming, F.M.I., is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Dayton and a Marianist Sister. Her areas of interest include the sociology of religion, women in religion, social psychology, and interfaith relations. Her dissertation focused on the “religious agency” that Roman Catholic women use to stay involved in a Church that they sometimes find patriarchal and hierarchical in a way that can be disempowering for them. She has continued to explore this concept both here in the U.S. and in parts of the developing world, particularly in India. She is the author of several journal articles including “Women, Religious Agency and the Politics of Vocation”; “Protecting Children on the Margins: Social Justice and Community Building”; and “The Millennial Generation on Catholic Campuses: Changes and Challenges in Ethnicity, Social Status, Spirituality, and Gender.”

Aristotle as “more divine” than seeking the good of the individual.¹ Even brief attention to national, global and local headlines suggests that the aspirations of these Catholic universities are worthy and even urgent goals. But Catholic institutions of higher learning have a dual history of encouraging students to speak and act on behalf of the common good while also pursuing “the good life” in the more individual sense that the phrase suggests in our day and time. As private higher education is increasingly challenged to demonstrate its “value added,” reflection on the contribution of Catholic higher education (CHE) prompts us to hasten the move from a sense of urgency to a capacity for agency in creating educational communities that lead to knowledge about and action for the common good. In a *Huffington Post Politics Blog* entry on March 10, 2016, Massimo Faggioli warned of “the short step ... to the death of the key idea of the common good” that is threatening American political discourse.² Institutions that value and aspire to foster the common good should hear this as a call to action.

Agency, inasmuch as it challenges the status quo can generate significant conflict, to which university campuses are not strangers. Strategic negotiation is needed for how we model conflict for students and equip them to discern both when agency for the common good is needed and how and when to use disruptive discourse to help achieve it.

Setting the Stage: The Economic Success of Catholics at Mid-20th Century

Based on the rapid shift in socioeconomic status of Catholics in the U.S. in the 20th century, one can reasonably infer that CHE has contributed well to promoting the common good for U.S. Catholics. Efforts have been so successful that the early primary beneficiaries, children of immigrant Catholic families, have moved into the more privileged groups of our society. Greeley noted this in 1989, when he pointed out the junctures in the mid-20th century at which the ratios of Catholics attending college and succeeding in the professions began to surpass those of Protestants.³ Looking at shifts in economic status across religious groups, William Swatos identifies the “greatest status change ... (as being) among Roman Catholics who moved from the bottom socioeconomic levels to the middle ranks during the post-World War II era.”⁴ Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar reported that in 2000, the median income of a U.S. Catholic family was \$5000 more than the U.S. average, a scenario that wouldn’t be imaginable prior to the changes that Greeley and Swatos point out.⁵ Institutional data spur considerable soul searching among the founding religious congregations when it reveals that the average

1 David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

2 Massimo Faggioli, “Catholic ‘Trumpism’ is Reigniting ‘The American Problem’ within Pope Francis’ Church,” *Huffington Post Politics Blog*, March 10, 2016.

3 Andrew Greeley, *Religious Change in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 78.

4 William Swatos, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1998), at <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/Stratification.htm>.

5 Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Publishing, 2006).

income of students' families is crossing higher and higher thresholds. Institutions founded to educate the children of immigrant Catholic farmers and workers are now educating students who are largely upper middle class. At the same time, many of these institutions are struggling to increase the racial/ethnic and economic diversity within their student bodies. How to be true to providing education for those most in need of it is a serious concern.

Many students, simply due to their class status and life experiences, have limited contact with and imagination for the day-to-day life experiences of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

As more students at Catholic universities come from increasingly upper middle class backgrounds, introducing all students, Catholic or not, to issues of inequality and inviting them to commit to the pursuit of a just society requires more attention to sensitization. Many students, simply due to their class status and life experiences, have limited contact with and imagination for the day-to-day life experiences of people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore it becomes more difficult for them to perceive policy impacts with regard to less privileged members of society. Increasing numbers of our students are not Catholic, and if they are may not have had much exposure to the themes of Catholic social teaching. Inviting all of them to a larger "moral imaginary" that takes account of society's more vulnerable members is both task and challenge.

Social Science Insights for Education for the Common Good

Early in this millennium, considerable effort was spent articulating the possibility of a new axial age in which cosmopolitan citizenship would be essential.⁶ Cosmopolitanism in this sense entails thinking of strangers as fellow world citizens and recognizing the responsibilities we have toward one another. Teaching cosmopolitanism offers an inviting path to students to help them think as global citizens and see their connections to others. The higher percentages of international students enrolled in U.S. Catholic colleges and universities offer one pathway to greater awareness of global citizenship. But given recent events of terror, border closures, and the tone of the political discourse leading to the 2016 presidential election, it is tempting to dismiss the optimistic bent of much of the literature on a new form of cosmopolitanism. Sociologist of religion

6 Craig Calhoun, "'Belonging' in the Cosmopolitan Imaginary," *Ethnicities* vol.3(4) (2003), 531-568; Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2006); Gerard Delanty, "Cosmopolitan Citizenship," in Judith Blau and Keri I. Smith, eds., *Public Sociologies Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Fuyuki Kurasawa, *The Work of Global Justice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Eboo Patel stresses that inviting students to a vision of a world greater than themselves and to imagine the contribution they can make is a tool that is widely used by terror groups.⁷ But this strategy can be just as successful in work for global harmony. A public sociologist, Patel founded the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), which focuses on empowering young adults for interfaith leadership. Just as W.E.B. DuBois identified “the color line” (1903) as a dominant problem of the 20th century,⁸ Patel sees “the religious line” as a dominant problem of the 21st. In his view, “appreciative knowledge” and meaningful relationships are the “leverage points” for building a religious pluralism that can help address the problems that religious and geopolitical tensions cause.⁹ IFYC partners both with researchers investigating the impacts of religious diversity education and with college campuses to help them assess and improve their environment for appreciative knowledge.

The scholarly trajectory of social thinker Jürgen Habermas has led him to take religion more seriously as a force in people’s lives, even though religion was not highlighted earlier in his career. Richard Wolin recounts a Habermas lecture underlining “the force of religious traditions to articulate moral intuitions with regard to communal forms of a dignified human life.”¹⁰ Habermas sees egalitarianism (a signifier of the “common” in “the common good”) as a direct legacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition and goes so far as to say its “critical re-appropriation and reinterpretation” is essential.¹¹ Standing firmly in that tradition, CHE is well resourced to make important contributions to shaping a world where appreciative knowledge (Patel) and true discourse can assist in finding consensus when that discourse occurs in a situation of equality that is absent of ideology (Habermas).

Catholic Resources for Education for the Common Good

New resources for meeting this challenge in the CHE environment are supplied in the current ecclesial context, with Pope Francis as a charismatic leader. Notwithstanding those for whom Francis’s approaches seem to pose a threat, the first selfie-taking, Tweeting Pope has won the hearts of many, young and old, Catholic and not. The image of Pope Francis washing the feet of a Muslim woman in 2015 spoke volumes for his preaching a “theology of encounter” and a “culture of care.”¹² Pope Francis used the word “encounter” 32 times in his first major solo-authored writing, the apostolic

7 Eboo Patel, *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2012).

8 In *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois actually highlighted this concept first coined by Frederick Douglass in 1881. DuBois named it as a major twentieth-century social problem.

9 Patel, *Sacred Ground*, 95-96.

10 Richard Wolin, “Jürgen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol 52:5 (Sept. 23, 2005), B16-17.

11 Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14:1 (2006), 1-25.

12 Pope Francis, encyclical *Laudato Si’* 231 (2015), online at www.vatican.va.

exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, or *The Joy of the Gospel*.¹³ As Archbishop of Buenos Aires and in seemingly very intentional displays as pope, Francis's personal witness has been clear. And his articulation of the need for ministers of the Church and people of good will to truly enter into relationships of genuine respect and care for people who are marginalized has been evident. In *Laudato Si'*, his first encyclical letter, and specifically named as part of the body of Catholic social teaching, Francis called for an "effective pedagogy" aimed at growth "in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care" (210).

Addressing the U.S. Catholic bishops in the fall of 2015, Francis noted that "we are promoters of the culture of encounter" in which "dialogue is our method" and which Francis sees as occurring in ever widening circles, not just with the Church's laity but with broader society. Francis is not original in calling for Catholicism to engage in authentic encounter. The bishops of northern Africa published a document in 1979, with the subtitle "The Meaning of our Encounters," describing that call of Christians in their presence to overwhelmingly Muslim nations. They drew inspiration—as does Francis, and Pope Saint John Paul II before him—from Vatican II sources emphasizing the presence of Christ through the Spirit both inside and outside the Church. Martin McGee, making a case for Christian-Muslim dialogue telling the stories of Catholics who stayed in Algeria during the civil war, notes that interreligious dialogue can rise to being a "sacrament of encounter" when reconciliation and change of hearts are the byproduct.¹⁴ If the encouragement to fostering interreligious encounters is not new, what is new is a moment in which Catholicism has re-entered the world stage in an often more positive light than recent years when the scandals of priestly abuse and Vatican bank abuses were the continual focus of media reports. This newfound social capital is an opportunity for the global networks within Catholicism to have positive influence in addressing the social problems that are paramount in the 21st century.

Moving from Urgency to Agency

The necessity of moving from urgency to agency is a premise of this paper. Agency is not practiced in a vacuum but is enacted within specific social contexts. Anthony Giddens lays out an understanding of social structure that emphasizes the ongoing development and even transformation of society through the interplay of the "rules" and the "resources" that are available to actors in their social milieus.¹⁵ The "rules" of social interaction are the commonly held beliefs and tacit assumptions about "the way things are" or "how we've always done it." Resources are knowledges, skills, and capacities that are employed by actors to "get around," or as social interactionists say, to "negotiate" rules. All social interaction, then is a work of constant attention to the social

13 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*) (2013), online at www.vatican.va.

14 Martin McGee, *Christian Martyrs for a Muslim People* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008).

15 Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

We have strong resources within Catholic higher education and the Catholic intellectual tradition since both are deeply rooted in tradition (memory) and looking toward a just society (vision) where we use knowledge creatively to address critical human needs.

rules which can constrict activity, and discernment of how the available resources can facilitate action and choice.

A “duality” of structure holds structure and agency in creative tension; human agents work within structures but are also the initiators of action to change or revise those structures.¹⁶ William H. Sewell informs Giddens’s work through a focus on social interaction as a source of transformation of structures depending on how agents use the resources available to them. Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische further elaborate agency by recognizing the importance of memory and vision for the future as fuel for implementing change.¹⁷ This suggests we have strong resources within Catholic higher education and the Catholic intellectual tradition since both are deeply rooted in tradition (memory) and looking toward a just society (vision) where we use knowledge creatively to address critical human needs. It is in this context of agentially using resources for social transformation that we can look at educational practices that lead to voice and action for the common good.

Rather than looking at any institutional context as monolithic, it is in the micro-processes and micro-politics of social interaction that we find actions that promote or inhibit transformation.¹⁸ A focus on practices as an analytical tool has been prominent in sociology and sociology of religion more narrowly for some time.¹⁹ By isolating individual conscious actions at a moment in time, one is more able to perceive the role of individual actors and their strategic maneuverings within institutions and, more broadly, within society. Frequent invocations to best practices across many sectors reflect the usefulness of attention to daily choices of actors that are intentional and effective. Here the aim is to shed light on educational practices that inspire students

16 William H. Sewell, Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98:1 (1992), 1-29.

17 Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, “What is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology* 103 (4) (1998), 962-1023.

18 Catherine Wessinger, *Religious Institutions and Women’s Leadership: New Roles inside the Mainstream* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

19 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

to their conscious choice of actions that contribute to the common good and stimulate their agency. Practices of higher education largely focus around research and teaching, so special attention will be paid to examples of teaching and research praxis that inspire and engage students to personal commitment and action in pursuit of the goals that our mission statements espouse.

Classroom and University as Discursive Space

In a 2015 article notably titled “The University as Agent of Social Transformation,” Orfilio Ernesto Valiente describes the stance of the University of Central America: “to denounce with clarity what destroys human values, stand beside the poor in their struggle for liberation, and take any possible steps—no matter how small that these may be—toward greater dialogue and the concrete advancement of society.”²⁰ Speaking of dialogue, Valiente invokes a deeply engrained process and value of university education. The very name “university” calls for commitment to enlarge our perspectives and to see reality not just from our own standpoint but to increase our capacity to see from the perspective of others. A central theory of the Habermas corpus, communicative action, posits the existence of “ideal speech situations” where meaningful and deep exchange can occur freely in the effort to reach consensus on how to move forward. Key to Habermas’s position is the “arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection” that is needed for true

The very name “university” calls for commitment to enlarge our perspectives and to see reality not just from our own standpoint but to increase our capacity to see from the perspective of others.

communication. We experience that hard work whenever there’s a particularly difficult department or academic senate meeting. But Habermas issues a challenge to those of us who do CHE from a faith perspective in asserting that “religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life.”²¹ For real understanding, he cites a need for translating religious values into language others can comprehend and the need for non-religious dialogue partners to work at comprehension and take religious insight seriously. Therefore, while we can take affirmation for the insight we may bring to our world situations, we are also charged with providing translations that have explanatory force on the importance of protecting the vulnerable and promoting global understanding and appreciation. In doing so we

20 Orfilio Ernesto Valiente, “The University as Agent of Social Transformation: The Case of the University of Central America in El Salvador,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 34:2 (2015), 281-299, at 281.

21 Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” 10.

offer the tools at our disposal, notably Catholic social teaching and our global, national, and local networks. Kurasawa asserts that efforts made to enact understanding and justice in society are a process of stretching, whereby “distant strangers are treated as concrete and morally equal persons whose rights are being violated or incompletely realized.”²² Challenging students to see and respect the other as morally equal persons and to engage in meaningful communication starts in the classroom or residence and moves out in increasingly larger circles.

Universities have a unique opportunity to foster various spaces for dialogue that promote justice and we do that at many levels. We work to empower students of the liberal arts and the physical and social sciences who can analyze and develop practices that address unequal power relations. Professional schools that graduate truly ethical leaders as a result of the breadth and depth of their learning and reflection on their responsibility for the common good are another example. The quality of communal dialogue—not just *discussion*—on the level of the university as a whole, whether that be around curriculum revision, the mutual understanding needed for shared governance, or the university’s role as an anchor and resource in its own urban or rural environs, is another signal of productive discursive space. Universities are ready-made settings for conversations that are cross-disciplinary, inter-cultural, and inter-generational, and we should make use of those opportunities. At a more personal level, there are the multiple speech communities including everything from the office for multicultural affairs and the ways it provides support, to college political groups, Greek life, and small faith communities. Each individual unit has the opportunity to create space that promotes encounter, appreciative knowledge, and wisdom or conversely, a space where interactions devolve into identity politics that isolate and exclude. Attention to processes that promote the former are essential.

Individual classrooms and labs are privileged places for enhancing students’ capacity for dialogue. Nelle Morton tells a powerful story from her teaching ministry of the transformative power of “hearing into speech.”²³ The active listening stance of others in a group, and thus the experience of being heard, enabled a woman in her class to articulate her life story for the first time and to recognize her own power. Creating classroom environments that support students in coming to voice—and in Patricia Hill-Collins’s view, thus “coming to power”—requires intentionality.²⁴ And the invitation to create a community of scholars has to be extended and accepted at least by some students in the class. When it is, students often make significant gains in being able to articulate how their own experiences have shaped them. For example, in a recent sociology of education class, journal keeping focused on remembered experiences of social justice proved to be a tool that fostered reflexivity and raised many personal examples that students brought

22 Kurasawa, *The Work of Global Justice*, 3.

23 Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

24 Patricia Hill-Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

to their small groups. Invoking their own memories of privilege or pain in educational settings and sharing and analyzing them with peers was an exercise that both accepted and affirmed their insights and strengthened the community learning.

Creating such dialogic spaces will almost inevitably reveal difference and the need to grow in skills for negotiating difference. Examining transformative institutions, Laurent Fleury points out that spaces that promote debate (rather than simply promoting consumption) are places where constructive resistance can emerge and grow into critique of social structures.²⁵ Such resistance needs to be directed toward deeper reflection and research; that is, not simply in service of argument but in search of wisdom. Negotiating a “way through” conflict peacefully is invaluable to our students in their individual lifeworlds and to our wider world today. Therefore, peace-making and conflict negotiation are valuable academic skills that will carry well beyond the classroom.

Immersion as Teaching Practice for Encounter

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis underlines the gospel imperative “to run the risk of face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction” (88). His insistence on being face-to-face may reference Levinas, who maintains that being “face-to-face” with the other creates an “anxiety for justice.”²⁶ Encounter, then, becomes the stimulus for the kind of deep feeling that motivates agency; that is, action that aims to shape social structures for human flourishing.

Immersion is an example of experiential learning that has become widely used by our institutions and offers the quality of deep encounter that Francis encourages. In many cases, the local, national, and global networks of our founding congregations allow relatively easy access to non-governmental organizations and school settings nearby and in many far-flung places that can provide rich opportunities for encounter and mutual benefit. Mutuality is particularly important to protect the integrity of these experiences to ensure that they do not become experiences of poverty tourism or have the unintended consequence of reinforcing a sense of privilege without responsibility. Students who own that “learning” is pre-eminent over “service” are better able to recognize that the gifts they are receiving in their encounters are more than the benefit they are able to give. Moreover, immersion itself can sometimes be a trapping of privilege, if only students who have disposable income or rank in elite programs within our institutions are able to take advantage of these opportunities. Reflection on how we spread the wealth so that more students with more modest means or average performance can benefit is important. Careful attention to processes around pre-immersion preparation, opportunities for discussion, processing and interpretation of daily experiences during the trip, and post-trip integration and application is crucial for orienting students to the common good.

25 Laurent Fleury, *Sociology of Culture and Cultural Practices: The Transformative Power of Institutions*, trans. Michael Lavin (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

26 Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani, *Levinas and the Politics of Non-Violence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

We have numerous opportunities to design active learning experiences that familiarize students with the cities that host our institutions and to help them encounter and befriend people who might otherwise be perceived as distant strangers.

Immersion can take place in many ways other than traveling beyond borders of city, state, or nation to exotic settings. An exercise I often require of first-year sociology students, “riding the bus,” is a form of “micro-immersion.” If they haven’t lived in a large U.S. city where public transportation is good and a part of daily life, and perhaps even then, many of our students have rarely or never used public transportation. To navigate the system to a chosen urban destination and systematically observe both neighborhoods and travel companions is an immersive experience in itself. We have numerous opportunities to design active learning experiences that familiarize students with the cities that host our institutions and to help them encounter and befriend people who might otherwise be perceived as distant strangers. Such learnings can encourage students to examine previously unrecognized structures of privilege and exclusion and to develop skills for engaged citizenship. Bringing multiple others into our classrooms as respected experts and dialogue partners can be highly educational encounters as well.

A key, then, to using immersion as an educational practice for the common good is helping students to identify and analyze structures of privilege, especially those from which they benefit, since these most often go unrecognized. A corollary and necessary skill is recognizing and appreciating the capabilities of others who are frequently seen as disadvantaged.²⁷ This blurring of the lines that divide groups opens up space in which we are better able to take on the standpoint of the other,²⁸ a requirement for the constructive dialogue and empathy needed to navigate political and religious challenges of our day.

Mining the Resources of Catholic Social Teaching

The seven major themes of Catholic social teaching (CST) presented by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops serve as a useful resource for interdisciplinary and curricular conversations.²⁹ Many of the themes resonate well with current issues that are addressed across the curriculum—work and workers, family life, human dignity,

27 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2011).

28 Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

29 See www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching.cfm.

inequalities, the environment, and of course, the common good. Increasing the capacity of faculty members to be familiar enough with the themes of CST to introduce them as conversation points in class is an ongoing and valuable project in CHE. One example is a recent board development workshop at a Catholic university in the southwest. Board members were engaged in conversation about their own family histories and where they found intersections with themes and issues in Catholic social thought. Faculty seminars, workshops within divisions like engineering, social sciences, or humanities faculties, and clusters of faculty working on a multi-section core course in the curriculum are opportune sites for increasing capacity for CST inclusion within the curriculum. In the wider university, students can be drawn into conversation about themes of CST through whatever mechanisms exist to lay out standards of behavior within the university community.

When students are informed and knowledgeable, not infrequently do they challenge administrative decisions or community interactions that they find out of sync with their understanding of community and justice. This is one micro-example of “disruptive discourse,”³⁰ wherein members of a university community turn the stated values of the institution back on itself in the light of a perceived violation of said values. I propose that we know that we’re doing something right when we hear the voices saying, “Well *THAT*’s not very _____!” (Fill in the blank: Marianist, Benedictine, Ignatian, Vincentian, etc.). We’ve seen many examples of more coordinated agency that disrupts business as usual across our campuses: Black Lives Matter protests, Dreamers rallies, immigration policy protests, and even Nuns on the Bus. The spirit in which these disruptions are welcomed and supported, or encounter resistance from members of the administration or fellow students, is an object lesson in negotiating conflict. Sometimes it is a measure of whether we are living up to the standard of our mission claims.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a global outreach arm of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference since 1943, is a willing partner with Catholic universities and colleges to promote global social justice education. Their “Faculty Learning Commons”³¹ provides curricular resources and opportunities for coordinated and networked learning around particular themes. Faculty can include units like human trafficking, supply chains, or fair trade within a course and have their students participate with students from other Catholic universities in webinar sessions and electronic messaging. CRS also conducts training with teams of student ambassadors to plan and lead at least three local events each year to engage their campuses. Bringing experiences of non-governmental agencies around the world into our classrooms and onto campus is an opportunity for our students to encounter the “distant other,” learn from professionals in the field, and choose how to respond.

30 Michele Fine, *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

31 <http://university.crs.org/faculty/course-materials>.

At the Intersection of Research and Teaching

The Council on Undergraduate Research touts many benefits of student engagement in research including retention, capacity for critical thinking, and promoting innovation.³² Student research is synonymous with faculty mentoring so student learning can become an extension of faculty research and stimulate more learning and more research. There are many outstanding examples that illustrate where research and teaching practice intersect and stimulate the “anxiety for justice” of which Levinas speaks and for which Pope Francis advocates. A specific example is current research around the issue of mass incarceration, for which I was able to gather data directly from students who benefited.

At the University of Dayton (UD), the social science element of the core curriculum was designed to encourage faculty members to teach the introductory course required of all students in light of their own research strengths. The point of this decision was for faculty to be able to showcase their research in introductory courses while students get a more close-up look at the research that their teachers are passionate about. Sociologist Jamie Longazel is a recognized scholar on issues surrounding immigration, crime and inequality, and mass incarceration.³³ Early in his teaching career at UD he began planning to challenge students to be more informed about mass incarceration while also being engaged in creating social change. Dr. Longazel shaped his Introduction to Social Science course on mass incarceration, introducing students to the sociological, political, and human rights perspectives surrounding this pressing social problem in the U.S. Increasing student engagement in 2016, Dr. Longazel began offering a course on crime and inequality through the Inside-Out program, a prison classroom program where professors teach a college course inside a prison and bring the same number of students with them who are taking the course through their home institution.³⁴ The “inside” students and the “outside” students are on an equal footing in the class. The mutual experience of sharing papers, small group discussions, and collaborative projects between incarcerated persons and traditional college students promotes transformational awareness for both groups of learners. This is truly an “encounter” for everyone in the course.

Dr. Longazel’s students attest to the changes they see in themselves as a result of his classes. Emily,³⁵ a 22-year-old senior, was enrolled in the Inside-Out course that took place at Warren Correctional Facility in southwest OH. When asked how the

32 See www.cur.org/about_cur/fact_sheet/.

33 Jamie Longazel, *Undocumented Fears* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2016) and *The Pains of Mass Imprisonment* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

34 See the national Inside-Out Program’s website: (www.insideoutcenter.org/), as well as Program founder Lori Pompa’s essay “Service-Learning as Crucible: Reflections on Immersion, Context, Power, and Transformation,” in D. Butin, ed., *Service Learning for Higher Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 173-192.

35 With Dr. Longazel’s permission I contacted Emily and Tim, asking them about their experiences by responding to two questions. Both students gave permission to be quoted in this paper.

course has changed her thinking about society and the need to pursue the common good, she responded:

This class opened my eyes, mind, and heart to the various forms of oppression in our society and their devastating impact on both oppressors and oppressed. I've learned that oppression strips us of our essential, inherent humanity. It has been a heart-wrenching and difficult journey to learn about my role in maintaining the systems of oppression. Yet, in taking this class, I have resolved not to close my mind or heart because the only way we can bring about societal change is to examine and discuss these painful realities and our roles (conscious or unconscious) in helping sustain them.

Responding to my queries about the impact of the intro-level mass incarceration course, Tim, a 20-year-old junior, says the course “challenged me to view our society through a different lens than I had in the past. After seeing the challenges and injustices that many people face as a result of an unjust system, I was forced to think, pray, and reflect on my own role in bringing about change and reform.” As evidence that real change occurred for Tim, one can point to the fact that the semester after he took the course, he worked to create a “Criminal Justice Plunge” as one of Campus Ministry’s immersion program options. He attributes the course as an important part of the “motivation to be involved in this” and told me “not only am I now better able to recognize the injustices within our justice system, as well as the prevalence of racism, but I have also come to realize that I have an obligation as a Christian to stand against such injustices.”

The “difference” the Inside-Out class has made for Emily is that it

reaffirmed the necessity of meeting people where they are at—whether they are in the oppressed or oppressor group. It is teaching me that while only the oppressed can free themselves, it is the responsibility of those who might find themselves in the oppressor or privileged group to foster solidarity in order to help empower the oppressed. In addition, it’s teaching me not to solely attack or blame an oppressor for his or her views. For their views are largely the product of seeds sown long ago, continually harvested in society’s fertile soil of division and egoism. I think that in order to have any chance against fighting oppression, we have to explore our own identities (without clinging to them) and then transcend our identities in order to recognize our interconnectedness and reclaim our shared humanity.

The “interconnectedness” and “obligation ... to stand against injustice” that these two students articulate is evidence of high-impact teaching practice. I would argue that key to these students’ ability to articulate their obviously deep learning is the credibility that Dr. Longazel has with his research so clearly tied to his teaching. He is not a distant, even if expert observer of a social problem but can provide students access to experiential learning that leaves a deep impression and challenges their previous assumptions about prisons, people who are incarcerated, and their own call to “speaking out against oppression” (Emily).

Education for the Common Good Structured at the Program Level

The choices that our institutions make about programs also give evidence of how invested we are in creating the infrastructure of common good education. At the graduate level, St. Mary's University of San Antonio offers a year-long certificate program in "Conflict Transformation" to small cohorts of students from around the globe. Enrollees take four online courses together, sharing from the perspectives of their participation in the various justice issues they focus on in their home places. Program courses span from Theory and Practice of Conflict Transformation to Models for Engagement and Encounter. At the end of the fourth class, students meet face-to-face at a Northern Ireland peace-building organization to form a community of practice and to learn peace-making strategies that they can use in their own country and on their own vocational path. In this example of program planning, there are mutually reinforcing goods of research, teaching/learning, and commitment to action for justice.

When faculty and staff help students learn to navigate campus tensions around voice, silence, and displays of power on the issues of the day, we contribute to students' capacities to live choice-filled futures that also grow the public good.

Seminars, colloquia, conferences, and research showcase opportunities, whether with international or local participants, with professional scholars or undergraduates, are a constant feature of universities and can be privileged sites for improvement of commitment to justice praxis. How we use our voice in the public sphere and spend our social capital should reflect our public commitments. We must recognize that it is not easy to strike an appropriate balance between activism and pursuit of knowledge. How we understand "disruption"—as an annoyance or an opportunity—will influence our decisions and actions and requires discernment. This is an area for which Catholic institutions of higher education have great resources. Discernment is something that we all should be good at, given the wealth of spiritual resources and skills for reflection and drawing connections that are part of our founding traditions. We should teach it! Our students are entering the workforce at a time when skills for reflection before action, conflict negotiation, and appreciative knowledge of those who are "other" are sorely needed, along with the capacity for discourse that contributes to the light of wisdom rather than the heat of wrath. As Bruce Lincoln shows, disruptive discourse can be effective under certain conditions which need to be analyzed and weighed.³⁶ In his view, similar to Emirbayer and Mische, discourse only can shape or reshape

³⁶ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

society if it is first persuasive to its hearers and also evokes emotion that fuels agency. When faculty and staff help students learn to navigate campus tensions around voice, silence, and displays of power on the issues of the day (diversity on campus, gun legislation, bathroom usage, immigration laws), we contribute to students' capacities, as Daniel Porterfield described so aptly, to "live choice-filled futures that also grow the public good."³⁷

Certainly not every course or program can have this intensity of experience of encounters in prison classrooms or field research in Northern Ireland. But many curricular spaces offer opportunity for social analysis and deep discussion of issues of ethics, inequalities of various types, and the roles educated citizens can play in addressing them. While I do not belittle "knowledge for the sake of knowledge," it is incumbent on Catholic institutions of higher education to advance the search for "knowledge for the sake of wisdom" and the good that can flow from its application.

Conclusion: A Renewed Theory and Praxis of Education for the Common Good

Emily and Tim and the international and domestic students studying conflict transformation may not be typical students at our universities, but their stories and witness certainly demonstrate "bearing collective responsibility for one another."³⁸ They are real examples of the movement toward the sort of cosmopolitanism discussed above and that the missions of our institutions are continuing to bear fruit. But we continue to be challenged by "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties"³⁹ of the people of our time, and so are likewise challenged to renew our commitments to extend the impact of education in pursuit of the common good. If anyone is equipped to take up Habermas's challenge to re-appropriate the Judeo-Christian tradition of egalitarianism, it is the network of Catholic colleges and universities. We have the resources we need. Founding charisms, Catholic social teaching, social scientific and religious wisdom for egalitarian social relations, critical pedagogy for inclusive education, liberal arts perspectives and ethics for professional school students, developmental economics, the list goes on; all provide critical resources for deepening our theory and praxis of education for the common good. Our constant challenge is finding the leverage points in each of our academic institutions, based on our own capabilities and connections, and assuring that our graduates develop skills for encounter, engagement, and disruptive discourse when it is called for and can be effective.

In the 2015 Good Friday Ignatian Solidarity Network reflection, Dr. Fred Pestello, president of St. Louis University (SLU) referred to his institution's "Ignatian moment" prompted by the Ferguson, Missouri, uprisings in the wake of Michael Brown's death.

37 Daniel Porterfield, "On College Signing Day, Four Goals We Should Set for Education in America," *Forbes Education*, April 26, 2016, www.forbes.com/sites/dporterfield/2016/04/26/on-college-signing-day-four-goals-we-should-set-for-education-in-america/.

38 Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

39 Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, paragraph 1), online at www.vatican.va.

SLU's campus became a protest site and a space for engagement and encounter. While these kinds of moments are particularly intense, the ordinary structures of our institutions and the communities assembled within them give us unique opportunities to foster meaningful encounter and boundary-crossing dialogue at all levels. Whether it is creating opportunities for chance encounters to more easily occur or structured conversation in classrooms and residential areas, core curriculum planning or fostering interfaith knowledge, requiring ethical reasoning within all majors, or simply celebrating cultural diversity, we can enhance capacities for purposeful action for a more just world. Seeing the distant stranger as a person with rights and with whom we share mutual responsibility for the good of the planet is a lens that students enrolled in Catholic higher education need. Catholic universities have the resources to help them develop such a lens.

The people who populate our institutions have an openness to developing this kind of awareness, vision, and capacity for agency. The Freshman Report from the Higher Education Research Institute states that 59% of 2015 college first-year students want to improve their understanding of other countries and cultures.⁴⁰ A robust 75% of them believe it's important to help others in difficulty. Translating these idealistic intentions of our youngest students into concrete awareness and opportunity to respond is the challenge of turning urgency into agency. How we capitalize on their openness and help them shape it into specific skills to be effective in building a just and sustainable world will be the measure of how we are fulfilling our collective missions.

40 Higher Education Research Institute, University of California at Los Angeles: The American Freshman National Norms, 2015, www.heri.ucla.edu/infographics/TFS-2015-Infographic.pdf.