

# Phillips: Catholic Studies program is like being in intellectual purgatory, and that's a good thing

Being in the new Bachelor of Arts in Catholic Studies program at Newman Theological College is a bit like the second part of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy: Purgatory*.

This might seem like a negative statement, but it is actually not. Let me explain myself by first sharing both some of the joys and frustrations I have experienced this past year.

Firstly, the main joy I find in the program is how each course seems to be intertwined with the others. Perhaps this is coincidence (or rather Providence), but when one course is speaking of a subject, one or more of the other courses are often touching upon the same subject, only approaching it from a different angle.

For example, we might be learning about *Rerum Novarum* – Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on the condition of the working classes – and the Church's social teaching in our Introduction to Catholic Studies course while also covering the exact same thing in our Catechism class.

Indeed, all this can be summarized as teaching me that learning is about more than just getting a job, but ultimately about drawing the mind forward on its journey toward the Truth, toward God.

Secondly, there are challenges with the program. Having been out of school for a couple of years now, it was a bit of a challenge to get into a steady routine as I started in September. Readings and assignments more difficult and different than what I had done in high school seemed overwhelming at times.

Fortunately, it did not take overly long to adjust and I soon found a steady rhythm. In addition to my own personal adjustment, however, many of us in the class struggled with the readings which could be a little too long and sometimes quite difficult.

Yet, this can only be expected in a first-year program as the faculty learn themselves what works and what does not work for the program. Thus, there are definitely challenges and joys mixed together.

Now, in conclusion, how has my year been like journeying through purgatory?

Well, St. John Henry Cardinal Newman spoke of an “integrated habit of mind.” What this means is that the mind learns to relate the parts, the various understandings it gains through learning, in light of the whole.

This forms the mind to possess a healthy understanding of the world, but more importantly, draws the human being closer to God as they understand their relationship to Him.

Thus, like purgatory, they are journeying towards God and this journey is filled with the hardships of purgation, in one case of the mind and the other the soul, but it is also filled with the joy of drawing closer to the Truth.

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