Jesuit Education and the Cultivation of Virtue
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Preface

For two hundred years, Georgetown University has been preparing the young for lives of responsibility and service. Our commitment is to forge character by providing a community which serves as a context for the living of some very difficult questions:

- What do I want to stand for in my life?
- What are my obligations to my family, my community, my church or synagogue, and my country?
- What kind of family do I wish to raise and under what conditions?
- What kind of person should I be?

We believe that the most appropriate context in which to live these questions is a community, a community built on a shared set of moral commitments and a shared understanding of the nature of undergraduate education.

In 1989-90, Georgetown University entered its third century. The six lectures presented this year, included in this volume, offer an opportunity to reflect upon our community and to clarify the shared commitment and understanding upon which our community is built. We present them with the hope that they will have as much meaning for members of other communities as they have for us.

John J. DeGioia
Dean of Student Affairs
June, 1990
Introduction

The essays which comprise this volume were originally presented in a series of distinguished lectures on Jesuit education at Georgetown University. The theme for the series, "Community of Character," was derived from a book by Stanley Hauerwas, whose "Honor at the Center" appears in this volume. A central thesis in Hauerwas' *A Community of Character* is that the development of character takes place in the context of a community shaped by a narrative--in Georgetown's case, by the gospel narrative. That thesis underlies each of the essays presented here.

In the opening essay, "An Ignatian Re-vision of the University," James Connor, S.J. attempts to recapture the founding vision of St. Ignatius Loyola in order to chart a course for the future of Jesuit education. He isolates four features of Ignatius' experience which gave rise to that vision and draws out the educational implications of each:

1. Ignatian education preserves the institution's choice of the Jesus story as its foundational story and seeks to strengthen commitment to this choice, and to integrate it into the learning process and scholarship.
2. Ignatian education enables its participants to serve others better.
3. Ignatian education finds and forges forms of collaboration to sustain a "community of learning."
4. Ignatian education enables its scholars to enter into appreciative dialogue with the best minds of the day "to incorporate corrections into Christian consciousness and to point out limitations in various other schools of thought."

Father Connor then shows how these essential features of Ignatius' vision can correct serious weaknesses to which our culture is particularly prone, including self-centeredness, individualism, and rationalism.
Father James Walsh, S.J. returns to the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* to show how central was the role of imagining in Ignatius' life and how central it can be in the life of the student. He guides his audience through a series of steps including that of imagining. The gospel stories provide the context for this exercise: one is led by Ignatius to place oneself imaginatively into a scene from the life of Jesus. In the play of imagination, one is transformed through the interaction with the person of Jesus. Father Walsh then shows through a series of examples how the activity of imagining is a central ingredient in virtually everything we do and can even determine our experience. Of primary importance, then, is the education of imagination, the transformation of imagination. As Father Walsh argues, learning in the Jesuit tradition is a matter of re-imagining, of entering a different world, a larger world. In Jesuit schools, that larger world is “the world not only of the Lord God of Israel, but of the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the poor, the oppressed.” Jesuit education, then, is not about the mastery of facts, but rather about the liberation of imagination.

In “Changing Paradigms of Virtue,” Anne E. Patrick, S.N.J.M. further explores the way imagination gives rise to moral universes and determines role models within them. She opens with a *New York Times* account of the death of Ignacio Martin-Baro in San Salvador, noting that “by one set of standards he was a good priest and by another he was not.” This example enables her to describe “a conflict of two competing paradigms, or exemplary sets of ideals for virtue, which are now in tension within Catholicism,” the “patriarchal” and the “egalitarian-feminist.” Characteristic of the patriarchal paradigm, she thinks, is an otherworldly spirituality, a pattern of domination and subordination, misogyny, and a body-rejecting dualism; in this paradigm, chastity is seen as the pinnacle of perfection.

In the egalitarian-feminist paradigm, women and men are equal partners in the human community, respect for all created reality supersedes control, ideals of love and justice are not segregated into distinct spheres of personal and social ethics, and Matthew 5:16 (“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice . . .”) receives special emphasis.

What is at stake in the contest of the competing paradigms becomes apparent in her analysis of the beatification of Marie Clementine Anwari on August 15, 1985. The story of her rape and murder during the civil war in Zaire raises fundamental questions both about the nature of rape
and about the patriarchal elevation of chastity to a position of preem-
inence; it calls into question the validity of the patriarchal paradigm itself. She suggests the need for re-imagining, for opening a larger world with new paradigms of virtue; in Father Connor's words, for "incorporating corrections into Christian consciousness." Assisting in this task are feminist scholars of religion and literary artists, whose ethical reflections allow for new interpretations of virtue. Carlos Fuentes' *The Good Conscience* displays, she thinks, "just how the patriarchal paradigm of virtue is implicated in some of the most besetting problems of Catholicism today: injustice to women and the blindness of the middle and upper classes to matters of social and economic justice"—a condition not just incidentally related to the deaths of Ignacio Martín-Baro and his fellow Jesuits.

James Donahue, in his "Jesuit Education and the Cultivation of Virtue," is also keenly aware of the power of imagination to bind or to free a person. The particular way students' imaginations are constricted becomes evident in their fixation on grades and their preoccupation with career goals. As a corrective, Professor Donahue urges the retrieval of the notion of vocation and an understanding of the moral life as a life of response to one's vocation. He isolates seven characteristics of Jesuit education, noting that common to all of them is the centrality of "detecting God's movements and presence, of responding to God's call in action, and of using the full range of one's abilities to realize one's true self." To the extent to which one appropriates this skill, one can hope to be freed from the constricted vision of careerism which prevails in America today. Crucial to that process is the recognition that the "excessive self-focus and... single-minded attainment of material satisfaction are antithetical to the imperatives to love and to be just that are at the heart of the biblical message, embodied in the gospel teachings of Jesus Christ."

In "Honor at the Center," Stanley Hauerwas offers a critique of a dominant contemporary conception of education—that students are to be prepared to "make up their own minds." This conception, he believes, "undercuts the formation of people of virtue capable of withstanding the confrontation with truth." It is his conviction that moral life is concerned with "the formation of virtuous people by tradition-formed communities." The model he proposes for this project is that of the master craftsman-apprentice. Because tests and papers are among the ways apprentices demonstrate that they have understood and integrated what
their master has taught, honor occupies a central place in any institution of learning. Cheating, then, can be shown to be a more serious crime than murder in an institution of learning because, however odious murder may be, it does not strike at the heart of the educational institution in the way that cheating does. Moreover, the privilege of learning “comes from a community that believes that nothing is more important than to have a people who bear the rigors of seeing more truly the way the world is . . . through the ongoing business of learning a craft well.” Such an ideal of learning requires the cultivation of moral virtues, the formation of a character which can sustain one in this calling.

But, says Carol Ochs in this volume’s concluding essay, “how can we begin to talk about character until we have some sense of who we are and how we relate to those around us?” To respond to this question, Professor Ochs engages her audience in a process of “wrestling with God” through a consideration of archetypal stories in Genesis.

In the story of Abraham, Professor Ochs sees the emergence of the self in an unmediated relationship to God, a necessary achievement in moral and religious development. “Until Abraham could recognize his selfhood—that he existed separate and distinct from his surroundings—he could not emerge from the world of his idol-worshipping ancestors to search for and ultimately come into relationship with God.” The story of Abraham’s self-development reaches its climax in the account of the binding of Isaac. When Abraham comes down off the mountain after the binding of Isaac, he is another man.

If self-knowledge can be said to begin with the knowledge of God, it must be added that not all come to know God the way Abraham did. In fact, Professor Ochs finds more of a likeness to our situation in the story of Joseph, who never encounters God but must learn about God through the ordinary events of his life and, in particular, in his reconciliation with members of his family. What does one learn? Though others may intend harm, God intends what happens to us for good. In a way which reminds one of Professor Donahue’s critique of careerism, Professor Ochs remarks that “one lesson we can draw from Joseph’s story is that the concept of self is to be found not in our ambitions but through our relation to God.” She adds that “a life devoted to discerning God’s working for good in the patterns of our lives is lived as a tempering process and as an adventure . . . but our existence is needed to discern that good and put it into practice.” In a way which rings true to Ignatian
spirituality, she notes how fitting it is that “Genesis, which begins with
the account of God’s creation, should end with a statement telling us how
to be partners in this creation.”

A collection of essays like this one does not come into being without
the help of many hands. It is a pleasure to acknowledge those who have
in different ways made this volume possible: Mara Parrish and Angela
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William J. O’Brien
Assistant to the Dean of Student Affairs
James L. Connor, S.J.

An Ignatian Re-vision of the University

James L. Connor, S.J. is Director of the Woodstock Theological Center.
I am very grateful to the Office of Student Affairs here at Georgetown University for the kind invitation to speak to you about "An Ignatian Revision of the University." It is a timely and important topic.

I understand “vision” to mean one’s ideal expectations or desired outcome of an enterprise. It may not be attained; it may not even be fully attainable, but a vision beckons us forward on a journey, sets our direction, organizes our activities, and makes our sacrifices meaningful. Vision gives value to the present and hope to the future. When I think of vision and visionaries, I think of Don Quixote, the dreamer of the impossible dream. I think of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his “I have a dream.” I think of Robert Kennedy’s “Some men see things as they are and say why. Others seek to dream things that never were and say why not.” More to the point of today’s topic, I think of St. Ignatius Loyola, who may have been the greatest dreamer of them all. Ignatius had a vision for education which was rooted in his vision of life. Life and education—the two are inseparable for Ignatius, as we shall see.

My remarks are gathered under three headings: I. The Originating Experience, II. Features and Implications, and III. The Current Need.

I. The Originating Experience

Inigo de Onaz y Loyola was a Basque born in the year 1491 to a rather well-to-do family—nobility, in fact. His youth was undistinguished until at the age of sixteen he was sent off to be trained as a gentleman courtier in the royal court. He marvelled at the courtly life, with all its pomp and circumstance. In fact, he soon became a colorful figure, fun-loving and adventuresome, whose favorite hobbies seem to have been late night brawls and womanizing. His heart was set on becoming a soldier.

It is not surprising, then, that in the year 1521 we find Ignatius commanding troops in Pamplona on the Spanish border, defending its fortress against French invasion. Despite his stubborn and courageous efforts, the citadel proved indefensible and, in the end, Ignatius was severely wounded, taking a cannon shell to the leg. It was crushed so badly the doctors wanted to amputate immediately but Ignatius insisted on surgery to save it. Operate they did, not once but twice. The first time it had healed crooked, and Ignatius demanded it be rebroken and reset, despite the agonizing pain.
But all of this is prologue to a most unusual experience in the course of Ignatius' convalescence at the castle of Loyola. By his own admission, it was not only a turning point, but one of the most profound learning experiences of his life.

He had a great love of fiction, so as he lay in bed recuperating he asked for some romances to while away the time. But none were to be found. The castle's library had only a Life of Christ and some stories of saints. So, intermittently he would read them, while spending most of his time daydreaming about chivalry, fair damsels, and knightly exploits.

He describes his favorite daydream this way:

Among these there was one thought which, above the others, so filled his heart that he became, as it were, immersed and absorbed in it. Unconsciously, it engaged his attention for three and four hours at a time. He pictured to himself what he should do in honor of an illustrious lady, how he should journey to the city where she was, in what words he would address her, what bright and pleasant sayings he would use, and what manner of warlike exploits he should perform to please her.¹

Alternately, then, he would read the lives of Jesus and the saints, ponder their deeds, and find himself struck with admiration. He would wonder, "What if I should act like St. Dominic? Or what if I should do what Francis of Assisi did?"

And so his dreams and imaginings would go alternately. Now the important thing is the difference that he began to notice between two sets of feelings. He puts it this way (referring to himself in the third person), "But in these thoughts there was this difference. When he thought of worldly things it gave him great pleasure, but afterward he found himself dry and sad."² When he thought of living in imitation of Jesus and the saints he experienced enthusiasm and joy, not only while he was engaged in his thoughts and imaginings, but afterwards as well.

These different feelings in reaction to his reading and daydreaming fascinated Ignatius. What did they mean? Where did they come from? What was he to make of them? And was there any guidance to be found in them for choices he had to make? This kind of reflective analysis was to become a lifelong preoccupation with Ignatius. Over the course of years of experience and reflection, Ignatius would develop a detailed and systematic description of a process by which to interpret interior movements of the spirit. This way of interpreting reality, making choices, and
acting on them—this kind of knowing, choosing, and doing—became, purely and simply, Ignatius’ way of life. After him the process would be called “Ignatian.” Ignatian discernment is the centerpiece of Ignatian spirituality.

He lays out this process in a little manual, composed over a lifetime of experience, and entitled The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It is a “how-to” book which leads the participant—ideally for a month—through an experience that alternates: (1) immersion in the two “stories,” especially the Jesus story as found in the Bible; and (2) discernment of the reactions aroused (as, for instance, fear, joy, insight, love, conviction, anxiety, depression, or enthusiasm). The aim of the Exercises is to enable the participants to know clearly, to choose freely, and do generously whatever is revealed in the course of this experience. A secondary goal is to incorporate this way of learning, choosing, and doing habitually into one’s daily life. The exercises are done under the supervision of an experienced guide.

In his first and rudimentary effort at discernment during his convalescence, Ignatius concluded that he was called to be like Jesus and to follow him. What convinced him was the fact that the joy, peace, and enthusiasm he experienced when dreaming of living like Jesus lasted throughout the entire time, even after the contemplation was over. Living that way felt right to him; it fit. On later reflection, he would say that it is the perfect fit for all of us, whereas careers based on self-promotion and vanity do not fit or develop human nature.

So, Ignatius forsook his soldiering ways and set out on a pilgrimage, much like Don Quixote, to “find and follow Christ”—where and how he had no idea. Eventually, he gathered some companions, and together they formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Besides other works, they started and staffed schools—so many that they came to be called “the schoolmasters of Europe.” For instance, Father Peter Canisius, S.J. was personally responsible for founding nineteen Jesuit colleges!

II. Features and Implications

Education, like all Jesuit works, is rooted in the experience of Loyola Castle. In what follows, therefore, I will first mention a particular feature of that experience, and then suggest some educational implications flowing from that feature. My remarks are suggestive only. Their aim is to
stimulate discussion, decisions, and action with a view to carrying on the
tradition of the Ignatian vision in contemporary forms.

1. **Story.** Notice the central role of story in Ignatius’ experience. He is taken up alternately into the story of Jesus and the story of
knightly exploit. As he reflected on the basic affections and
motivations these stories aroused in him, Ignatius came to re-
gard the Jesus story as the embodiment of altruism and the story
of knightly exploits as the embodiment of vanity and self-seek-
ing. For him they exemplify, therefore, the age-old rivals for the
fundamental meaning of life. Each story appeals to us in its own
way; each invites us to enter into its history and community, and
to give ourselves wholeheartedly to its story line. Each expects
commitment and submission as to our “ultimate concern”—as
Paul Tillich describes faith. Ignatius describes each option in a
key meditation in his *Spiritual Exercises:* “The Two Standards.”
In modern terms, we could say that two anthropologies are in
contention for our fealty. And we all answer the question,
“What does it mean to be a man or a woman?” one way or
another in actual behavior, even if unconscious of the choice.

**Educational Implication**

Ignatian education presumes the choice of the Jesus story on the part
of the Jesuit educational institution. This need not be—and, for ecumeni-
cal and intellectual reasons, ideally is not—the choice of each and every
student, faculty member, or staff member, but presumably a critical pro-
portion of people are actively and consciously committed to this story.
Others are sympathetic to it. Hiring practices, orientation programs, and
promotion procedures embody this criterion in order to sustain the
clarity and vigor of the institutional mission. Jesuit education seeks to
strengthen commitment to this choice, and to integrate it into the learn-
ing process and scholarship.

2. **World.** The two stories into which Ignatius enters alternatively
are two different worlds. The worlds themselves are organized
differently; and they organize, interpret, and evaluate reality dif-
ferently. Think, for instance, of poverty and wealth, sickness and
health, prestige and ridicule. For Ignatius the yardstick for interpreting, evaluating, and choosing these things is whatever helps to serve others better. “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,” Ignatius hears Jesus say (Matt 20:28). And again, “If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). In living this way Ignatius discovered joy and peace, and therefore he commended this formula to others.

Educational Implication

Education is good, in the Ignatian vision, to the extent that all the participants are enabled to serve others better. Father Pedro Arrupe, the recent past Superior General of the Jesuits, described the ideal graduate as “a person for others.” In a world compulsively driven to self-promotion, Ignatian education has a countercultural task. It cannot be self-promoting itself, and it must find ways to help students see the destructiveness and tragedy of this compulsion in society and for individual persons. Courses, not only in the humanities, but also in the sciences, can point out concretely the way this debilitating compulsion contributes to serious crises in society, the environment, family life, and mental health. Programs of community service to the homeless, street people, drug addicts, AIDS patients, and others provide valuable experiences on which guided reflection will transform attitudes and behavior. In fact, this reflection can readily become an exercise of Ignatian discernment. Imagination will discover ever better ways of shaping the institution’s system of rewards and sanctions to reflect this high priority on service of others.

3. Community. Because its primary motivation is to relate us in service to one another, the Jesus world forms community. Because the motivation of Ignatius’ dreams of knightly chivalry was to draw plaudits for himself, it creates a world of individualistic people who use others for their own self-interested purposes. Gabriel Marcel describes the divisive dynamics of egoism in his masterful essay, “Ego and Its Relation to Others,” in Homo Viator.3 He speaks of the agonizing loneliness of a self-centeredness which must look only to others for investiture. In the
Spiritual Exercises Ignatius dramatizes the alienating effect of egoism when, in a meditation on pride and sinfulness, he asks us to imagine how the sinner is in prison or exiled among brute beasts. "Hell," Dostoevski tells us in The Brothers Karamazov, "is not to love anymore."

Educational Implication

According to Robert Bellah and his collaborators in Habits of the Heart, competitiveness, self-interest, and ambition have promoted a debilitating individualism in our society. "Individualism lies at the very core of American culture," he says and asks "whether an individualism in which the self has become the main form of reality can really be sustained" (pp. 142-143). He obviously thinks not. Psychiatrists like Rollo May blame high levels of anxiety and depression on the compulsive drive to achieve. The same compulsion can creep into university life if self-promoting competitiveness becomes the primary motivation for students and faculty.

Hence, the desirability of finding or forging forms of collaboration to sustain a "community of learning." It might be collaborative and even interdisciplinary research among faculty members, student research teams or study groups, conscious community building in residence life and in extracurricular activities, and so on. Again, a university's system of rewards should acknowledge the sacrifice of private self-interest in service to the common good and community building. Retreat programs are an opportunity to pinpoint this destructive proclivity and provide support for the risks involved in sacrificing a life-style of self-interest. The example of faculty and administrators is most valuable.

Research and publication on the essentially social character of human nature and human persons, indicating educational implications, is also needed. A good deal of work has been done by scholars like Martin Buber, John Macmurray, Emmanuel Mounier, and Roberto Unger.

4. Immersion. In his conversion experience, Ignatius did not simply think about the stories and worlds. That is, he did not maintain a dispassionate distance and objectivity in order to subject them to logical, rational analysis. Rather, he entered into each of the two worlds with total immersion through imagination,
understanding, and affectivity. It is upon such personal experience of immersion, either in imagination or real life, then, that he reflects, evaluates, judges, decides, and acts. In other words, Ignatius brings the whole range of cognitive faculties to the learning process and therefore sets high store by experiences which dispose us to engage these faculties. He would understand perfectly well why the contemporary church tells us to be in solidarity with the poor and look through their eyes if we would accurately know and evaluate economic, political, or other social systems.

**Educational Implication**

Jesuit education from its inception has sought to educate the whole person and not simply the mind. It stressed a variety of studies and activities to attain this goal: poetry, drama, music, memorization, literature, language, science, and the latest technologies. Moreover, the educational environment, both physical and social, was a matter of concern as well. In fact, Ignatius' vision of education cannot be achieved unless all these dimensions do come into play. Intellect alone is insufficient for the task.

But the temptation to attempt to rely on reason alone is a prominent one in our day. Our contemporary culture is biased toward subtle forms of rationalism. William M. Shea describes it sympathetically but critically in his *The Naturalists and the Supernatural*. Rationalism in whatever form severely limits the use of all our cognitive faculties and, therefore, the range of things we can know. It will acknowledge a human experience of transcendence, but denies the possibility of knowing the Transcendent. To that extent it cannot accept the Ignatian vision for life and education.

A major task of Jesuit education today, therefore, is to offer credible scholarly grounds for its own claims to intelligibility—without itself becoming rationalist or doctrinaire as has sometimes been the case. This challenge was the lifelong preoccupation of some Jesuits of a past generation: Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, John Courtney Murray, and Bernard Lonergan. They entered into appreciative dialogue with the best minds of their day to incorporate corrections into Christian consciousness and to point out limitations in various other schools of
thought. It remains a task for our own day.

These are some basic features of the Ignatian vision of life with some suggested implications for contemporary education. I would like finally to stress the urgency of developing this vision in new educational perspectives and programs on Jesuit university campuses.

III. The Current Need

I have mentioned three weaknesses to which our culture is particularly prone: self-centeredness, individualism, and rationalism. All three are interrelated and we see their interrelationship in the story line they form.

So, in conclusion, I return to the place where I began this talk: to the story. The popularity of story, as well as myth—recall Joseph Campbell’s television series—attests to the felt need of people to overcome the limitations of self-centeredness, individualism, and rationalism. Story, and certainly the Ignatian story, provide the antidote to these tendencies. There is growing recognition of this fact. Let me give some examples.

In an editorial in the *New York Times* (December 27, 1989) Christopher Lasch of the University of Rochester wrote, “The moral bottom has dropped out of our culture. Americans have no compelling incentive to postpone gratification, because they no longer believe in the future.” We see drugs, vandalism, pointless violence, and a psychological existence of almost unbearable pain among the young. If they see no connections between past, present, and future, the blame, Lasch says, must be borne by us adults who “have failed to provide them with a culture that claims to explain the world.” His proposal is for a story.

Once upon a time we told our children stories, drawn from our collective experience, that helped them to make their way in the world. The Bible, classical mythology, fairy tales, and patriotic legends gave them something to live up to. The stories we all had in common . . . served young people as a reassuring background or framework against which their own lives become intelligible. If you take away that background, the foreground fills the whole picture—an insistent “I want.”

Neil Postman says the same thing in his review in the December 1989 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* of Alan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* and E.D. Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy*. He disagrees with Hirsch
that the right set of facts will give people literacy in today's world. Facts abound, Postman maintains; what is lacking is any coherence in the facts, any meaning in life, and therefore any purpose in knowing at all. What is needed, he proposes, is a story.

Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence. . . . [Stories] help us to understand why we are here, and what we need to pay attention to, and what we may ignore. A story provides a structure for our perceptions; only through stories do facts assume any meaning whatsoever. . . . Without air, our cells die. Without a story, our selves die.

Nations, as well as people, require stories and may die for lack of a believable one. . . . A story gives us direction by providing a kind of theory about how the world works—and how it needs to work if we are to survive. Without such a theory, such a tale, people have no idea what to do with information. They cannot even tell what is information and what is not.... The purposes we conceive for learning are tied to our larger conception of the world, and the problems we face, and the way we have developed our story at a given time. (122-23)

Any number of authors are pointing to this need. One is a speaker in this series, Stanley Hauerwas (see, for example, his A Community of Character and, more recently, Christian Existence Today). But Alasdair MacIntyre deserves most credit for giving prominence to the need for and function of story in After Virtue, a book which probes the foundations of several schools of ethical thought. The following is an example of MacIntyre’s appreciation of story and narrative.

In successfully understanding what someone else is doing we always move towards placing a particular episode in the context of a set of narrative histories, histories both of the individuals concerned and of the settings in which they act and suffer. It is now becoming clear that we render the actions of others intelligible in this way because action itself has a basically historical character. It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others.9

This contemporary recognition of the value of and need for story provides Ignatian education with a rare opportunity. This opportunity and challenge was strikingly articulated by Frank H. T. Rhodes, president
of Cornell University, in a keynote address he delivered last June to eight hundred plus educators in the twenty-eight U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities.

He asked, "Can the Jesuit presence in higher education bring us to a new world view, such as that put forward by Teilhard de Chardin? Unbridled specialization is higher education's mortal sickness, leading to atomistic narrowness and incoherence. In the memorable words of John Donne, 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone." How, he asked, can coherence be restored. On what principle?

In response, he cited St. Paul. "Now Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God . . . Every single thing was created through, and for, him. He is both the first principle and the upholding principle of the whole scheme of creation" (Col 1:15 ff.). And then in the concluding paragraph of his address he made this application.

This surely is a principle upon which our present society divides. If there is a guiding strategy to all the Jesuits' efforts, it must presumably be that. If that audacious claim is correct, the map of knowledge has a new orienting compass. It is the systematic mining of that unique lode, the particular implications of that unique event, and the personal exemplification of that unique relationship that have, over the centuries, represented the great strength and unifying power of Jesuit higher education. And it is that same principle which is surely the hope of Jesuit education, and which may indeed inspire all education, now and for the future, here and elsewhere.

As Dr. Rhodes says, "This surely is a principle upon which our present society divides." I suspect that there is also much in my talk upon which many of us here at Georgetown divide--in our stories, principles, and educational implications. That is to be expected. Now is the time to talk about these different views. I would hope that in doing so we would exchange not only ideas and theories, but also our stories and visions, experiences and convictions, desires and fears. This could lead us right into a discernment after the heart of Ignatius. Nothing would be more salutary--or please him more.
Notes


2 Ibid., 26.


9 Ibid., 211-12.

10 Frank H.T. Rhodes, unpublished keynote address at Georgetown University, June, 1989.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.
James P. Walsh, S.J.

Imagining:
A Way of Life

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Imagining is central to the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*. A retreat made according to the pattern Loyola lays down is, precisely, a series of exercises, of various sorts. Meditation is one. It works this way. Ignatius gives the retreatant some steps to take, with the assurance, If you try these steps you will be able to pray. Try it. Put yourself in God's presence. Ask for what you desire (make it specific: here's a suggestion of what might prove useful and productive to ask for). Try asking and see how it feels, whether it fits. Is this me, or am I faking it? If you find yourself not really wanting this grace you are asking for, notice that and ask from there: as someone who has a shallow or purely nominal desire for this gift, as someone who has very limited expectations of receiving it. If you follow these suggestions, you will fairly soon zero in on who you are--the real you--and then God can do something for you. The suggestion to enter into the exercise called meditation is the first step in a series of steps that will lead you to true--that is, honest--praying, and you will find God. Or God will find you.

Another exercise is imagining. Imagining works this way. Ignatius suggests that the retreatant bring vividly to mind a scene in the gospel: the stable in Bethlehem, for example, or the mountain where Jesus is preaching the Beatitudes. But the retreatant is not to be a passive observer, letting the scene play itself out before her mind. Ignatius suggests that the retreatant put herself into the scene, as a participant, as someone involved in the ongoing action. For example, in the Nativity contemplation, the retreatant should imagine himself as a servant in the stable, close to the holy family, listening to their words and watching their faces. This form of imagining leads to a kind of interaction with the characters in the gospel story. For the hour the exercise lasts, one's life and selfhood is caught up in the person and words and works of Jesus.

Notice that there is no fixed or preordained outcome of this imagining. It is an exercise. What comes up in the imagining depends on who is doing it. The only suggestion is to enter generously into the exercise, lending your imagination to God and letting the imagining flow. There is a certain playfulness to it. It is the opposite of discursive thinking. Thinking can never surface the images and feelings deep within us. Thinking, as a matter of fact, is governed by those images and feelings, and is blind to them.

Imagination, then, is central to the *Spiritual Exercises*: only that sort of
playfulness—undirected, unprogrammed, unself-protective—can engage our deeper self in the gospel story, and so allow the transformation of the self by that story and by the person of Jesus.

Much more could be said on the Exercises and the use of the imagination in the Exercises, of course, but my topic has to do with the implications of all this for education and for life.

I. How We Imagine Reality

Let me begin by generalizing the notion of imagination from the Exercises to daily life. To do so, allow me to use an old story. It goes back twenty years or so. Probably most of you have heard it, and as I tell it you will smile in recognition, or maybe roll your eyes in disbelief: Oh no, he’s not going to trot out that old story again. Well, if you know the story there was a time when you didn’t: think back to that time, and how the story struck you when you did hear it. If you don’t know the story, then just follow as I recount it.

A man and his son are out driving and are involved in a terrible accident. The ambulance takes them both to the hospital. The father is not badly hurt but the son has very serious injuries, and needs immediate surgery. The surgeon on duty walks into the operating room, looks at the boy, and says, “I cannot operate on that boy: he is my son.”

Many people are puzzled when they hear this story. It doesn’t make sense to them, and they ask for it to be repeated. Their puzzlement continues. Is the surgeon the grandfather? No. Is the surgeon the stepfather? No. “I give up.” Give up on what? There is no puzzle, really. The surgeon is the boy’s mother.

Notice what happened as you followed this story. As I told it, you were processing it. You were imagining. Those were not just words you were processing, but pictures, events, persons, dialogue. You imagined it all, in response to the verbal indications I gave. You imagined the father, and the son, and the surgeon. If the story left you puzzled (as twenty years ago it left most people puzzled), that was the doing of your own imagination, not the story or the way I told it. There were no tricks in the story at all. Your imagination supplied that male figure in the O.R. greens walking into surgery.

Now consider this. What if I had asked, Are all surgeons men? You would of course have said, No. In your thinking, there are women
surgeons. In your imagination, possibly, there are none; at least the image that popped up as you heard the story didn’t suggest that you think there are. When we speak of a transformation of consciousness, then, we are speaking of more than taking in new, correct information or thinking new thoughts. We are talking about a transformation that involves the whole self: imagination and feelings. If that takes place, we do not need a checklist of things to be listening for when someone speaks of the surgeon in “his” work, or says, the engineer and the challenges that face him. Our imaginations (I hope) have been transformed, and we resent—or at least regret—the failure of imagination we hear so clearly in that kind of language. By the same token, when someone speaks of the typical Georgetown student it is easy to visualize Bridget O’Flynn or Kevin O’Brien. Our imaginations are still locked into past experience, so that names and faces that belong to persons of color may not come to mind.

Let me give another example of how the imagination determines our experience. On the Baltimore beltway one day some years ago a group of Jesuits were driving back from a funeral. One of us pointed out to the driver that we were about to miss the exit that would get us back to Washington. The driver, glancing over his right shoulder, looked to see if he could get to the exit across three lanes of fairly heavy traffic, and made his move. We almost made it, except that one driver in the outside lane sped up when he saw us trying to get over, and blocked us so we had to go on to the next exit. I looked at the expression on his face as he drove past us: resentment, outrage, triumph. I was wondering, “How does he imagine this situation?” Doubtless it says a lot about me, but I thought that he was feeling something like, “That guy is trying to get ahead of me.” And I thought that possibly he goes through life that way, not letting anybody get in line ahead of him, seeing people as his rivals, jockeying for position, trying to crowd him out.

There is a memorable character in The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis. His name is Puddleglum. Here is how Lewis pictures him:

As they drew nearer, the figure turned its head and showed them a long thin face with rather sunken cheeks, a tightly shut mouth, a sharp nose, and no beard... Its expression was solemn, its complexion muddy, and you could see at once that it took a serious view of life.

“Good morning, Guests,” it said. “Though when I say good I don’t mean it won’t probably turn to rain or it might be snow, or fog, or
thunder. You didn’t get any sleep, I dare say.”

“Yes we did, though,” said Jill. “We had a lovely night.”

“Ah,” said the Marsh-wiggle, shaking his head. “I see you’re making the best of a bad job. That’s right. You’ve been well brought up, you have. You’ve learned to put a good face on things.”

“Please, we don’t know your name,” said Scrubb.

“Puddleglum’s my name. But it doesn’t matter if you forget it. I can always tell you again.” ...

“I’m trying to catch a few eels to make an eel stew for our dinner,” said Puddleglum. “Though I shouldn’t wonder if I didn’t get any. And you won’t like them much if I do.”

“Why not?” asked Scrubb.

“Why, it’s not in reason that you should like our sort of victuals, though I’ve no doubt you’ll put a bold face on it. All the same, while I am a catching of them, if you two could try to light the fire—no harm trying—! The wood’s behind the wigwam. It may be wet. You could light it inside the wigwam, and then we’d get all the smoke in our eyes. Or you could light it outside, and then the rain would come and put it out. Here’s my tinder box. You wouldn’t know how to use it I expect?” ...

“Now,” said Puddleglum [who had caught a dozen or so eels]. “Those eels will take a mortal long time to cook, and either of you might faint with hunger before they’re done. I knew a little girl—but I’d better not tell you that story. It might lower your spirits, and that’s a thing I never do...”

Puddleglum is a memorable character because of his very gloomy outlook on life. His sense of reality, and therefore his experience of life, is shaped by the expectation that everything that could possibly go wrong will. That is how he imagines reality. Puddleglum would deny that, because he is unaware of how he imagines reality; look at the last sentence I quote. I suspect that C. S. Lewis was making fun of a friend of his in drawing that portrait. If so, that friend almost certainly failed to recognize himself.

Another example. I had a friend years ago who had a migraine headache. Not headaches: a headache. From birth his head hurt, badly. When he was about fourteen—from a change in hormones, who can say—the headache went away. For the first time in his whole life he was without that awful pain between his ears. At that moment he experienced a powerful change in the way that he experienced life—not least in a sense of what was going on inside other people’s heads. He had always assumed (he told me) that other people’s heads hurt the way his did.
That was life. He never even thought to consider--why would he?--that other people's experience could be different from what he knew, nor that his own experience might be different. That was the way things were. Then, it all changed.

II. Re-imagining Reality

With that example we come to a consideration of what I call re-imagining. In my book, *The Mighty from Their Thrones*, I use a story about a family in Appalachia. A Glenmary missioner visited them and noticed that they trekked down the hollow a couple of miles to get their water. They fetched it in buckets. That was their only supply. But the missioner noticed that in their back yard there was a well. So one day he said, "Why don't you just get your water from the well?" (Was the well dry? Polluted?) Their reply: "Rope's too short."

The priest did what I suppose we all would do, and bought them a longer rope. They were delighted. Now they didn't have to go down the holler to fetch water. They had their very own well in their own back yard.

Some months later, he came through again, and noticed that the family had resumed bringing water in buckets. "What happened to the well?" he said. "Rope broke," they answered.

I like to use this story as a double parable, to show both the way the imagination of that family worked and the way our imaginations work as we hear it.

For the family, the trek to get water was simply the way things were. As has often been pointed out, part of the culture of poverty is that it locks people into one way of seeing and doing things, and there is no possibility of envisioning anything else.

For us, as we hear the story, our imaginations work a certain way also. We instinctively identify with the outsider. It never occurs to us to identify imaginatively with the family. Yet if we were to do so, the story could serve as a parable for us: we are that family. In some respect or other, we are like them locked into a certain sense of things, of the way things are, and it takes an outsider (ultimately, the gospel message) to open us up to that fact and to the alternative possibilities.

We can learn to re-imagine, though. The Appalachian family could not; my friend did, once the migraine went away.
Here is another example of how we can re-imagine our experience. Handicapped people use a term in talking to people who are not: they invite us to think of ourselves as "temporarily non-disabled." That sets you back. "Oh. I can see and hear and walk but it could all be different."

Another example. In 1986 there was an exercise on the Georgetown campus. For a day, petit apartheid was in force. The point of the exercise was to enable people here to experience the plight of the nonwhite majority in South Africa. The racial minority on campus had privileges not enjoyed by the majority. At Georgetown that day, the people of color on campus were the privileged group. The whites were subject to various sorts of restriction, allowed to use only certain restrooms and entrances and stairs. The exercise gave us a kinaesthetic image of what it is to be subject to apartheid. Most people who took part in it did so willingly and in a playful spirit, but it provided a powerful lesson nonetheless. It caused us to re-imagine our situation and, more than had been the case, to be able to enter into the experience of people in South Africa.

I have often thought that it would be useful to have a "Back to the Future" Day here, when campus life would revert to 1955. Only seniors, no undergraduates, would be able to use Healy stairs and the main entrance to the Healy building. There would be no women on campus of course, at least in the College. Students would wear coats and ties. Jesuits would wear cassocks and birettas. We would go "Back to the Future" in the classroom as well. At a certain point, whenever he or she chose, the professor would take five or ten minutes and continue to present whatever material the class happened to be studying, but the content would suddenly be what it was thirty-some years ago. In biology, chemistry, biochemistry (did the field exist in 1955?), economics, biblical studies, what would be presented would be very different from what is taught now. In English classes there would be no talk of deconstructionism or constructivism; the New Criticism would be regnant. I think that would be an effective teaching tool, if suddenly we were transported back in time and got a kinaesthetic image of what people in various disciplines were learning, how they were talking, what their presuppositions were. It would certainly relativize the claims the several disciplines make: professors were teaching material then with just as much assurance as they do now, but most fields now are quite different, not just in their content but in their procedures and paradigms as well. Further, such an exercise would bring into sharp relief something fundamental about learning.
Learning is not simply absorbing factual material. It involves the play of inquiring minds capable of asking, "Is that really so?" "Let's see where this leads, or that." It is a matter of being invited into a different world, with no assurance about where one will end up. At its heart is what I am calling re-imagining.

III. "Fact"

There is another model of learning. Quite possibly it is the dominant model in American education. Learning consists of mastery, conquest, dominating: taking in and gaining control of a body of information and knowledge, mastering skills, and so on.

This understanding of education is captured nowhere more memorably than in the second chapter of the first book of *Hard Times*. Dickens presents Thomas Gradgrind standing before a classroom of children:

He seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away.

[Mr. Gradgrind calls on "girl number twenty," and asks her name.]

"Sissy Jupe, sir," explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.

"Sissy is not a name," said Mr. Gradgrind. "Don't call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia."

"It's father as calls me Sissy, sir," returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsey.

"Then he has no business to do it," said Mr. Gradgrind. "Tell him he mustn't. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?"

"He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir."

[Sissy's father was a trainer of horses in the circus that was then in town. Notice that Sissy has grown up around and with horses all her life.]

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

"We don't want to know anything about that, here. You mustn't tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don't he?"
"If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir."

"You mustn't tell us about the ring here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horsebreaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker. Give me your definition of a horse."

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.)

"Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!" said Mr. Gradgrind...

"Girl number twenty possessed of no facts in reference to one of the commonest of animals! Some boy's definition of a horse. Bitzer . . ."

"Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth." Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

"Now, girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, "you know what a horse is."

The third gentleman now stepped forth.

"Very well," said this gentleman, briskly smiling, and folding his arms. "That's a horse. Now, let me ask you, girls and boys. Would you paper a room with representations of horses?"

After a pause, one half of the children cried in chorus, "Yes, sir!"

Upon which the other half, seeing in the gentleman's face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, "No, sir!"--as the custom is, in these examinations.

"Of course, No. Why wouldn't you?"

A pause. One corpulent slow boy, with a wheezy manner of breathing, ventured the answer, because he wouldn't paper a room at all, but would paint it.

"You must paper it," said the gentleman, rather warmly.

"You must paper it," said Thomas Gradgrind, "whether you like it or not. Don't tell us you wouldn't paper it. What do you mean, boy?"

"I'll explain it to you, then," said the gentleman, after another and a dismal pause, "why you wouldn't paper a room with representations of horses. Do you ever see horses walking up and down the sides of rooms in reality—in fact? Do you?"

"Yes, sir!" from one half. "No, sir!" from the other.

"Of course, No," said the gentleman, with an indignant look at the wrong half. "Why, then, you are not to see anywhere what you don't see in fact; you are not to have anywhere what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact. . . . This is a new principle, a discovery, a great discovery," said the gentleman. "Now I'll try you again.
Suppose you were going to carpet a room. Would you use a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it?"

There being a general conviction by this time that "No, sir!" was always the right answer to this gentleman, the chorus of No was very strong. Only a few feeble stragglers said Yes; among them Sissy Jupe.

"Girl number twenty," said the gentleman, smiling in the calm strength of knowledge.

Sissy blushed, and stood up.

"So you would carpet your room—or your husband's room, if you were a grown woman, and had a husband—with representations of flowers, would you," said the gentleman. "Why would you?"

"If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers," returned the girl.

"And that is why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?"

"It wouldn't hurt them, sir. They wouldn't crush and wither if you please, sir. They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy—"

"Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn't fancy," cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. "That's it! You are never to fancy."

"You are not, Cecilia Jupe," Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, "to do anything of that kind."

"Fact, fact, fact!" said the gentleman. And "Fact, fact, fact!" repeated Thomas Gradgrind.

"You are to be in all things regulated and governed," said the gentleman, "by fact. We hope to have before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use," said the gentleman, "for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is Fact. This is taste."2

What the purveyors and commissioners of Fact find so offensive about fancy is that it can lead us into new worlds. "Fact," though, lends itself to mastering. We are in control. We are comfortable. We set the limits. We are the ones who apply the yardsticks. We are the ones who
are judging. But with fancy, with imagination, there is a kind of venturesomeness and a playfulness that is just the opposite of control.

Our reaction to the invitation to be led into other worlds tends to be one of resistance. Yet that resistance is very useful in itself, because part of education is locating our resistances, where we are uncomfortable, where we are not sure of our footing and are unwilling to venture. It is possible then to choose to acknowledge our resistance, and to go on to choose to accept the invitation to be led into those other worlds. Those choices give us a taste of freedom.

IV. Experiential Completeness and the Other

Part of what is liberating about imagination is its concreteness. The surgeon you imagined was a man or a woman. It was not an amorphous parent. Imagination is always concrete. In the exercise on the Incarnation in the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius asks us to imagine the persons of the Most Blessed Trinity looking down on the face of the earth. This is how he describes it:

> the persons [on] the face of the earth, in such diversity, in what they wear and in what they do; some white, some black; some in peace, others at war; some mourning, others laughing; some healthy, others sick; some being born, and others dying.

If the capacity for imagination is developed, if it becomes a habit of mind and of selfhood, then when we hear certain terms of art or analytical categories, we cannot but supply some kind of objective correlative to body forth those abstract terms. What do “strategic balance” or “geopolitical factors” mean in the lives of real human beings? How do such categories translate into the flesh and blood experience of “the persons [on] the face of the earth, in such diversity”?

The biblical tradition also invites us in very concrete ways into another world, the world not only of the Lord God of Israel, but of the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the oppressed. Exodus tells us, “Do not oppress the stranger. You know the heart of a stranger: you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” You know how it is to be treated that way. Do not treat others that way. Leviticus tells us, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Put yourself in his place. Think how you would react in those circumstances and act accordingly. Imagination is liberating because it gets us out of ourselves, into the concrete experience of the other.
V. Re-imagining the University

The previous talk in this series, by Father James Connor, was called "An Ignatian Re-vision of the University." Father Connor suggested that as a community we could perform a kind of examination of conscience playing off the University statement on goals and objectives, that foundational document that is supposed to define what we are all about here at Georgetown. He pointed out that Ignatius has us notice in prayer and in imagining: notice where we are, notice where those resistances are. So, in thinking about Georgetown and re-imagining this institution, we would notice our resistance to community--our individualism--and acknowledge or confess it. We would talk to one another to find out what we believe. What is the operative model or paradigm of teaching, of learning, of education, of community living? Where, in fact, do we put our resources? What is the allocation of money and of space? What is the concrete pattern of choices that makes us what we are? What, concretely, do we take seriously? Our operative choices betray what we think about ourselves, what our self-understanding is, what our values are, despite what we say or profess. Is that operative model or paradigm what we want it to be? So, we would gather evidence. We would note this expenditure and that allocation of space. We would note such and such an evidence of a priority. Then we would see, in all honesty, what we are. We would test everything in the light of what we profess to be or want to be and what we really do.

VI. Learning and Living

Education is a matter of imagination, not the mastery of facts. It consists precisely of being led beyond where we would be comfortable and, as the first moment in that process, noticing and facing honestly our resistances to what is new and strange and alien. It brings us out of ourselves into the experience of the other.

I want to suggest that there can and should be a congruence of learning and living. We learn skills in acting courses, in biblical literature, in English and history. Those skills, of imagining and re-imagining, can come to be practiced in daily life. For example, in roommate problems there is a whole hermeneutic at work. If I grew in wisdom I would be able to see that what I hear in what my roommate says, or the way I treat my roommate, is subject to the same kind of "noticing"--the same kind of
appropriation of operative self-understanding, of the way I imagine the world—that I bring to bear on what I deal with in the classroom or in reading. If in fact we did develop imagination in the way I am suggesting, we would be able to enter generously into the experience of others, and that, surely, would put an end to a lot of roommate problems. We would become capable of friendship. There would be an openness to the other as other. Institutionally, the University could help bring this about by introducing an element of accountability or responsiveness: institutional invitations to re-imagine. When someone approaches the RA or RD to demand a change because of roommate problems, that can be made a learning moment, an occasion for the student to be invited into the experience of the roommate and not just see things in terms of his or her own experience.

In the work of the Committee on Speech and Expression, this was the principle that emerged as central. It comes down to this: you never say, “Shut up!” You say, “Let’s talk!” If someone says something that you find stupid or offensive, you do not bring in the Inquisition. You do not pull the plug. You say, “Let’s talk!” Every moment, then, is the beginning of a conversation and the pursuing of a conversation. The only way to violate that policy, then, is a sort of hit and run approach: anonymous letters or posters, a refusal to be drawn into conversation and, therefore, into the realm of the other.

VII. Conclusion

Education can be seen as the process by which we can be made aware of the ways in which we imagine the world and the ways we act out that sense of reality; it is the process by which we are invited into new worlds, the world of others in their otherness, in the concreteness of their diverse experience, and so re-imagine our own lives. It is the process by which we are freed to go out of ourselves and live with others in friendship. Let me close where I began, with prayer. C.S. Lewis writes:

[God] must constantly work as the iconoclast. Every idea of Him we form He must in mercy shatter. The most blessed result of prayer would be to rise thinking, “But I never knew before, I never dreamed...!”

3
Notes


Power and Responsibility: Changing Paradigms of Virtue
Like many talks at Jesuit institutions, mine has three parts, in this case arranged in a musical form known as ABA. I begin with some free-wheeling associations, loosely grouped under the heading “Images as a Context for Theorizing about Virtue,” since images and the imagination are central to Ignatian spirituality, as Father Walsh’s lecture on “Imagining: A Way of Life” brought out in November. Then, in part B, I launch into a theoretical discussion, developing the topic of the lecture’s subtitle, “Changing Paradigms of Virtue,” and not dealing very explicitly with the themes of power and responsibility for want of time, though power and responsibility are the subtext of everything I shall say. Finally, in the end I return to some free-wheeling images and associations, proposing a research topic that connects this ethical theory with practical questions of student life. My working title for this very sketchy conclusion is “Changing Patterns of Vice.”

A. Images as a Context for Theorizing about Virtue

For many reasons it is a pleasure for me to speak at Georgetown, including the fact that I learned some of the most important lessons of my life here, in a building now known as Nevils. (Though at the time I was first being taught, thanks to a strategically placed blow, to do such vital things as breathe and use my voice, the building was known as the Georgetown University Hospital.) It was fitting that decades later, when I was preparing to train this voice to enter the conversations of Catholic theology and ethics, I should return to Nevils to sweat out a summer over theological German before starting my doctoral work at the University of Chicago. Thanks to that summer course I did pass the Chicago German exam, and this makes me all the more pleased to return today and say a few words, if not in theological German, at least in theological English.

I want these words to help in your own theological investigations, which essentially involve coming to understand your lives in their ultimate context. My emphasis on “Changing Paradigms of Virtue” sounds abstract, but I hope to focus things concretely and leave you with images and ideas that may catalyze some insights. Having begun on a light note with the image of my neonatal yell, let me grow more serious as I recall an image seared into memory last November, the death scene of someone I knew from graduate school days in Chicago, someone I never knew to
raise his voice, though apparently in the end he did. Or so I read in the *New York Times* for November 28:

In her deposition, Mrs. Barrera said she heard shooting and doors opening and closing at about 1 a.m. She went to her window, which had an obstructed view of part of the Jesuits' residence.

"I could hear soft voices without being able to distinguish who was talking," the witness said. Then she made out the voice of the Rev. Ignacio Martin-Baro . . .

"It was an injustice; it was carnage," she heard him say . . .

She said she then heard more gunfire, then silence. There were no more voices, she said. She said she then began crying.

The previous evening, she recalled, she had asked Father Baro why he did not leave the country.

"I have work to do here," he had replied.

So--an image of birth, an image of death. And what lies between? Ethics is about the something that lies between. It is in the context of knowing that our experiences have these boundaries that we ask: What is the good life and how can we live it? It is in this context that we hold up models of women and men who seem to have brought it off well. We hope to learn from them, since life is limited and we only get to do it once.

If my lecture has a thesis, it is this: among the many causes that led to Ignacio's death is the fact that by one set of standards he was a good priest and by another he was not. Ignacio is not unlike Martin Luther King in this respect. And, I believe, our ideas about what makes someone a good priest or a good minister are rather close to what we think any good Christian should be like, though being a cleric may up the ante a bit. But I want to be clear on one thing, which is that in itself Ignacio's murder is no more atrocious than was that of Celina Ramos or her mother, who kept house for the Jesuits. Ignacio, in fact, would not want attention drawn to himself; his research interests were much more concerned with Celina and her kind than with clerics. Ignacio, I suspect, would be displeased that I am saying so much about him, and my only defense is to admit that everything I say must finally be accountable to Celina and her sisters and brothers, though whether I can explain how today remains a question. For now, I'll move to ethical theory, and invite you to consider the possibility that what is at issue in the debate about changing ideals of virtue--what makes someone a good Christian, a good Catholic, a good
priest—has bearing on what happened in San Salvador in November and also in Memphis in 1968.

B. Changing Paradigms of Virtue

My analysis assumes that Christian understandings of value and virtue developed over time, that is, they are historical, and this historicity entails that continuing change should not surprise us. If this is the case, the interesting question becomes the normative one: What changes should be promoted by Christians? What configuration of values and virtues is needed for today’s world, and how should we contribute to the process of transforming inadequate notions of value and virtue for the sake of God’s realm? Before normative questions can be resolved, however, it is necessary to gain some understanding of how “virtue” is related to the individuals who comprise society and to the society that shapes individuals.

Virtue: Historical, Social, and Narrative-Dependent

In the past, questions of personal virtue were discussed in isolation from topics of social ethics. Virtue, however, is a thoroughly social phenomenon, for groups of all types are distinguished by the traits and dispositions they foster in their members. Besides recognizing the historicity of virtue, then, an adequate theory will appreciate its sociality as well. This involves acknowledging that an agent’s social context determines to some degree the ideals for character he or she will develop. Societies promote ideals through such means as laws, rewards and punishments, rituals and prayers, and above all, narratives. Myths, legends, histories, biographies, fables, dramas, and other works of fiction convey clear messages about what sorts of characters are valued or despised. Whether or not individuals personally embody the traits prized by the group, they generally internalize the values contained in important cultural myths and judge their own worth in light of these common norms. Narrative communicates and reinforces the values and virtues esteemed by a culture. Moreover, narrative also functions to criticize views of value and virtue once their favored status in a society is seen as ambiguous. Take, for example, the value of obedience to authority. When it became known that this was the defense that the Nazi war criminals offered at Nuremberg after World War II—"I was only following orders"—
society had to rethink whether obedience deserved quite the place it had enjoyed in the then prevalent paradigm of virtue, and it is not surprising that narratives satirizing military discipline, such as *Catch 22*, came to prominence in the postwar period. Meanwhile religious thinkers were working in a more systematic way on the problem of overemphasis on obedience, with the result that some of them contributed to a shift in emphasis away from obedience in favor of responsibility.²

In stressing the social dimensions of virtue I do not mean to suggest that every agent in a society will adopt a uniform set of ideals, for especially in modern pluralistic cultures, value options are instantly competing for adoption by individuals, with agents choosing among this plurality and *to some extent* designing their own value paradigms. Certainly, ideals for character vary among members of any society. But the element of choice is far from completely autonomous, because social realities strongly influence an individual's sense of value and virtue, establishing the limits within which personal freedom operates. It is now generally recognized that the human person is constitutively social. In other words, we would not develop as human beings in the absence of social relationships; our very selves are structured by the values bound up in the linguistic and mythic patterns of the cultures in which we are raised. And narratives are especially efficient at shaping us because they express the world view and ethos of a group in a way that at once engages emotions, intellect, and imagination, effectively conveying the message of what is valuable and what values should be given priority.

Among contemporary Christian ethicists, Stanley Hauerwas is known for emphasizing the historical and social dimensions of virtue, and for attending to the role that stories play in shaping communities and individuals. His position is summarized in the claim: "Our capacity to be virtuous depends on the existence of communities which have been formed by narratives faithful to the character of reality."³ Hauerwas stresses the primary function of narrative in relation to values and virtues, namely, its role in forming communities and selves. But the norm of adequacy to reality in his theory suggests the importance of the secondary function of narrative, that of correcting the limitations of operative myths by critiquing inadequate ideals for character. John Barbour demonstrates this second, critical function in his 1984 study, *Tragedy as a Critique of Virtue*, in which he combines insights from Hauerwas, classics scholar James Redfield, and his own literary investigations to explain the
role played by tragic novels in critiquing dominant ideals of virtue. Such works as Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* and Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, Barbour demonstrates, portray the human cost of attempting to live out certain ideals for character to their fullest, thus inviting reconsideration of societal norms.  

I shall build on what Hauerwas and Barbour have said by describing a conflict between two competing paradigms, or exemplary sets of ideals for virtue, which are now in tension within Catholicism. One of these sets of ideals is captured in the term "patriarchal," and the other can be called "egalitarian-feminist." My assumption is that the latter is gaining ascendancy in Catholic consciousness, and this accounts for the increasingly defensive articulations of the patriarchal paradigm by those in power who espouse it. After laying out this typology, I shall illustrate the two functions of narrative with respect to paradigms of virtue--namely, shaping selves and critiquing ideals when they have gone too far--by discussing two stories. The first is a brief report of a recent beatification ceremony, and the second is a longer work of fiction, *The Good Conscience* by Carlos Fuentes. In this novel Fuentes uses a genre linked with issues of character formation, the *Bildungsroman*, to critique the constellation of attitudes concerning Christian virtue that I term the patriarchal paradigm.

**Current Conflict of Catholic Paradigms for Virtue**

The debate concerning "authority and dissent" in the Catholic Church, evident recently in the United States in Vatican disciplinary action against Professor Charles Curran of Catholic University and Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle, has not often been analyzed in relation to Catholic ideals for character. But these cases from 1986, and others like them, are symptoms of the tension between competing understandings of virtue, for what is at issue is precisely what it means to be a "good Catholic." Whether implicit or explicit, each side has a different normative constellation of values and virtues, lining up with either the patriarchal paradigm or the egalitarian-feminist one. Keep in mind, of course, that any typology is abstract and artificial, and reality is always more complex than theory.

Before I sketch this typology, I should say a few words about my use of the terms "patriarchal" and "egalitarian-feminist." Patriarchy literally...
means father-rule; I am using the term in a more specialized, ethical sense to designate social patterns and structures of domination and subordination, especially (but not exclusively) those flowing from unjust attitudes toward females. Whereas “patriarchy” is institutional or structural, the sin of “sexism,” or failure to respect the full humanity of females, is attitudinal. I employ “feminist” here in a broad sense to indicate a position that involves (1) a solid conviction of the equality of women and men, and (2) a commitment to reform society so that the full equality of women is respected, which requires also reforming the thought systems that legitimate the present unjust social order. Given this understanding of feminism, it is, strictly speaking, redundant to use the term “egalitarian-feminist,” but I do so in order to distinguish the type of feminism I have in mind from other sorts with which it might otherwise be confused. I hope it is clear that my analysis does not see males as such as “the problem.” On the contrary, I presume that men and women both suffer under the injustices of patriarchy, although in different ways and to different degrees. I would like to see increasing numbers of both sexes claim the ethical stance of feminism, for not to do so is to be complicit with its opposite, namely, sexism. And finally, it should be noted that there is bound to be great variety among feminists in terms of levels of commitment, degrees of explicitness of commitment, and opinions regarding specific problems and their solutions.

A patriarchal paradigm for virtue has long dominated Roman Catholic thinking. Its shape has been affected by the otherworldly spirituality, the theological and social patterns of domination and subordination, the misogynism, and the body-rejecting dualism characteristic of Western culture. This paradigm understands virtue to involve the control of passion by reason and the subordination of earthly values to heavenly ones. It articulates many ideals for character, but tends to assume that these are appropriately assigned greater emphasis according to one’s gender and social status. All Christians should be kind, chaste, just, and humble, but women are expected to excel in charity and chastity, men are trained to think in terms of justice and rights, and subordinates of both sexes are exhorted to docility and meekness. For various reasons this paradigm came to function in a way that saw chastity as the pinnacle of perfection, absolutizing this virtue as defined by physicalist interpretations of “natural law” and stressing its necessity for salvation. In this model charity and justice may be said to be more important, but in reality
chastity is most important. This claim might be denied by defenders of the patriarchal paradigm, but such denial is unconvincing in view of their continued insistence that there is no "smallness of matter" where sexual sin is concerned,\(^8\) whereas violations of charity and justice admit of varying degrees of gravity.

Biblical grounding for the patriarchal paradigm comes in part from interpreting the beatitude "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8) in a way that internalizes sexual taboos and establishes sexual purity as a focal sign of religious devotion. For this paradigm, "purity of heart" is interpreted in a narrow, sexual sense, rather than in the broader sense of singleness of purpose. The paradigm is based on a metaphor of domination, which emphasizes control of the lower by the higher; the unruly body must be dominated and tamed by dispassionate reason. Further scriptural warrant is found in the Pauline declaration, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection" (1 Cor. 9:27). The rigid emphasis on control from above extends beyond sexual matters to include social ones as well; hence the high value placed on obedience in this model. In fact, the idea of hierarchical control of the "mystical body" closely parallels the premium placed on domination of the flesh by the will in traditional understandings of chastity. It would seem also that the tendency to apply military "solutions" to political problems may be a secular manifestation of the same paradigm.

In contrast to the anthropological dualism of the patriarchal paradigm, the egalitarian-feminist paradigm understands reason itself to be embodied, and women and men to be fully equal partners in the human community. Instead of control, the notion of respect for all created reality is fundamental to this paradigm, which values the body and the humanity of women and promotes gender-integrated ideals for character. Rather than understanding power as control over, this paradigm operates with a sense of power as the energy of proper relatedness. Discipline is still valued, but it is less rigidly understood. Ideals of love and justice are not segregated into separate spheres of personal and social ethics, with responsibility for realizing them assigned according to gender; instead, love and justice are seen to be mutually reinforcing norms that should govern both sexes equally.

Perhaps because of the exaggerated attention given by advocates of the patriarchal paradigm to sexual purity, advocates of the egalitarian-feminist model tend not to emphasize the virtue of chastity per se, though
a reinterpretation of this virtue may be inferred from what they have
written on love and justice, and also on particular sexual questions. The
newer paradigm sees sexuality as a concern of social justice as well as of
personal virtue, and it attends particularly to the beatitude, "Blessed are
they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt.
5:6). It recognizes that the focal sign of religious devotion cannot be the
directing of one's energy to controlling bodily impulses and other people,
but rather must involve a stance of ongoing commitment to the well-
being of oneself and others, which has material as well as spiritual com-
ponents, and which entails building social relations of respect, equality,
and mutuality.

Presently, the egalitarian paradigm is capturing the imaginations of
the devout, through a process involving many factors. Among these
factors are new narratives and new critiques of old narratives. To illus-
trate this aspect of the dynamics of change, I turn now to an example of a
narrative designed to foster the patriarchal paradigm, and show why such
stories are losing their power over contemporary believers.

A Narrative with Fading Power

Throughout its history the Catholic Church has communicated ideals
of character by designating certain persons as saints or "blessed ones." To appreciate how stories of the saints have supported the patriarchal
paradigm of virtue, consider this brief story from the New York Times for
August 16, 1985.

KINSHASA, Zaire, Aug. 15--Pope John Paul II today beatified a
Roman Catholic nun who chose to be killed rather than surrender her
virginity. The nun, Marie Clementine Anwarite, demonstrated the "pri-
mordial value accorded to virginity" and an "audacity worthy of martyrs,"
the Pope said. He said he forgave the man, a Col. Pierre Colombe, who
killed the nun during an incident in Zaire's civil war in 1964. (A4)

How do contemporary believers respond to such a report? My own
reaction testifies to major changes in one Catholic's perception of values
and virtues, for I responded very differently to this story than I did to a
similar one decades earlier. St. Maria Goretti was canonized in 1950,
when I was in elementary school, and I recall being greatly influenced
during childhood and adolescence by the story of her repulsion of the
sexual advances of the youth who stabbed her to death in 1902. Here in this teenage victim, Maria Goretti, was an exemplar for girls, a model of virtue whose concern was not for her physical well-being but rather for the spiritual values at stake. A biographer quotes her as declaring during the encounter with her assailant, "No, God does not wish it. It is a sin. You would go to hell for it," words that reveal much about the values Maria espoused and the religious world she inhabited. This was a world where sexual pleasure outside of sacramental marriage, if deliberately indulged, was always grounds for damnation, a world where death was preferable to yielding to rape. The Vatican’s selection of this young woman for canonization in 1950 was clearly an effort to articulate the value of premarital abstinence in a society that was questioning the absoluteness of this norm. Moreover, the saint’s preeminent concern for the spiritual welfare of her assailant (“It is a sin. You would go to hell for it”) functioned to reinforce the emphasis on a young woman’s responsibility for the sexual behavior of a dating couple typical for Catholic education of the day. None of this troubled me consciously during the years when the examples of Maria Goretti and the Jesuit “patrons of youth” (John Berchmans, Aloysius Gonzaga, and Stanislas Kostka—none of whom ever indulged a sexual thought, if their hagiographers are to be believed) were held up as the ideal of holiness. Gradually, however, if one outlives these teenage saints, one’s notion of heroic virtue may change. The extent of the transformation in my own case was evident when I reflected on the Anwarite beatification five years ago.

Several items about this news report disturbed me. Paramount was the flagrant injustice of the basic situation of attempted rape and actual murder. This situation is faced frequently by women around the globe, with all too many suffering one or both aspects of the threatened evil: forced sexual contact and death. Moreover, I now know that unjust patterns of relationships between the sexes contribute to the frequency with which women experience such predicaments, and that schooling in so-called “feminine” virtues of docility and submissiveness to male authority increases the likelihood that a woman will suffer this violence.

Also disturbing is the explicit value statement, “the primordial value accorded to virginity,” with its clear implication that a woman’s life is of lesser value than a physical condition that is not typical for the majority of mature women of all cultures. Marie Clementine’s virginity was, to be sure, “consecrated virginity,” and the religious significance of this should...
not be minimized. Nonetheless, the aspect of formal religious dedication should not obscure the basic fact that a woman was lifted up as a model for the emulation of the faithful because “she chose to be killed rather than surrender her virginity.”

Now any person’s right to physical integrity, privacy, and sexual autonomy is a high value. But is this value greater than that of the person’s life? To be sure, the threat of death is not necessarily removed by a woman’s submission to rape, but if we assume that some virginal victims are presented with two real alternatives, the Anwarite beatification explicitly raises the question of whether rape is a greater evil than death.

But is this to put the question wrongly? One might object that the chief value at stake in these instances was not virginity per se but rather God’s will. There is point to this objection insofar as the question of subjective culpability or merit is concerned, for the formal value of God’s will is preeminent for believers. The obligation to follow a certain conscience is exceptionless. But to recognize this formal value does not answer the substantive question concerning what God “wills” a woman to do when threatened with death if she does not submit to rape. Answers to this question can hardly be universal or absolutely certain, for as with other ethical decisions, the right choice must be discerned in view of the relevant circumstances, values, and principles involved in each case. This leads to further questions: Is such overriding emphasis on sexual “purity” a good thing? Is it right to emphasize one response to the threat of violent attack by a rapist (“Take my life, but not my virginity”) by idealizing it to the extent that virginity assumes a “primordial value” for females, one greater than their own lives, with the result that other responses, which might be equally moral, are ruled out of consideration by devout women? The answers to these questions bring one to the point where concerns about virtue and action intersect most conflictively in contemporary Catholicism because they hinge on the issue of discerning God’s will, and on the question of what constitutes the basis for claims of the hierarchy to have certain knowledge on all matters of sexual ethics.

Furthermore, these stories invite questions about what they imply concerning the nature of rape. Do they recognize that rape is primarily an act of hostility and aggression, or do they contribute to the prevalent and inaccurate myth that somehow a victim derives pleasure from being seized and “taken,” thereby reinforcing the tendency to blame the victim of this crime? Furthermore, what does the lack of attention to the social
causes of male sexual aggression imply? One might have hoped that by 1985, if not 1950, church leaders would recognize that past teachings about the "unnaturalness" of masturbation and homosexuality and the "naturalness" of rape—these very classic teachings based on inadequate Aristotelian understandings of human reproductive biology—feed into the insecurities of young males and contribute directly to patterns of seduction and rape. Finally, why would any woman prefer death to the violation of her virginity? Such a choice on a woman's part is largely a function of her socialization; it makes sense in light of the ideals for character dominant in her culture, values she has appropriated to govern her decisions.

The Anwarite case clearly shows the influence of culture and narrative on character. Early in the history of Christianity, the biblical emphasis on sexual purity among the Hebrews, the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity, beliefs that Jesus avoided sexual activity, and emphasis on eschatological virginity combined with a body-rejecting dualism present in Greco-Roman culture to yield an ethos that encouraged the development of persons who saw their own bodies as the locus of a contest between the powers of good and evil, with goodness demanding a vigilant campaign against one's sexual inclinations. Over the centuries new stories entered the culture—stories of virgin martyrs, ascetic monks and nuns, repentant profligates, and the like—all of which joined with legal practice and an otherworldly eschatology to create a world where a decision to die rather than lose one's virginity made quite good sense.

A person growing up in such a world understands that an ideal character chooses no sexual pleasure before marriage and strictly limits it within marriage. Such a person tends to judge the self according to this norm, whether or not he or she achieves it. Now such a view of chastity may have done more good than harm in the past. What is clear today, however, is that an ideal of character with this notion of chastity as its linchpin is no longer accepted uncritically by Christians, although a clearly delineated alternative understanding of this still important Christian virtue has yet to be articulated fully. Catholic society today is reassessing its ideals of character with respect to sexuality, even though the transformation has not been the focus of much attention in discussions of virtue among theorists of the moral life. Instead, Catholic moral theologians have concentrated on gingerly questioning former absolute prohibitions of certain sexual acts without unleashing a plague of ecclesiastical
penalties on their lives. We are at a moment in history when one understanding of chastity is increasingly recognized as inadequate and when a more adequate one has not come fully into focus.

At this juncture, however, we can recognize that the task of moral theology in bringing a new interpretation of chastity into an egalitarian paradigm of virtue has been made easier because of ethical reflection already done by two groups working mainly outside the circle of traditional moral theology. These are feminist scholars of religion and literary artists, and particularly novelists, who have been testing various ideals for character and virtue ever since the novel was invented.

A now classic feminist critique of ideals for virtue is Valerie Saiving [Goldstein]'s article "The Human Situation: A Feminine View." Saiving argues that traditional Christian understandings of sin and virtue reflect experiences typical for those males who enjoy some status and power in society. For such men, pride has been recognized as the most harmful inclination, with temptation to sensual indulgence at others' expense also a recurrent danger. Thus exhortations to cultivate humility and self-sacrifice are appropriate. But to universalize this analysis, and especially to apply it to women, is to exacerbate the moral problems most of them face. For given the disparate experiences of the two sexes, the temptations of women tend to be different from those of men. Instead of pride being the greatest danger, for women the chief temptation is to fail to have a centered self, to yield up responsibility for one's identity and actions to other persons and environmental factors. Whereas generally speaking men are tempted to abuse their power, women tend to abdicate their possibilities for using power properly by surrendering it for the sake of approval and security. What women in patriarchal society need are not exhortations to humility and self-sacrifice, much less stories of saints who preferred death to rape. Women need instead new models of virtue and new stories that communicate them. I look forward to the day when such narratives are characteristic of popular Catholicism. In the meanwhile, a second resource for the constructive work still to be done by storytellers and theologians is the large body of serious fiction that critiques the inadequacies of the patriarchal paradigm of virtue. A particularly interesting example is an early work by the Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, The Good Conscience, a story that has bearing on the November 1989 massacre at Central American University.
Chastity and the Psychology of Social Injustice

Originally published in 1959, *The Good Conscience* provides an incisive analysis of the ambiguity of Catholic teaching and practice with respect to values and virtues. A prominent theme in this narrative is that of the cooptation of Christian moral energy in the service of an unjust social structure. Because in the culture depicted in this novel Christian morality has been reduced to preoccupation with sexual purity, the wealthy Mexican class into which the story's hero, Jaime Ceballos, is born succeeds in distracting itself from the poverty and injustice surrounding it, and to which its own defensive greed and narrow, unchristian understanding of family contribute. The novel depicts Jaime's transformation from a sensitive, idealistic child, who befriends a fugitive labor organizer and a Marxist Indian youth, into a hardening egoist who will follow in the footsteps of the hypocritical uncle whose values he has always despised. At the book's end we find Jaime dealing with the guilt he feels over having failed to show love and respect for his parents, by visiting a brothel after his father's funeral. There he commits a sin that can be more easily named and absolved in the confessional than the pride and insensitivity to others that have become part of his character. Thus by reducing the moral life to a routine of sexual sin and confession Jaime comes to have a "good conscience," as the work's ironic title puts it. Earlier scenes establish the connection between affirming one's own embodiment and rejoicing in the mysteries of creation and God's love. They also show how such feelings are linked with a disposition to care for others, whereas alienation from the body is associated with alienation from other people. Indeed, through the lives of Jaime and his family, Fuentes shows how moral theology and pastoral practice emphasizing sexual sins contribute to neurotic patterns of individual behavior as well as to social injustice. With the rest of life removed from the arena of sin and grace, the injustice of social systems and cultural values never comes to attention.

*The Good Conscience* demonstrates just how the patriarchal paradigm of virtue is implicated in some of the most besetting problems of Catholicism today: injustice to women and the blindness of the middle and upper classes to matters of social and economic justice. And from there, to draw out explicitly the connection with the atrocities in El Salvador during the 1980s, it is a short step to defending one's sense of family and property with whatever means it takes. We see in this novel what rigid
patriarchal authority has done to one family system, and we can infer what it has done and is doing to the church. Jaime's was a home in which the truth could not be spoken, and where sexuality above all was a taboo subject. What Fuentes' narrator says of this home brings to mind how pastors and moral theologians alike have been silenced on matters of sexuality: "The first rule in this family was that life's real and important dramas should be concealed."^{12}

There is more to this argument, but given the hour I must move to my conclusion, which will briefly treat the matter of "Changing Patterns of Vice," and where I again consider some images close to home.

A. Changing Patterns of Vice

In the last few days we have learned more about who is responsible for the deaths of Celina and Ignacio and the others at Central American University. Thanks to the courage of Mr. Christiani, we have some names. But who are they, the men behind those names, those brutes who committed such atrocities? I believe that they are our brothers, and that their evil deed has many causes, not the least of which are some attitudes about the good life that are rather widely shared. We make a mistake, at any rate, if we demonize these soldiers, and fail to ask whether we are in some way implicated in their brutality.

I have an image of Georgetown from the days when I was in high school in Silver Spring. I picture a scene I never witnessed, but which my friends said went on at Georgetown parties. It's the image of students stacking up empties as high as they could, no doubt in competition with each other. Perhaps the scene was exaggerated in the telling. Maybe Georgetown parties then and now were as innocent as the wedding feast at Cana. But let's suppose some of these parties resemble ones I've heard of at Carleton, where student drunkenness is often a problem, and now and then so is sexual irresponsibility, sometimes accompanied by force. So here they are: the classic student vices. Is the paradigm changing? Ought it to change? Will our changing paradigm of virtue influence the dorm and the apartment?

For want of time I must be very sketchy here, and refer you to a more developed suggestion I made in a paper for Boston College last spring, whose title doesn't give a whole lot away.^{13} But let me suggest that if Georgetown University, with splendid medical, science and humanities
faculties, wants to make its mark in interdisciplinary research, why not focus in creative new ways on the problems of substance abuse, addiction, drunkenness, and, for good measure, sexual irresponsibility, measured not by traditional taboos but by the human consequences of these behaviors? The research might go forward under the hypothesis that drunkenness and sexual irresponsibility are functions of the patriarchal understanding of virtue. Mr. Christiani has bravely named those he believes are responsible for killing Celina and Ignacio and the others. Let some Catholic university be brave enough to probe the psychological and ideological factors that enable boys to grow up and behave the way these soldiers behaved, including the religious factors analyzed so brilliantly by Carlos Fuentes. The point of this research I am proposing is not to get things "under control," to force the young to sobriety and sexual abstinence, though it would be good if it could help them learn to choose their pleasures wisely, in ways appropriate to their station in life and consistent with their deepest values and beliefs. After all, it seems to me that although drunkenness and sexual irresponsibility are quite wrong, they are not entirely irrational behaviors. Rather they are skewed responses to a faulty scheme of things, inadequate ways of deadening the pain. Why is it that rape is compulsively associated with the violence of war? What is the pain that students try to forget about with chemicals? Let the research go forward, even if it means implicating some men who have a great deal of power.

In honesty, though, I must call your attention to what happened on the other side of Rock Creek Park a few years ago, when a man got into quite a bit of trouble for refusing to cover up the findings of his research. And although his own bishop praised him as an exemplary priest, and never retracted that praise when the judgment about his teaching came from Rome, Father Charles Curran is unlikely to do any more research as a professor at any Roman Catholic university under the present pontificate.14 And this, it seems to me, is an enormous loss for us all.
Notes


9 M. Buehrle, s.v. “Goretti, Maria, St.” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1967), vol. 6, 632.

10 One wonders what Augustine would have thought of the language used to praise Marie Clementine, for his insight in *City of God* I, 18 is entirely absent from the report of the ceremony: “[B]odily chastity is not lost, even when the body has been ravished, while the mind’s chastity endures” (trans. H. Bettenson; Baltimore, 1972), 28. Despite the body-rejecting dualism implied in his analysis, Augustine is correct to recognize that chastity involves a disposition of the subject which endures despite bodily violation. His analysis betrays his male bias, however, especially in the assertion that an act of rape “perhaps could not have taken place without some physical pleasure on the part of the victim” (I, 16: 26). It can only be lamented that in the late twentieth century Catholic women were being exhorted to an even more repressive understanding of chastity than that of the fifth century Augustine. For an informed contemporary ethical and pastoral analysis of these matters, see Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983).

12 Fuentes, 26.


Jesuit Education and the Cultivation of Virtue

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In this talk I will explore three questions. Each is complex and intricate in and of itself and each raises other questions and issues that go far afield of my topic of Jesuit education and virtue. The three questions are the following:

What are the essential components of Jesuit education?

What does it mean to understand the moral life as being a life of response to one’s vocation?

Why are so many students at Jesuit as well as non-Jesuit universities preoccupied with concern for their careers and their pre-professional training?

While these might initially appear to be unrelated questions, each is profoundly related to the other. Together they represent pieces necessary for constructing a coherent understanding and vision not only of Jesuit education but of Catholic higher education as well. Answers to these questions will also clarify some puzzling and vexing issues that concern many of us who take seriously the challenges of higher education today.

My comments will be divided into four parts. First, I will articulate what I understand to be some of the essential components of a Jesuit vision of education. Part II will explore the meaning of “vocation,” to many, perhaps, an archaic concept connected to the idea of a religious ministry. I will reconstruct the idea of vocation, employ it as a moral category, and propose that it is important for helping us understand what we actually do, or perhaps ought to do, in Jesuit education. Part III will address the issue of careerism or preprofessionalization, a phenomenon that in my mind presents one of the most severe challenges to Jesuit education today. I will attempt to understand this phenomenon by analyzing both its symptoms and its roots. I will suggest in Part IV what strategies might emerge from the idea of vocation for combatting the debilitating effects of careerism.

I wish to propose that one of the primary goals of Jesuit education ought to be to instill in the students of our universities the skills and abilities to respond in their own unique ways to God’s call to them for the realization of their own authenticity.
I. Characteristics of a Jesuit Vision of Education

Any attempt to articulate some of the defining characteristics of Jesuit education must begin with the figure of Ignatius Loyola. Surely, merely to summarize my own list of those essential features of St. Ignatius’ vision of education lacks sufficient defense and rationale to pass rigorous academic muster. But since my purposes here are not historical but rather constructive, I will do just that.¹

My contention is that the key components of a Jesuit vision of education include the following:

1. A sacramental view of life in the world; that is, a belief that God is present in all things and that all human activity, indeed all relationship, is imbued with a sense of meaning and purpose in that God’s grace (God’s intentions and purposes) is at work in human activity.²

2. A commitment to developing in the students a “taste for the other,”³ that is, a recognition that God intends them to be responsible as a community. Others are to be treated with respect as ends in themselves and not as means to other ends. Enabling students to develop a sense of justice is an essential ingredient of Jesuit education.

3. The priority of the notion of service in the doing of God’s will. Ignatius uses the term “giving oneself over” as a way of expressing his idea that one’s mission is to give oneself in service of God’s redemptive plan. Jesuit-educated youth are to be schooled in a belief that theirs ought to be a life of service to others.

4. The integral relationship between the life of faith and the life of the mind. Intellect and reason have prominent places in an Ignatian vision of life. They do not contradict the life of faith; rather, faith and reason complement one another. Faith and reason are the hallmarks of a Jesuit university, though, as many will attest, the relationship between them is at times difficult.
5. A commitment to the education of leaders, those who will occupy positions of power and influence in the world in all walks of life. Ignatius believed that through everyday action in the world the life of faith finds concrete expression.

6. A priority on the importance of the interior life or inner journey of faith. The *Spiritual Exercises* attempt to develop the ability to cultivate the life of faith or the spiritual journey. They enable individuals to explore and grow in their understanding of how God is present in their lives, of how they might come to know God in a deeper way through a reflection on their own personal experiences, and how to make choices in light of God’s presence.

7. The centrality of discernment in the development of knowledge and faith. Philip Keane defines discernment in the following way: "a process of decision making in which a person has several alternative choices and determines which of these choices is God’s will through a reflection on the stirrings or movements or responses which the person subjectively experiences vis-a-vis the possible alternatives."

Discernment is a way of enabling individuals and communities to make choices in the present in light of the past, choices that promote human and spiritual growth in the future. The ability to discern leads to an understanding of the direction and path that one is to follow to be faithful to God’s purposes and intentions.

The characteristics of a Jesuit education have a number of things in common: all are concerned with process in some way; all center on the process of detecting God’s movements and presence, of responding to God’s call in action, and of using the full range of one’s abilities to realize one’s own true self in the fullest possible way. Since life’s meaning resides in being true to what God has called one to be, Ignatius’ view of education provides a structure and process by which one can come to know God’s will in light of each individual’s own uniqueness and at the same time in light of the larger community and society of which one is a part.

What do these words mean in the concrete? As I reflect on my own
Jesuit education, one particular experience stands out that crystallizes the essence of the characteristics that I have summarized. I was a senior in high school at the time and was in the process of applying to college and making plans for what I thought would be a program in prelaw (whatever that is). One day in informal conversation with one of my Jesuit teachers I was asked what seemed to be a rather simple and direct question: What was I planning to do with my life? In response, at that point I launched into a description of the things that I was planning on the immediate horizon. First there was college, where I would major in political science, then law school, then practice of law in either private practice or some corporate setting. Along the way there was surely marriage and family. And on and on and on. My Jesuit teacher listened to this litany of future plans, looked at me again and said, “But you haven’t answered my question. What are you planning to do with your life?” Assuming we had some kind of communication problem here, I then began my litany again. “I’d like to go to Holy Cross College, then to law school and so on.” But as I babbled on I realized that there was more than just a communication issue here. I was not understanding his question at all. He later amplified a bit. “What I am really asking you is what kind of person you desire to be? What values you believe in and want to live your life by? What decisions and commitments you think you are being called to make in your life? Who God is in your life and what place your relationship with God has in your understanding of who you are as a person? What is the larger context of your choices and your plans?”

My Jesuit friend was asking me questions of a depth and a scope that I had never been asked before. I was for the first time being asked questions of ultimate significance and meaning. I was being asked questions about the direction and foundation of my life’s plan. I was being asked to consider the “God question” in a real and concrete way. These questions have stayed with me in a powerful and haunting way ever since that encounter twenty-five years ago.

As I explore this experience further, the idea of vocation strikes me as an appropriate lens for understanding. What I was really being asked was what was my vocation. How was I to understand the larger context of my life, and what choices would best manifest who I was and who I was called to be? How did I understand God’s action in my life and what was God calling me to be? My contention is that Jesuit education is most itself when
it asks students in its institutions these kinds of questions. Through asking the larger questions of meaning, purpose, and direction of students' (and faculty's) lives, Jesuit education realizes its own charism most effectively. To ask these kinds of questions is to ask questions about vocation. Who are you going to be in light of who God calls you to be?8

What needs to be spelled out in more detail is exactly what form this vocational questioning takes. I surely am not suggesting that all who teach and work in Jesuit institutions ought to become pseudo-Jesuits, to be religiously active on campus, or for that matter to be committed Christians. Rather, my contention is that these questions are woven into the fabric of a university—in the conduct of daily activities, in what Alasdair MacIntyre calls the “practices” of the institution. They are questions that permeate the curriculum, the kinds of decisions that are made about budgets and resources, decisions about student life, decisions about who gets admitted, hired, and promoted at the institution. Jesuit institutions need to be in all their manifestations institutions of vocational inquiry.

II. Jesuit Education and the Idea of Vocation

“Vocation” is rarely used in contemporary parlance: for some it conjures up ideas of a calling to a life of religious ministry; for others it has overtones of quaintness or irrelevance.

A “vocation” quite literally is a calling. In a religious sense, the calling is from God. Several theologians who have thought about the concept of vocation suggest how it can help one understand the focus of Jesuit education.

Karl Barth writes:

Vocation refers not just to one's work, and not merely in relation to the common good of citizens but to the whole of the particularity, limitation, and restriction in which every man meets the divine call and command, which wholly claims him in the totality of his previous existence, and to which above all wholeness and therefore total differentiation and specification are intrinsically proper as God intends and addresses this man and not another. It is the place of utmost responsibility where one stands before God, one's specific and situated determination with respect to one's stage in life, one's special historical circumstances, personal aptitude, and finally one's sphere of ordinary everyday activity. From this situation, one may live freely, for God and for the neighbor.9
In Barth’s sense, the ethics of vocation “reaches a sort of limit, capturing the whole of what one is and has become as the basis of ‘where one stands’ before God in readiness for future service in obedient love.”

Walter Brueggemann defines vocation as “finding a purpose for being in the world that is related to the purposes of God.” Brueggemann says:

To view humans as shaped for covenantal living transposes all identity questions into vocational questions. We move from the question Who am I? to the question Whose am I? We move from the question Who am I in relation to all these significant others in whose eyes I see myself reflected? to the question Who am I in relation to the Creator, Ruler, the Redeemer-Liberator of the universe. Eventually from this perspective, all questions of identity become questions of vocation.

For James Fowler, vocation is the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership. This response involves the “orchestration” of leisure, relationships, work, private life, public life, and resources one stewards, and puts all at the disposal of God’s purposes in the services of God and neighbor. By orchestration, Fowler says,

I mean something like the artistry involved in blending the special qualities and range of a wide variety of musical instruments so that the resulting composite is beautiful and richer than the sum of its parts. This orchestration is not grim planning and studious, ascetic control—though in parts it may involve both. What I am trying to convey is more like the motion of dance, or the disciplined freedom of theatrical improvisation, or the responsive creativity of good conversation, in which all the participants are really “all there.”

Each of these descriptions of vocation captures some aspect of the idea that I believe to be at the heart of an Ignatian vision of education. As my Jesuit friend twenty-five years ago understood, to make choices about oneself in the most authentic way requires one to see oneself in a context that transcends a narrowed focus on the I/me in a particular time and place. Vocation challenges one to envision one’s own path and direction in the context of its ultimate meaning and significance as well as in the context of the larger community. “Vocation language” provides a means of bridging the oftentimes dangerous gap between individualist
and collectivist conceptions of personhood. It attempts to integrate the past, present, and future of one’s life with some coherence and guiding sense of purpose and consistency. There is a breadth and a scope to the concept of vocation that enables a person to move beyond limitations of self, narrowness of perspective, and limitations of gender, race, ethnic origin, and time.

What might this commitment to vocational inquiry look like in a Jesuit institution? As I indicated earlier, my contention that vocation is the heart of the mission of Jesuit education does not require that one become a campus minister or assume a pastoral mode. Rather vocation takes shape in many ways in a university:

- In the way that questions of ultimacy, ultimate context, meaning, and purpose are posed; in the questions, frameworks, modes of analysis, and resources that are employed in the many disciplines that make up a university; in the way students are taught and encouraged to think and feel about issues.¹⁵

- In the style of analysis that is used in teaching and research in pursuit of topics of academic interest. For example, how open a discipline is to considering a variety of ways of exploring issues and alternative modes of analysis is an important issue for educational consciousness. What issues are chosen to be explored in the classroom and laboratory and what evidence is acceptable for marshalling rational arguments and justifications?

- In the kinds of questions that students and faculty are encouraged to ask about the assumptions and presuppositions that undergird what they are studying and reading. Are they taught to analyze the paradigms that inform their outlooks and the outlooks and ideas that are being presented to them?

- In the way the curriculum is structured. Exposure to a wide range of intellectual problems is an absolute necessity for education for vocational consciousness to avoid the always nagging pitfalls of prejudice and ideological bias.

- In the creation of an environment of intellectual and spiritual
curiosity both inside and outside the classroom. I have heard some critics assert that many Jesuit colleges do not have vital intellectual communities with students who have an intrinsic interest in ideas and issues and are anxious to engage in conversation about these issues. Vocation entails the cultivation of environments of intellectual discourse.

- In the way that the worship life of the community reflects the nature of the mystery and those “compelling objects of attention” that draw our loyalty and call forth our response and commitment.¹⁶

- In the way that questions of privilege and justice are raised in the context of the intellectual and spiritual community.

To make my case, I realize I would need to elaborate in some detail. For now, however, I wish only to propose that vocation offers promise as an important category for construing the mission and purpose of Jesuit education.

Of course, for many the primary connotation of vocation is the idea of career, profession or job. Most people, if asked what they understood as their vocation, would begin talking about their line of work or their professional advancement or something along those lines. This understandable confusion raises a set of issues that present a profound challenge today to those in Jesuit education who seek to create an environment where ultimate questions are asked and encouraged. I refer to what many call the Crisis of Careerism.

III. The Crisis of Careerism

A. The Symptoms of Careerism: A Descriptive Approach

Scenario 1. It is the day after I have just returned a set of exams in my “Introduction to Christian Ethics” course. A student comes to me asking if I will reconsider the B+ I have given him. He is filled with anxiety and disappointment, and somewhat arrogantly requests that I demonstrate to him why he deserves a B+ and not an A.

I begin to probe a bit, focusing for a moment not on the grade and test
immediately at hand, but on the larger question. Why does he feel so intensely about his grade? What does the mark represent to him? What propels his anxiety and tension? Conversation reveals that several forces are at work in the life of this twenty-year-old. Stiff competition for grades prevails among his peers. He needs to meet his parents’ expectations that he excel, expectations which he has internalized. Finally, there is the competition born of attempting to gain credentials for admission to the prestigious law or medical school, or the offer from the right management training program.

When I push the conversation to the next level by asking the student why he wants to do that graduate work, or meet the burdensome expectations of others, discussion becomes stymied. The answers to the “why” questions that probe the deeper levels of explaining his behavior are less forthcoming. The reasons and motivations for his actions are less clear. In further conversation I ask the student about his future. He has a plan—a well-delineated plan. First college, then the “right” graduate school, then the “right” job. The distinguishing feature of these goals is their concern with financial success and security, access to power and influence, sufficient leisure and personal satisfaction, and prestige in the marketplace. He also has firm plans for marriage and a family. These goals are assumed as givens and are not the result of extensive conscious choice which reflects his preferred values.

When I ask him what his personal future goals are he answers, “To be successful, to have security, to be able to afford to do what I want, to have a good wife and family, to be relatively problem-free.” When I ask about his fears for the future, he is at first speechless. Then, after some time he speaks. He fears most that he won’t be able to acquire and achieve all the goals that he set out for himself or that have been set out for him. He fears that the well-laid-out and definite plan will not come to fruition. He fears that he will fail in his aspirations. A B+ represents in his mind perhaps his first taste of failure.

Scenario 2. In my class on “Christian Ethics and the Professions,” I ask students to write a vocational autobiography. In it I ask them to cite and trace the main influences that have shaped their decisions for a career or a profession. The purpose of the assignment is both to prod them to think about their career choices and to initiate a process of personal reflection through which they begin to see the patterns and influences that operate in their life choices in general.
The results of this project are revealing. Most students are intrigued by the thought of looking at the past's influence on their present, yet find the project difficult in part because of their inexperience in this type of thinking. But more telling is the fact that very few have given much conscious critical thought to such a major life choice as career. For many the reason for their career choice is that their mother, father, or some other relative was a professional and it seemed "OK to them." Striking to me in these assessments is the lack of critical exploration of alternatives to the accepted career path. Students speak as if there existed a fixed set of roles presented to them by their parents and the society at large, and they have uncritically accepted the boundaries and the terms of the choices presented. An alarming lack of critical consciousness and originality marks these autobiographies. Moreover, an urgency seems to bear down on the students that makes an open-ended and relaxed exploration of alternatives impossible.

Each of these scenarios represents a piece of a puzzle presented to us in higher education today. If these are the symptoms, what are the causes?

B. What Careerism Is Not

To level the charges of "self-centeredness" and "greediness" at today's college students is superficial. Students' manifestations of self-interest and their quest for security are symptoms of problems and not causes in themselves. In large part students' decisions and orientations are not born of their own ill will or lack of regard for the well-being of others. Their choices are responses to a set of conditions that appear threatening to today's adolescents. The economic environment, for instance, makes real the possibility that today's college students will not be able to achieve the economic quality of life that their parents enjoyed. Family patterns are unpredictable and seem bewildering to adolescents and young adults caught up in the constant flow of their own changing family structures. In the religious environment long-standing norms of authority, morality, and religious practice are being challenged, questioned and oftentimes ignored. And in our political system, election to public office depends almost wholly on media appeal and "single-issue" positions which satisfy the most powerful constituencies. The careerist response in our students is a symptom of a deeper social disorder.
C. The Roots of Careerism

Careerism must be assessed at two levels—the level of symptoms (the surface level) and the level of causes (the deeper reasons).

At the symptom level careerism commits adolescents and young adults to a course of study which is seen as a direct vocational preparation for a job, a career, or a professional school. This aim typically entails developing technical skills in preparation for success in the career marketplace. Rigidity and urgency regarding these career commitments combine with an unwillingness to let their sights stray far from the means necessary to reach the desired goals.

At a deeper level, careerism is a set of responses born out of fear, confusion and anxiety in the face of conditions that appear frightening to the adolescent. The careerist response strains to establish some certainty and security in a world which seems to provide little of either. Many students I speak with feel that the culture around them is shifting and that what counts as “valuable,” “important,” and “worthwhile” is in a state of flux. Students speak of having very few things to “hold on to” and which they can count on to provide a healthy, happy, and worthwhile life.

The conditions to which our students are responding are many and varied:

**Economic Conditions.** The debt incurred by our students is enormous.\(^{17}\) Accumulated debt affects not only their choices of careers and professional studies but it also affects their decisions about what they might do once they have entered into a profession or career. The high cost of economic goods (housing, health services, child care, education, etc.) challenges anyone in today’s economy who seeks to construct a viable economic plan for the future.

**Political Conditions.** Students observe dramatically changing political patterns and often respond with apathy and cynicism. Politics has little resemblance to the theoretical picture students learn in government class. They question the moral integrity of their leaders; political decisions seem to be driven either by the media or by the pocketbook rather than by the honest and open involvement of people. Recent political trends, particularly the
activity of the New Right, emphasize the priority of the individual over the well-being of the group.\textsuperscript{18} Public policy today creates structures that bolster the primacy of the individual.

\textit{Family Patterns}. I am convinced increasingly that the primary motivation of the careerist student is the search for security in the midst of changing and bewildering family patterns.\textsuperscript{19} The number of our students who have experienced their parents' divorce and are living in single parent and step families has risen dramatically. Whatever the causes, and my remarks here ought not to be construed as a moralistic judgment on these issues, the changing family is a reality. I am struck by our students' fear, confusion, and anxiety about this situation (together with an anger and the determination to change it).

\textit{Authority in Religious Institutions}. The credibility of religious institutions is severely tested today. In the Roman Catholic context, post-Vatican II changes have provided occasion for creatively exploring new and diverse patterns for religious belief.\textsuperscript{20} But at the same time the changes have created havoc in a tradition that historically treasured its regularity, uniformity, and consensus. Appeals to religious authority, particularly its institutional manifestation, can no longer be counted upon to provide a persuasive and compelling reason for religious and moral behavior. Students' religious reactions vary from a rejection of religion as personally irrelevant to strict identification with the dictates of institutional religious authority.

\textit{Moral Relativism}. As many professors of ethics find, the predominant mode of students' moral reasoning runs like this: "Rights and wrongs are matters of preference and depend on the situation. The main moral norm is to be as free as possible and not hurt others. It's important to be value-free and tolerant. What is moral is what is practical. Honesty and authenticity are important, but the most important virtue is the freedom to make one's own choices unencumbered by the dictates of the surrounding world." The development of the idea of autonomy in ethics has a long and complex history. It is sufficient to mention
here that its contemporary manifestation takes the form of securing the good of the individual prior to the good of the community. For our students this translates into a modern form of the sixties cliche, “I've got mine,” or “You do your thing, I'll do mine.”

These complex social and cultural conditions are elements of the confused social ethos. Inherent contradictions in the American ethos are at the root of our students' confusion, and if Jesuit education is to address careerism adequately it must provide an opportunity for students to scrutinize critically the content of the ethos in which they live.21

D. Locating the Moral Problem

The moral dilemmas inherent in careerism are not immediately apparent. Certainly, there is nothing inherently wrong with developing a career plan and taking the steps necessary to implement this plan. There is surely nothing immoral about wanting more security and predictability in a swiftly changing and ambiguous world. Students can't be faulted for their desire for the good life even if it does sometimes reflect an exaggerated self-concern or materialism. However, careerism does manifest some fundamental problems which raise profound ethical and theological issues, including:

• A deep sense of confusion that lurks not too far below the surface of our self-confident and assured careerist students. A sense of desperation can be detected in the urgency that many students feel about their choices. “I don't know what else to do and I don't have time to explore the alternatives.” An intense search for security and definition pervades our students' decisions. Confusion and the alienation that accompanies the search are the real issues confronting students.

• The lack of critical consciousness invested in students' choices is troubling to theologians whose discipline is founded on a critical assessment of the human experience of faith. Critical scrutiny requires undertaking a challenging analysis of one's position in favor of more appropriate alternatives. Careerism shows little
broadth or scope of consideration in making life choices.

• Careerism manifests what Erik Erikson calls a “premature over-commitment to an identity.” For Erikson, the aim of the adolescent and the young adult years is to give shape and definition to an identity. Erikson defines identity as “an integral unity of one’s gifts, potential roles, and image of the self and the capacity to be faithful to the choices and directions that one has freely chosen without risking a losing of the self.” This identity is achieved over a course of time only as the young adult makes choices about the roles (values, political and religious outlooks, vocations) that he or she will play in a cultural and social tradition. This process takes time. There is a danger that the adolescent will choose before he/she is ready, or that he/she will become overwhelmed or paralyzed by the multiple role possibilities that society presents.

One can also detect overcommitment in our students’ career choices. Often their zeal and enthusiasm for a career choice are extreme. It is as if the student’s whole life takes on meaning and purpose by identifying with a type of work, a profession, or lifestyle. To be sure, enthusiasm and zeal are healthy hallmarks of most adolescent and young adult behavior. At issue here is whether the exaggerated nature of their choices might mask more unsettling and disturbing issues that they would rather not face.

• There appear to be few links between the content of our students’ individual life-projects and the projects of our social and communal life. A fundamental premise of Christian theology is that the well-being (salvation) of the self is integrally related to membership in the community of the people of God. The task of Christian social ethics is to assert the primacy of the self-social bond in both conceptual and practical ways. Yet the connection between the self and the community is not evident in the materialist and self-centered choices of students.

• Perhaps the most telling problem with careerism for Christian theologians is that its values run counter to the moral claims
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that are at the core of the Christian message. Excessive self-focus and the single-minded attainment of material satisfaction are antithetical to the imperatives to love and to be just that are at the heart of the biblical message, embodied in the gospel teachings of Jesus Christ. The other-orientation of the Christian message clashes with the self-orientation of careerism. This proposition is complex and requires fuller explanation, but it is not unfair to suggest that careerism is profoundly anti-Christian at its core.

IV. Jesuit Education, Vocation, and Careerism

I have suggested that the idea of vocation is the appropriate focal point for understanding Jesuit education. I contend as well that it will enable us to develop an adequate response to careerism. If Jesuit higher education is to provide a way of challenging careerism, certain fundamental strategies which derive from an understanding of the concept of vocation can be employed.

1. **Develop an awareness in students that the issue of careerism affects not only their own individual futures but also the future of the social order itself.** Through investigation students can discover that career choices involve not only their career success and personal satisfaction but also the futures of others in the society in which they live. Careerism is an issue of values, of human meaning and worth, of fulfillment and happiness, of social bonding, an issue with moral, religious, economic, and political ramifications for the entire society.

2. **Get students to explore the conflicts and anxieties that lie just below the surface of their concerns.** To respond effectively to the problem of careerism, teachers must address the students’ own questions and experiences. These must be the departure points for the student’s process of self-realization. Only by effectively enabling our students to explore the conflicts, contradictions, and ambiguities of their experiences can one hope to enable them to find adequate solutions and to make authentic personal choices.
Students can best be engaged with the problematic aspects of their careerism by focusing on the points of “breakdown” or conflict with which they are familiar, provided, of course, that they can face the difficulties involved. For young adults this effort requires mustering the courage to look squarely at their dilemmas and to acknowledge the anxiety that accompanies them.

An example. In my courses on sexual ethics, or in discussion of ethical issues in marriage and family, it is particularly useful to “engage the topic” by critically exploring ways in which sexuality, family, and marriage break down today. At a time when many of our students’ parents are divorced, at a time when many of our students have experienced profound ambiguity about their own sexual experience, and at a time when marriage is experiencing chaotic upheavals which affect our students deeply, students have no difficulty in finding experiences of conflict in their lives.

Having students use these experiences as points of entry into ethical topics can be an effective mode of pedagogy. This approach leads to a level of involvement and interest that provokes the students’ insights at a serious and profound level. These experiences are the “boundary” or “limit” situations that students confront which propel their maturation process.

3. Develop an awareness of the integral relationship between personal and social reality. I am struck by the sense of isolation that many students articulate and the concomitant lack of concern for the welfare of the larger group or society. Developmental theorists suggest that the adolescent’s struggle is to move from an outlook in which “the other” becomes incorporated into one’s world view, love being the paradigmatic expression of mutuality and reciprocity. Careerism indicates that this movement is somewhat stultified at present.

An adequate response to careerism must provide “bridge” categories for use in intellectual analysis. Bridge categories link the personal and social dimension. These categories of analysis cannot be reduced to purely individual terms that fail to take into account features of social reality, or to a purely communal
perspective that is disconnected from profoundly personal and particular human experience. The concepts of character and story, as well as the concept of vocation, serve as examples of such “bridge” categories. They are constitutive both personally and socially and defy polarized reductionism in their usage.

4. **Provide an environment and structure a mode of inquiry in which critical questioning is valued.** In such a climate there is no urgency to “get the answers,” “make the decision,” or “resolve the dilemma.” To impart the insight that investigation requires critical inquiry and patience—not just answers—can be a major contribution of the liberal arts component in the undergraduate curriculum. The attributes of inquiry and patience, missing in the careerist rush to action and goal attainment, can and must be introduced into the student’s range of consideration. My own discipline, theological ethics, is uniquely suited to achieve this task and the theological component of the curriculum offers one appropriate place and time for this important endeavor.

**Conclusion**

The above strategies are but the first attempt to give form to ideas inherent in the concept of Jesuit education as vocational inquiry. There are many possible concrete ways that students can be encouraged to construe their future commitments to be faithful to their unique calls. To create institutions that manifest this vision takes the imagination and creativity of all who live and work in Jesuit education. My purpose here has been to offer categories with which to think about the call to be faithful to Ignatius’ vision and ultimately to God’s call.
Notes


2 For a helpful introduction to the idea of sacrament, see Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983).


4 While the original vision of Ignatius was not to engage self-consciously in the education of future leaders, Ignatius believed that certain young men had the potential to be influential in the education of others and in the carrying on of God's purposes. Historically, the superior quality of Jesuit education became recognized by the leaders in particular societies who then wanted their children educated in Jesuit schools. I am indebted to the insights of my colleague at Georgetown, James Walsh, S.J. for my understanding of this issue.


8 The idea of vocation is developed in relationship to modern theology and ethics most imaginatively in James Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984).


12 Ibid.


14 Ibid.
Several articles by Michael J. Buckley, S.J. provide a thoughtful foundation for thinking about the nature of Jesuit education. Among these are: “The Catholic University as Pluralistic Forum,” in *Thought* 46.181 (June 1971); “The University and the Concern for Justice: The Search for a New Humanism,” in *Thought* 57.225 (June 1982); and “‘In Hunc Potissimum . . .’ Ignatius’ Understanding of the Jesuit University,” in *Readings in Ignatian Higher Education* 1.1 (Spring 1989). The ideas in this essay have been generated in large measure by the many conversations that I have shared with Michael Buckley over the course of the past ten years.

The idea of ethics as requiring vision appropriate to seeing the world in clear ways is developed in some depth in Iris Murdock, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).


For one of the few sustained and comprehensive analyses of the state of the contemporary family, see Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

The problem of authority in the Roman Catholic context is analyzed with some insight in T. Howland Sanks, *Authority in the Church: A Study in Changing Paradigms* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974).

The concept of ethos is an essential category for undertaking analysis in social ethics. The work of Gibson Winter uses the idea of ethos and provides a foundational statement of the relationship between social theory and ethical analysis. See his *Elements for a Social Ethic* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

The work of social psychologist Erik Erikson provides a masterful analysis of the process of psychological growth in the adolescent and young adult years. See his *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968) and *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968).

Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 261.

The issue of the relationship of the individual and community is a central topic in contemporary discourse in social ethics. Much of the debate revolves around response to the work of Robert Bellah et al. See Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
Honor at the Center

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We live at a time when ethics has become big business: medical schools hire medical ethicists, business schools hire business ethicists, Congress has an ethics committee and schools and universities are supposed to teach values. As a theologian trained in ethics, I suppose I should be happy about this development. Suddenly, people think that there are experts in ethics who can take up the slack for what seems to be missing. As far as I am concerned, however, the hiring of ethicists to teach in medical schools and business schools or to lecture to you about what it means to be ethical or to teach values is to try to cure the illness with but another form of the disease. Let me elaborate. I object to the term “value.” In our culture, values denote personal preferences in contrast to “objective” facts. But as Alasdair MacIntyre has reminded us in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, facts, like telescopes and wigs for gentlemen, are seventeenth century inventions, and I think wigs and facts are seventeenth century inventions we ought to leave behind. As I do not believe in facts, so I do not believe in their contrast, values. Nor should universities be concerned about either.

So I felt in a bit of a quandary about how to approach a talk to you about what it might mean for Georgetown to be a Christian university, and, in particular, one that is sponsored by the Jesuits. If I engaged in a jeremiad about the sad condition of the modern university, that jeremiad would include most Christian universities and, in particular, those that have been influenced by the church. For all I know, that jeremiad would include Georgetown. In *Christian Existence Today*, in my essay “How the Christian University Contributes to the Corruption of the Youth,” I attacked the current notion that colleges and universities should be about the Socratic function of allowing students to make up their own minds, of helping students to be better informed. This assumption is celebrated in the movie, *The Dead Poets Society*, whose protagonist is a teacher who intends to help students make up their own minds. My own view, however, is that the view of education he represents is completely corrupt, because most students do not have minds worth making up.

I realize that I just insulted you, but it is important that I confront your self-perceptions. I cannot think of anything that invites you to be more in the conformist mode of the American proposition than for you to believe that you should make up your own minds. That attitude defeats rather than sustains education. It undercuts the formation of
people of virtue capable of withstanding the confrontation with truth. Making up one's mind has nothing to do with being educated.

Most colleges today approach their curriculum as though it were a market for an elite group of consumers—their students. Students come to the university to consume ideas, and the teachers present various alternatives in class. If asked, “Which one do you think is true?” the teachers say, “That is not my task. I’m just trying to help you to understand what the options are so that you can make up your own mind.” If the assumption that students are fundamentally consumers who can make up their own minds is not challenged, students so educated will never be able to stand up against capitalist manipulation. Capitalist interests are served when students believe that they are free consumers who get to choose between a Sony or a Panasonic radio. It never occurs to them that this choice is imposed. They are just taught to call such choices “freedom.”

The assumption that we should train students to make up their own minds is deeply rooted in modernity’s understanding of morality—that is, that ethics has to do with decisions. Therefore most ethics courses today are shaped around questions such as, “What would you do in these circumstances?” These decisions are supposed to be made by that most fictitious entity of modernity, the individual. Such a view of morality is fundamentally at odds with those like me who believe that moral life is about the formation of virtuous people by tradition-formed communities. Perhaps this is what Georgetown University is about or could be about.

To elicit this sense of morality which might make Georgetown different from its secular counterparts I am going to talk about one of the essential practices that makes a university morally coherent: I am going to talk about honor and honor codes and why honor is intrinsic to the university. I am going to make six contentious claims that I believe to be true, and I hope to convince you that you also believe they are true. Insofar as you embody these truths in your life, we can hope that moral discourse is possible, even in universities that teach you to make up your own mind.

My six contentions are these:

1. Cheating is a more serious crime than murder for those engaged in the activities of learning and teaching.

2. There is honor among thieves and among Marines, but that does not mean that honor is a bad idea.
3. The fact that we have an honor code or the fact that we should have an honor code does not mean that we have a corrupt community or institution.

4. If you do not cheat, that is, if you do not use someone else's work on a test and do not use material in a paper without due acknowledgement, that does not mean you are a person of honor—but it is not a bad place to start.

5. The most compassionate thing that you can do as a Christian is to turn someone in for cheating.

6. If you think that you can cheat while you are in school because this is just preparation for the real world, you will never be prepared for the real world because it doesn't get any more real than this.

Those are my six contentions. Now I want to explain each one.

1. "Cheating is a more serious crime than murder for those engaged in the activities of learning and teaching."

Note that I did not say "for colleges, universities, or schools," all of which many or may not have to do with learning and teaching. Learning and teaching certainly require institutional support, but they are activities that may be more or less supported or corrupted by their institutional embodiments. Learning and teaching are activities which any good community requires, and while they often take place in schools and universities, they also occur in construction trades and farms. Alasdair MacIntyre has defined such practices as "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to and partially definitive of that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence in human conception of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended." Though this account may not provide for the appropriate sense of purpose as part of a practice, it nonetheless nicely suggests how we became more than we are by being part of such practices.
Teaching is a practice and learning is a practice because we believe that we have something worth passing on from one generation to another. Such passing on may be something as basic as one bricklayer teaching another bricklayer how to hold a trowel in order to spread mortar, or one person taking another through Plato’s *Meno* to understand whether virtue can be taught. Inherent to these practices is learning how to pass on shared judgments, how to give back what we have learned and so indicate that we have got it. Therefore, initiation into the knowledge of the past presumes willingness to be exposed to judgment in order to know whether one has it right or wrong.

To be initiated into a craft, an apprentice must learn from the teacher, and then from continuing self-education, how to identify mistakes in applying the standards recognized to be the best available in the history of that craft. Learning a craft is tricky; apprentices must learn to distinguish what in particular situations is really good to do from what only seems good to do. I am thinking of things like learning to pot. It may well be that some of the most important courses one can teach at a university are pottery and auto mechanics.

You could correctly surmise that I am not an advocate of liberal arts education as something intrinsic to Christian universities. Indeed, I do not like the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge. All knowledge that is interesting is practical and draws upon a deep community interest. So the craft analogy is meant in a straightforward manner. By thinking of education as a form of craft, moreover, we can better appreciate the role of the teacher.

As Alasdair MacIntyre has suggested in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, to learn how to pot, an apprentice must learn to distinguish between two kinds of excellence: that which the apprentice and others can expect of himself or herself here and now, and that which furnishes both apprentice and master craftsman with the final end of the craft itself. Clearly, then, the only way one learns a craft is through apprenticeship to a master. This claim is crucial. You cannot learn to lay brick; you can be taught how to hold a trowel, how to spread mortar, or how to hold a brick. But the only way you ever learn to lay brick is by working with a master bricklayer, day in and day out, learning all the nuances of the craft.

If the bricklaying analogy is unfamiliar to you, think about the craft in terms of learning to play a musical instrument. To learn how to play a musical instrument, you must be initiated into the art by a master. Part of
being initiated is learning to trust the master’s judgments, and you find out that judgments are not things that can be learned by rote.

To achieve the purpose of the craft, then, apprentices learn that they must be transformed. They do not try to transform their interests; they just learn day in and day out that, for example, to form a pot it is important to use this clay rather than that clay. Distinguishing between clays is extremely important. For me, a nonpotter, clay is clay; but master potters learn to distinguish between clays with the kind of discriminating judgment they have earned through initiation into the craft. They have been changed by being taught how to appreciate different kinds of clays.

Notice that genuine education understood as becoming a skilled practitioner requires recognition of an authority who has earned our trust. Yet one of the most important developments in universities today has been the devaluation of what it means to sit under a master teacher. Instead, students sit under technocrats who have been given licenses through the Ph.D., and the question about what constitutes a master teacher has on the whole been ignored. Although ignored, the master-apprentice relationship still may be hanging on. We still give apprentices, whom we call students, a way to discover their appropriation of the craft by inviting them to demonstrate that they understand what has been taught. Some of the ways we ask you to discover for yourselves what you are engaged in are tests and assigned papers.

Universities, then, are institutions set aside for the passing on of the knowledge we call wisdom--about matters that matter. Because judgments must be learned through apprenticeship to masters, some dead, some living, we cannot and do not use others’ work without due acknowledgement, because to do so would betray our learning activity. We would not be acknowledging the masters who are necessary for us to do our work well if we failed to so acknowledge them. We are required to footnote, not because the others’ work is theirs, as if there were a capitalist relationship between oneself and one’s work. I know that if I have a “creative idea,” it just means I have forgotten where I read it. A creative idea is not property. Due acknowledgement of others’ work is a way of indicating who are the necessary members of the conversation I am participating in to acquire the same kinds of nuanced judgments that I find exhibited in their lives. It is not as if I think of my work as a property that I own; but it is crucial that I show from whom I have learned and in what ways I may disagree with them.
Cheating, then, is any form of life that makes the activity of learning and teaching impossible. For institutions set aside for teaching and learning, therefore, cheating is worse than murder because cheating strikes at the heart of the reason we are here. Although murder is a terrible crime, cheating is worse than murder at these institutions. I do not mean you can kill somebody at a university, but cheating is worse because murder does not challenge the very nature of the institution. You must remember that we are called to be here. It is a privilege to be at a university, to be a student engaged in the kind of activity I have suggested. It is a privilege to be set aside to do nothing but to read books, to become articulate, to learn to speak eloquently, to learn to appreciate a great painting. That you are so called and so set aside means that you are seen as people gifted to face the rigors of living with the constant judgment that is part and parcel of being initiated into such activities.

In a world where people are starving, in a world where people are being killed every minute by the deepest injustice, how can you possibly justify your taking time out in your life to do nothing but to learn to read books well? How do you do that? I contend that this privilege comes from a community that believes that nothing is more important than to have a people who bear the rigors of seeing more truthfully the way the world is by exposing themselves to the otherness of the other which they meet through the ongoing business of learning a craft well. It takes a substantive community to believe that we can so set people aside.

People say to me, “Oh, you’re a teacher,” and I say “yes” and they say, “Well, how much do you teach?” and I say “six hours” and they say, “Wow, that’s quite a lot for a day,” and I say, “No, no, a week,” and they say, “You work six hours a week?” and I say, “Yes, I teach six hours a week, that’s how often I am in class,” and they say, “Man, I can’t believe that.” I have been set aside to do nothing with my life but to try to understand the significance of the Trinity and its implications for the nature of the moral life. Can you imagine a community setting anyone aside to do that? Why would they set aside people who do nothing but try to understand that there is something crucial about understanding that God is three and that as a matter of fact this claim has tremendous significance for the way we live? People who have been so set aside to engage in that kind of activity would need virtues of humor, humility, and courage to engage in that process. In short, they need to be honorable. So concludes the defense of my first contentious proposition.
2. "There is honor among thieves and the Marines, but that does not mean that honor is a bad idea."

It is certainly true that to be honorable is not sufficient in itself. After all, the Nazi SS was constituted by honor. These extraordinary people would sacrifice their lives for what they thought was absolutely worthy at the drop of a hat. They could be trusted, moreover, to be exactly what they were: SS. What you saw was what you got. That is important since one of the essential characteristics of people of honor is that they are not different from what they say they are. Moreover, honor requires a correlation with institutions that give us patterns of life that are worthy. Universities, we believe, are such institutions insofar as they have been set aside to sustain the wisdom of a people.

Even as I say this, I want to be clear that I am not at all sure that the contemporary university is morally intelligible. It is by no means clear what moral community the university is serving or what its task should be. Christian universities ought to be challenging assumptions that to my mind are undermining education today, assumptions, for example, that people have rights and/or that life is about happiness. Both of these assumptions seem to me to be cultural sentimentalities that are destroying the kind of reflection that is required in the university. Students need to be told that it is not always good to like your life. If you are miserable, it is not a bad way to be. It is tough being young; it is an awful time of life as far as I am concerned now that I am out of it. I think that if you are unhappy you have a lot of good reasons to be unhappy. Besides, who told you that you were supposed to be about happiness? It's never easy to be happy, and most of the time you should not be.

Aristotle said that eudaemonia (happiness) is a complete virtue in a complete life. He taught that, if you felt happy when you were young, you were in a deep delusion. I think that is probably correct, because any happiness worth having is derived from being engaged in worthwhile activities (like the study of theology) that are so engaging that you forget to ask if you are happy. Education is not about supplying wants, but teaching new wants. Providing this kind of education requires the university to be supported by institutions that stand against our culture's sentimentalities about happiness.

There is a peculiar notion today that what makes a university Christian is what goes on in the classroom. You require a few theology courses
and, if you are a Jesuit school, maybe a few philosophy courses. Or maybe you think that what makes a university Christian today is real concern about a student's life outside of the classroom. Then what makes a Catholic university Catholic is its Student Life division. I contend that if you let that happen, you live in a corrupt university. If you think that Christianity is primarily about regulating student life and taking care of troubled students in a way that has nothing to do with the activity characteristic of the classroom, then, as a matter of fact, you have lost the day and you have no rationale for a Student Life office to begin with.

On the contrary, what makes a Christian university Christian are personnel decisions about the kind of people who teach there. When someone is being considered for employment, deans need to be concerned about the kind of person they are hiring. It is not enough that they are good in their discipline. How and what they teach makes all the difference.

These are complex matters, to be sure, and it is easy to be misunderstood. But at stake are fundamental epistemological issues concerning the very nature of the university. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues in the concluding chapter of *Three Rival Versions of Morality*, when universities gave up religious tests, the consequence was not that universities became places of ordered conflict among rival traditions. Rather when the appointment of university faculty excluded belief from view, a different but equally exclusive conception of scholarly competence was enforced in making appointments, a conception of competence independent of standpoint. A corresponding conception of objectivity in the classroom required professors to present what they taught as if shared standards of rationality were accepted by anyone. Universities, therefore, became institutions committed to upholding a fictitious objectivity.

When this type of university is prominent, deconstructionists necessarily arrive and challenge the objectivist viewpoint. The natural response of those in the Enlightenment university is to dismiss these critics because they "are not objective." They certainly are not. Deconstructionists are saying what we Christians should have been saying all along: *there is no objective knowledge apart from the traditions that sustain it.* In this instance, that institution is the church. Yet, of late, what has distinguished Christian universities is the claim that they are doing everything that other universities are doing--except they require courses in theology. Unfortunately, this approach cannot help but make God appear as the "God of the gaps."

When Sidgwick was reforming English universities under the impetus of
Enlightenment rationality, he found that universities depended upon constrained agreements; that is, before you could even enter the conversation, you had to locate yourself within the Christian tradition, even if in dissent. Sidgwick, as reported by MacIntyre, objected to such “constrained agreements” as antithetical to the scientific method and thus reason. Of course, his assumptions about science have proved to be wrong; we have subsequently learned that science depends upon such constrained agreements. I know of no physicist or astronomer who is all that interested in astrology. Yet there is no scientific reason in itself for excluding it. Nonetheless, Sidgwick excluded theology because theology depends upon constrained agreement. According to Sidgwick, the university can only make room for those disciplines, like science, that depend on unconstrained agreements. As a result, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that no genuine disagreements ever get raised in the contemporary university. The university has become an institution where civility has become an end in itself.

In contrast, I would like for the contemporary university to be a place where what MacIntyre calls “constrained disagreements” might occur. For it to be such a place, we would need to form students in the tradition of learning that Christians care about and also make them take seriously how Jews understand the Old Testament. Then you would really have a conflict. You would not just be learning about conflict; you would be in conflict.

As it now stands, we do not have arguments in the university. Yet I maintain that universities sponsored by the church have a stake in initiating the young into their tradition as well as into the conflict of traditions that we now know as modernity. That requires our institutions to initiate our students into traditions that we think worthy. These traditions should be taken seriously because they deal with matters on which we hang our lives. In terms of the second claim, I think that universities, and in particular Christian universities, are those that insist that honor is an absolutely essential ingredient for the furtherance of what we care about in initiating youth into those traditions which we believe embody honor itself.

3. “The fact that we have an honor code, or should have an honor code, at a university does not mean that we are a corrupt community or institution.”

There is a strong view that honor is a good thing, but we should have no code of enforcement procedure. Those who cheat only cheat themselves;
they do not hurt me. Most honor codes at universities fall apart on the assumption that, although I do not want to cheat, if I catch someone else cheating, I will not turn in that person because I do not want to be someone who rats on other people. I do not want to be a police officer.

It is also clear that someone may never cheat on an exam and yet still not be an honorable person. This denial of the importance of honor codes and the corresponding enforcement imply a rather positive view of our character; namely, that most people are going to do the right thing given the opportunity. However, as Christians, we should certainly realize that, if most of us are given an opportunity, we will certainly do wrong and, even more, we must learn to call that sin. That is the reason we need other people to help keep us honest. We need one another to be good, and that is what we signal to one another through an honor code.

But sins, I will admit, can become an excuse for terrible forms of coercion, and the strictures against sin tend to blot out the goods which the strictures hope to serve. Not cheating on an exam can become so important that we forget that the negative prohibition draws on the deeper commitment to honor in the first place. Honor codes are necessary. Good communities and institutions need to find ways to remind themselves of what they are about as well as to give initiates a sense of those forms of life that make the community what it is. Codes, to be sure, can become simply law if they are divorced from the practices that give them moral intelligibility. But we must not underestimate the importance of such codes for articulating those practices which we think are crucial to the life of the university. Restraint is one way the community has of embodying its good.

4. "If students do not cheat, if they do not use someone else's material on a test, or do not use material in a paper without due acknowledgement, it does not necessarily follow that they are persons of honor—but it is not a bad place to start."

A person of honor can be trusted to stay true to convictions even when those convictions do not pay. Honor implies an elitist ethic, which should not surprise us, since universities are elitist institutions. You have been called to an activity to which not all are called, and because of that you are held to a standard and you hold yourself to a standard to which not all are held. Honor is not just a restraint. The university
honors those who exemplify what we are about.

For example, at Duke University, Dr. Simons has spent his whole life doing nothing but studying lemurs. Lemurs are wonderful little primates found on the island of Madagascar. They are slowly being decimated by the destruction of the rain forests. Dr. Simons is honored throughout the entire university because he has given his life to understanding and saving lemurs. You can say, "When children are starving in Ethiopia, how can you set aside someone to study lemurs? What are the moral presuppositions which allow you to do that?" We do this because lemurs are worth saving. Of course, starving children in Ethiopia ought to be fed; but what universities are about, given our commitments, includes the study of lemurs. We also set aside people who do nothing but patiently study the christological debates of the fourth century. Others try to understand the condition of women. Challenges to our past modes of understanding are honored by the university. Moral virtues are required for the willingness to stand before what we do not know--before a lemur, before christology, before the marginalization of women--without becoming satisfied with easy solutions.

It is interesting to ask the relationship between the virtues required for what we do at the university and the rest of our moral life. Can one be a scholar without being a good person? We have tried on the whole to avoid that question in the modern university. We have allowed university teaching to become a profession and the university professors to become professionals, by which it is understood that they can deliver the goods without respect to the kinds of people they are. About the only thing for which anyone is fired today is coercive sexual harassment. You certainly cannot be fired for laziness. But university professors steal when they go into a classroom unprepared. That is not honorable behavior. It becomes absolutely crucial, therefore, for faculties to be able to police themselves in order to maintain universities as honorable institutions, where we can say to someone, "You may not abuse alcohol in a way that absolutely abrogates your ability to teach."

Moreover, there can be no divorce of the classroom from the lives of students in the dorms and the lives of the professors at their homes. The true test of a university is: are alumni reading a book a month forty-five years after they graduated from college? Do they feel the need to go back and read The Republic as businessmen, businesswomen, and lawyers? If the university does not have that effect, it is not performing its task well.
There can and should be no divorce between the classroom and the dorm. To be sure, not cheating on a test is a minimum, but it is a good minimum to remind us of what we are about as a community of learning in which members care for one another.

5. "The most compassionate thing you can do as a Christian is to turn in someone for cheating."

As I noted, most honor systems flounder on the statement, "I will not cheat myself, but I could not turn anyone else in if I caught them cheating. After all, they only hurt themselves." The problem with this attitude is that it embodies the kind of individualism that is underwritten by a capitalist society: "I can do what I want to so long as I don't hurt anybody else and I play by the rules fairly." On the contrary, in institutions of honor, you owe it to those cheating to turn them in. For you must remember that you are not protecting yourself; you are reminding persons who cheat that they are betraying what they care about in terms of their being at that institution. Of course, the consequence is excommunication, but excommunication is the most gracious act the church ever performs. Without excommunication how would you ever know that you are leading a life that cuts you off from the community of grace? We do exactly the same thing in the university when we turn one another in, report one another, and say thereby you need help. It reminds us what the university is about.

Still it will be said that we do not live in a world of honor. Obviously, the kinds of criticisms that I have made about the contemporary university and the contemporary church indicate severely compromised communities. How can we hold ourselves, or anyone else, to standards that it seems no one believes in? To that I say, "If you believe that, the game's up." We cannot afford not to be courageous in a world of cowards. But if you are courageous in a world of cowards, your life is going to be more dangerous. If you are truthful in a world of mendacious people, you had better expect to be in a fight. But it has been the assumption of Christians that we cannot afford to be anything other than courageous in a world of cowards. We believe that we cannot afford not to be courageous in a world of cowards, and we cannot afford not to be honorable in a world of dishonor. There is no way that we can afford not to be honorable. This brings me to my last claim.
6. "If you think you can cheat here at the university because this is just preparation for the real world, you will never be prepared for the real world."

It does not get any more real than this if you believe that these activities are as important as I have tried to suggest. I am not going to explain that one, because, if it needs explaining at this point, then nothing else can be said.

Notes

5 Cf. the concluding chapter of MacIntyre’s Three Rival Versions of Morality.
Carol Ochs

Wrestling with God

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The title for this series of lectures is “Community of Character.” But how can we begin to talk about character until we have some sense of who we are and how we relate to those around us? My approach to this question of self is through a process I call “wrestling with God.” Wrestling with God means examining our relationship to God, a relationship of deep involvement, commitment, love, and tension. We can focus our wrestling directly on the circumstances of our lives, or we can focus it on a significant religious text. I have chosen the second course, using the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for wrestling with God.

We wrestle with the text, using our lives to illuminate the text and the text to give meaning to our lives. This dialectic takes us from the polished surface of the narrative to a deeper level of meaning. In the Book of Genesis, for example, essential aspects of the stories of Noah, Abraham, and Joseph occur within us, in our lives. Questions of biblical historicity aside, Scripture can teach us as much about the present unfolding of the events in our lives as it might about events of the historical past. We are always being liberated from Egypt; we are always straining to hear the revelation at Sinai.

Our self-understanding has developed in the light of three thousand years of biblical tradition. Even when we oppose the biblical formulation, we do so in terms of the categories laid down in the scriptural narrative. Immanuel Kant showed that our experiences are not raw: rather, they are shaped into meaningful patterns by what he called categories of the understanding. He held that meaning and value reside in our judgments, which require the categories of the understanding, and that experiences without the categories are meaningless. To Kant’s universal categories of space, time, quantity, quality, and relation, I would like to add many more subcategories of value that are not innate but are inculcated by a culture and define the world of that culture. Given that these categories are not innate but learned, they are open to being made conscious and to being transformed or discarded. They are transmitted by our culture in many different ways—among them biblical stories and traditions—often unconsciously and frequently without being examined. It is urgent that we reexamine the formative stories of our traditions with fresh eyes and with great self-awareness so that we can discern what kind of self is being shaped by the categories of the understanding that have come down to us through the religious tradition.

In Scripture the context of a statement plays a crucial role in deter-
mining its meaning. The words and what they signify will not show their
truth or efficacy by our examining them only on the literal level. Saying
words that are the same as someone else’s is not uttering the same truth.
The importance of recognizing the role of context, character, and action
in order to get at the full meaning of a statement is perhaps best illus-
trated by the story of Babel. To all appearances, the people at Babel had
achieved unity of vision, because they had certainly achieved unity of lan-
guage. But it is not language that fully conveys meaning; rather, it is the
entire form of life in which the language occurs, the character of those
using the language, and the context in which the language is used. The
distinction between language and meaning is illustrated in Genesis by the
story of Babel. Even though everyone spoke one language, the apparent
unity masked a deep divisiveness. There is a need for diverse languages
(forms of thought and forms of perception) so that when ultimate unity is
achieved it will not be by imposing a single view, but by allowing the
diverse perspectives to yield the truth. So what we learn from the story of
Babel is that the final form of truth may well require diverse expression
because truth is found at a level deeper than the linguistic one.

I. The Self

Our concept of self is based on one that is first formulated in The
Bible, and our task is to discern what this self may be. The Bible shows
that the self is in process. The different moments of this process, exhib-
ited in Genesis, are captured in the Talmudic tractate, Ethics of the
Fathers: “If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, who
am I? And if not now, when?”1 I will focus on how these distinct
moments in the formation of self are addressed by the Book of Genesis.
We will see that the teaching, “If I am not for myself, who will be?” is
exemplified by the life of Abraham; the second teaching, “If I am only for
myself, who am I?” is illustrated by the life of Joseph; and the final
teaching, “And if not now, when?” suggests that the way of Joseph is the
way most appropriate for us today.

“If I am not for myself, who will be?” This teaching of Hillel has been
interpreted to mean that “I have first to have a self... before I can sur-
render it.”2 Abraham’s life exemplifies the initial formation of a self, or
ego. It is a life shaped by defining one’s self in terms of radical difference
and separation that reaches its climax in a personal encounter with God.
Abraham is first separated from his nation and kindred, then from his nephew, and finally even from his sons. What remains is a direct, unmediated relationship with God. This direct approach to God, divorced from any human relationships, may be responsible for Abraham's seeming inhumanity in his sending Ishmael into the wilderness with only one skin of water and his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham's awareness of self represents a major turning point in human spiritual growth. Until Abraham could recognize his selfhood—that he existed separate and distinct from his surroundings—he could not emerge from the world of his idol-worshipping ancestors to search for and ultimately come into relationship with God. He could not begin to question the values held in his surroundings until he could recognize himself as distinct from his surroundings, and thereby be in a position to examine and evaluate the local beliefs. But because the concept of self was then so newly acquired, its boundaries are not expressed clearly in Genesis. It is not entirely clear where Abraham ends and his sons begin: are they property to be sacrificed, aspects of self to be nurtured, or "the other" against which he is to measure and define himself? Abraham's God, however, is radically other. God, as perceived by Abraham, is the one who speaks through the awesome theophanies of the Covenant between the Pieces, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Binding of Isaac.

The emerging concept of self is developed most significantly in the Binding of Isaac, a story that is central to both Jewish and Christian traditions, though with wholly different interpretations. In attempting to understand this formative story, we must ask not what God's demand meant but what it meant to Abraham. We must see that the demand was formulated within the context of Abraham's relationship with God and that the demand has no meaning outside that relationship. Biblical commentators who regard the Akedah as a test for Abraham are trying to interpret the meaning of the demand from outside the relationship. By the time God tells Abraham to prepare Isaac for sacrificing, Abraham has had a twenty-five-year relationship with God, one that had begun with God's telling him to "go from your father's house," that "you are no longer your father's son," and that he should "go from your country and your kindred" (Gen. 12:1). No longer defined in terms of his father or his culture, Abraham's self-understanding begins with a consciousness of God. The biblical self was not individualistic: biblical figures could not go off alone to discover who they were, as Descartes was later to do. The
Cartesian self is enclosed within itself, seeing everything else as an object. Descartes' "other" is always the "not-I"--the self stands apart from everything else. But for the biblical mind there is no initial self that thinks and reasons into being the world in which it operates; rather, the self becomes aware in its becoming aware of God. This is as true for Adam, who finds himself called into being, as it is true for Abraham, who finds himself called into relationship with God.

The change in Abraham begins with the call from God, but it does not end there. The biblical narrative signals a change of essence in Abraham through a change in his name from Abram before Isaac is conceived. Reading of God's command that Abraham sacrifice his son, we know that we must interpret the text. We, like Abraham, sense that a child is really a separate being collecting around itself relationships and values, creating a world even as we created a world. The child's world, at first, is closely interconnected with our world, but gradually it moves into its own orbit around God and itself. We know we must release our offspring, that in a real sense we never "owned" them, but between the concept of release (Gelassenheit) and the actual transformative experience, we feel something like death. We think that release to an independent life entails danger to the child, and there is danger. But the immediate danger we experience is the transformation of our self. The Binding of Isaac is portrayed in the Bible as Abraham's sacrificing the child to God. Abraham is indeed doing something, but what that might be needs to be interpreted. What is happening is not active, but passive, or passion. Isaac is identified as "the one you love," and it is just this element of love that infuses the story with such intense drama. Abraham does what all parents must do, in placing the fate of his own child in the hands of another and exposing himself to receive from another the triumph or tragedy of this child. Abraham releases his son to be what he will be, to thrive or not, and that is the real sacrifice. Kierkegaard emphasizes that Abraham gets Isaac back, but he does not--the Bible never places Isaac back with his father until Isaac returns with Ishmael to bury him. To release is to release--there is no escape clause. Just as Abraham does not get Isaac back, neither does he get Abraham back; the Abraham who comes down off the mountain is a self different from the Abraham who climbed up with his son.

When an individual has children, the self expands to include the new selves. When those children become adults, the self must contract to give
the new adult space; even if the expansion remains, the additional beings that were contained in the expanded self are now released. Who is this self that expands and contracts? What is its nature? What are its true dimensions? The self that is being formed cannot be attained by force, possessiveness, or control. The original parent/child unity resembles the one language at Babel in that it masks and represses true diversity and it is not a unity of equals. We cannot have anyone; though we are interconnected, we experience living as a very lonely enterprise.

The character development stories in the Bible begin in Genesis with Abraham's deep desire for a son. By the end of the narrative in Deuteronomy, in which Moses serves as the central character, his two sons hardly figure in the story because they are no more likely to follow in his way than are any other young men of that time. In meeting God face to face, Moses comes to recognize and appreciate God's celebration of diversity and of freedom—love freely given; so unlike Abraham and Jacob, who molded their sons, Moses did not.

II. The Family

Self-knowledge, in the biblical view, begins with knowing who God is. But Genesis offers a second approach: if a personal encounter with the God of Abraham is too fraught with danger, we can seek to discover God not on the mountain but through coming to know who our brothers and sisters are. From Abraham's pivotal acquisition of self, the biblical account turns to Isaac, whose self-knowledge is kindled by the loss of his mother and the comfort provided by his bride, and then to Jacob, whose complex family history activates the drama of Joseph and his brothers. That Joseph's story occupies fully one quarter of the Book of Genesis suggests its importance. Joseph resembles us in one significant way: he has no direct experience of God. He knows God only by inference from his experiences and from his own insights into those experiences. He must discover God in and through the events of his life, much as we must discern the working of God in the day-to-day events of our lives.

The story of Joseph serves as a useful way to look at the problems of otherness and sameness. Otherness helps define the self: it shows us where we end and "the other" begins, and it mirrors us. But otherness also challenges the self: it opposes our values, it is not us, and the differences frequently threaten our views and commitments. Sameness

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poses problems no less than does otherness. We feel ourselves to be unique, so we are threatened by that which appears to duplicate us. If our siblings are too different from us, they counter our values and we find it difficult to love them. If they are very much like us, we also find it difficult, because we see our own flaws reflected in them. It is easier to focus on the transcendent, which is absolutely other, than it is to focus on our siblings, who in most ways are the same as we are.

The story of Joseph begins with the differentiated love Jacob bears to his two wives and two concubines. Perhaps it begins even before that, in Jacob's feelings of guilt about stealing his father's blessing from his brother. It is impossible to think of Joseph without thinking of his brothers. And once we begin to think of Joseph's brothers, we are thrown back to a long, troubled history of sibling relationships in Genesis: Cain to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac, Jacob to Esau, and Rachel to Leah. Analysts interpreting these narratives have noted the overturning of primogeniture. There is a radical restructuring going on, but the transformation is more than the younger gaining favor over the older. (Joseph's younger brother Benjamin does not, in fact, gain favor over Joseph.) Nor is it merely the casting out of one in order to unify the others, as Rene Girard posits. The troubled relationships in the Bible extend beyond sibling rivalry; they include conflict between parent and child: Abraham and both his sons; Isaac and both his sons; Jacob and all his children; and related conflicts: Reuben and his father's mistress; Judah and his son's betrothed. Where conflicts are not explicitly spelled out in the text, they may be drawn out in the Midrash. Tension between Abraham and Sarah, for example, which is not apparent in the biblical text, becomes the subject of a midrash in which Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac is given as the cause of Sarah's death.

In the Greek Scriptures we read, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be present" (Matt. 18:20). But the Hebrew Scriptures demonstrate that where two or three are gathered, there there will be conflict, rivalry, hatred, and violence. But they also demonstrate that where that hatred is healed, then God is indeed present.

Joseph's ordinariness is, to my mind, the most important element in Genesis. We find God not on the mountain but in reconciling with our family. Joseph heals his relationship with his brothers and with his father, and that healing is a way to God--perhaps, the way that most needs emphasis in our time.
Joseph's coming to terms with his family is prefigured, in part, by Jacob's reconciliation with Esau. Jacob tells Esau that seeing his face again is like seeing the face of God:

God himself drew near to us as our brother and our neighbor... Our relationship with God is decided in our encounter with other men. A person who sees his brother sees God. The only image of God is the face of our brother. Our human brother now becomes a "sacrament" of God's hidden presence among us, a mediator between God and man. Every authentic religious act is directed toward the concreteness of God in our human brother and his world.  

Genesis offers two paths to knowing God: through our relationship with God and through our relationship with our family. Each way is difficult, demanding, and painful; each ultimately entails the other. We cannot, finally, come to God without having made peace with our family. And family does not exhaust itself; it forever opens up out to the higher connectedness that is God.

There is something marvelously paradoxical about our familial relationship. No one knows us better than our families: they know us biologically and historically. And yet no one knows us less: instead of seeing us as we have become, they tend to view us in the light of an earlier, less accomplished state. (Our friends, carefully selected for like-mindedness, seem to know us better.) Can a youngest child ever be regarded by its siblings as anything but the youngest child? Can a favored child ever live down what its brothers and sisters regard as a stigma? Can we see our siblings not in terms of their relationships to our parents but as they are in themselves?

III. The Essential Self

What we are searching for is our essential self. We want to find some fundamental aspect of our being that is not merely an inheritance from our parents, a legacy of our upbringing, or a product of our culture. We want to look beyond raw potentiality and traits shared with all of humanity to identify what defines us uniquely--what defines me as me. There is a Zen koan that gets to the heart of this concept of self: "What was your true face before your parents were born?" In other words, if you take away heredity and environment, does anything remain? Our "true face,"
or our essential self, is our face without the embellishments we have collected over a lifetime of interaction in this world. We create our world out of the relationships that define and nourish us. Some, such as friends, can be replaced and some, such as parents, cannot; but all, like Isaac, must be “sacrificed” and released. Our true face is not simply the given out of which we were formed, but the valuable aspect of self that we can, with care and reflection, recover. This recovery requires the kind of release Abraham had to make in the Binding of Isaac. When we are naked, without roles, relationships, or functions, our true face can be seen, and therein lies a function of the natural aging process. The roles we acquired are stripped from us one by one, friends die, our tasks are passed on to others. This notion of an essential self that is more than the sum of our relationships and functions but also takes into account our particular life experiences is captured in the statement, “Nothing matters; everything matters.” This teaching can show us a way to understand the nature of our self.

Saying that the self has an eternal aspect does not mean that, in forming the self, historically conditioned events and characteristics play no role. Eternity is not in opposition to history; it is not time before or after time—it exists beyond the dominion of time. Just as we experience the eternal in and through the temporal, the eternal aspect of self is shaped in and through the temporal. In all that happens we experience the ephemeral in sharp contrast to the eternal: “All things are passing, God never changes.” While this sentiment could imply an attitude that “nothing matters,” it also supports the view that “everything matters” because everything we experience is infused with the eternal, even our daily choices carry implications of infinite worth. So while recognizing that each of us has an eternal aspect, we cannot recover it by simply stripping away the accretions of daily living, because these interactions with the world help make us unique.

This brings us back to family drama and its centrality. If “nothing matters” is the key—if universality is the key—then the particular family we inhabit in this incarnation is scarcely worth contemplating. But adding the “everything matters” dimension explains the disproportionate amount of our lifetimes spent in healing family conflict. What the family drama teaches us is both temporal and eternal.

You cannot, as it were, “skip to the chase” or speed up the ending. Each moment, event, and choice represents a potential doorway to the
eternal. "But the central reality of the everyday hour on earth, with a streak of sun on a maple twig and the glimpse of the eternal Thou, is greater for us than the enigmatic webs on the brink of being."11

Joseph had experienced deep suffering and deprivation in his life. As a young child his mother had died giving birth to his younger brother. Besides losing, in childhood, his mother’s nourishment, comfort, and support, he also experienced the hatred of his older brothers, who first plotted to murder him and then sold him into slavery. After spurning an attempted seduction, he was falsely accused and imprisoned. Even someone he helped while in prison forgot him for many years. Hated, imprisoned, and forgotten, he somehow emerged from all his trauma with a sense of gratitude to God and a retrospective vision that allowed him to see, in all that had happened during his life, the unfolding of God’s greater scheme.

How did Joseph arrive at this capacity to see his life in the light of God? One clue may be found later in the story when the dying Joseph extracts a promise from his descendants: “When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here” (Gen. 50:25). Joseph, in other words, leaps forward in his imagination to a time of Israel’s deliverance and asks to be a party to it. By identifying his fate not with his own limited and personal being but with that of his people, Joseph transcends the events that occur to him personally and achieves the long perspective that allows him to discern God’s working through his life.

Joseph did not contact his father even after becoming established in Egypt, probably because he had come to understand what Jacob had inflicted on him and on his brothers. Jacob was not guiltless in his treatment of Joseph, but the relationship between father and son was eventually healed in Jacob’s deathbed blessing and adoption of Joseph’s sons.

Abraham’s life may be seen to correspond to the statement, “If I am not for myself, who will be.” There comes a moment, though, to surrender oneself: “If I am only for myself, who am I?” After Jacob’s death, Joseph’s brothers approach him with trepidation, fearing that he had been kind to them only for the sake of their father. Now Joseph would certainly show his suppressed hatred of them for selling him into slavery. They approach Joseph with an offer to become his slaves. But Joseph responds, “Although you intended me harm, God intended it for good.” This statement shows Joseph’s redemptive insight, which is part and
parcel of his transformed concept of self.

In Joseph's story we see the achievement—the end product of a life lived with a consciousness of God. If we look at the situations in which Joseph either invokes or does not invoke the God he had heard about in his childhood, we will begin to understand how his concept of self is transformed. Joseph does not mention God in connection with his various dreams. He does invoke God (for the first time in the biblical account) to strengthen his own resolve not to lie with Potiphar's wife. While he does not connect God to his own dreams, he does credit God with giving him the ability to interpret the dreams of others, both in the case of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker and in the crucial case of Pharaoh himself.

The occasions in which Joseph refers to God and those in which he does not, reveal this changing notion of self. Joseph's dream, unlike Jacob's at Bethel, is not an awesome dream that arouses adoration; rather, it is a dream of personal ambition. This is not the kind of dream that would lead one to look for God. But in the face of the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife, Joseph recognizes his own weakness and calls for a strength beyond his own. Suddenly he is not the center of the universe, and in that moment of awareness comes a summoning forth of the notion of God and God's laws. On a different occasion, Joseph tries to use his ability to interpret dreams to further his own ambitions. In return for predicting that Pharaoh's cupbearer will be released from prison and restored to his post, Joseph extracts a promise from the cupbearer to remember him. The cupbearer, however, forgets him for two years. When Joseph is finally called to Pharaoh, tempered by his earlier experience with the cupbearer, he interprets Pharaoh's dream but proclaims that not he but God "will see to Pharaoh's welfare." Only when Joseph rejects any merit or personal favor is he freed by Pharaoh.

So one lesson we can draw from Joseph's story is that the concept of self is to be found not in our ambitions but through our relation to God. We must look for God not in spectacular irruptions in our lives, but in our capacities and gifts. Gifts imply a giver, so if we are conscious of their source, we will use our gifts not for personal gain, but rather to fulfill the tasks that God has set before us. We can discover a self that, like Abraham's, is grounded in relation to God, and the relationship is found in the daily interaction with our family and the world around us.

Joseph found God not only in his own gifts but in the major events of
his life. That is a difficult path to pursue. How are we to look at the occurrences that thwart us and that cause us pain and loss, and discern in them the working of God for good? The theoretical answer is clear. Serious monotheists do not believe in chance, fate, or luck—the secularized names of the gods. They believe in God and, necessarily, in what is finally a single causal chain. That may follow logically, but our problem is not a logical one. We want to transcend what happens to us and to find an empowering image.

Joseph was indeed gifted—not only in interpreting dreams but in dreaming them as well. And his most significant dream is not the one he dreamed—the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him or the sheaves of wheat paying him homage—but one he harbored: that out of his brothers' evil intention he would be able to discern God's working for good. In the short term, the action of Joseph's brothers caused loss, pain, and suffering; in the longer range, it preserved lives from famine. In the still longer term, it led to four hundred years of bondage in Egypt; but in an even longer perspective, it led to the Exodus. At which range do we focus to discern God's working for good?

We must focus on that range that liberates us from simple causality and the need for retributive justice. Joseph cannot focus on the short range and find a higher truth, but neither is he satisfied merely with the alleviation of famine. His request that his bones eventually be carried out of Egypt suggests a vision that incorporates slavery. We cannot say with certainty how far Joseph's vision extended, and we don't need to. We do need to see that once he had had the liberating dream that God meant it for good, everything that would happen could be understood within that framework. The statement "God meant it for good" is not an empirical one that will leave us weighing up all the blessings and sufferings since Joseph's sale into slavery. It is a normative statement that tells us how we are to understand our lives. We cannot first look at the world and discover that God meant it for good. Rather, we first commit ourselves to God's working for good and gradually begin to see the world in that light. The commitment comes first and transforms the experience. The world does not reveal itself fully to analytical or logical scrutiny. Some things can be seen only after we have made a commitment of faith. Faith is not blind; it is precisely what enables us to see.

A life devoted to discerning God's working for good in the patterns of our lives is lived as a tempering process and as an adventure. We are
shaped and molded by dreams that are larger than our own. As we fight
against these dreams, trying to live by our own agenda, we experience the
forces that break into our lives—forces that we can name tragedy or
opportunity. As our lives take stranger and stranger turns, we can grow
either bitter or compassionate. Which one it will be depends on whether
we hold fast to our personal dream or try to stretch so that we can claim
Joseph’s insight. “God intended it for good” is not an empty phrase to
quiet doubts or cut off questioning. It is, rather, a challenge to find what
good can be extracted from what has befallen us. God may intend
something for good, but our existence is needed to discern that good and
to put it into practice. It is fitting that Genesis, which begins with the
account of God’s creation, should end with a statement telling us how to
be partners in this creation. We learn that we must be clear about moral
responsibility. “You intended me harm,” but we remain conscious of our
capacity to cooperate with the force of good working even through the
evil intent, because “God intended it for good.” Finally, we discover in
the resolution of the Joseph narrative the final state of the statement
from Ethics of the Fathers: “And if not now, when?” That moment is
now.

III. Wrestling with God

The self developed throughout Genesis is discovered in and through
relationship, first directly with God and eventually through God with
family. The biblical self provides an important corrective to the isola-
tionist and individualistic view held by most of Western modernity. “The
belief system of the majority of Americans [is] ontological individualism,
a conviction that the basic unit of reality is the autonomous individual
who subsequently decides about being related.” While the view of self
developed throughout Genesis is not that of the isolated self, neither is it
one of part to whole. Rather, the self stands to God as microcosm to
macrocosm. We are regarded as unique and our individuality is valued as
being irreplaceable. The Mishnah states: “A king of flesh and blood
stamps his image on a coin, hence all coins look and are alike; but the
King of Kings puts the stamp of the first man on humanity, yet no man is
like any other.” Israel Baal Shem Tov expresses a similar idea: “Every
man should know that since creation no other man ever was like him.
Had there been such another, there would be no need for him to be.
Each is called on to perfect his unique qualities. And it is his failure to heed this call which delays the coming of the Messiah.”

But we cannot be understood in isolation: we are constituted by our relationships and our functions.

The Hebrew Scriptures can help us understand and become who we are. Forming the self is a central issue in Genesis. We learn that the self cannot be formed with God “tacked on” later—it derives its initial identity from having been created by God in the image of God. So the starting point for understanding the self lies in recognizing God. If we seek the self before we seek God, we will end up with distorted notions of both. In Cain we see an assertion of self before there is a relationship with God. In Abraham, on the other hand, we see a calling by God. If we are to understand ourselves correctly, we must accomplish our tasks in the right order. That we are not merely the wife of A, the brother of B, or the keeper of C’s sheep is always clear in Genesis, as husbands and siblings die while our identities do not. We seem to incorporate our parents more organically, so that being the child of D remains forever part of our identity. That seems to be true experientially—whether we are concerned with our parents’ genetic contribution to our identity or the formative part they played in our growing up. Our roles may change—like Joseph we may go from shepherd to slave to prime minister—but our essential self remains.

Bernard of Clairvaux offers a clue to how our awareness of God gradually changes our concept of self. He describes four stages in the process of transformation: (1) love oneself; (2) love God for the sake of the self; (3) love God for the sake of God; and (4) love the self for the sake of God. Loving ourselves implies that we must have already formed a self and must accept it. In loving God for the sake of the self, we recognize that we are related to the whole, though we see the whole only for the sake of the self. When we can love God for the sake of God, we experience a change in self. When we can love God for the sake of God, we experience a change in focus: now our concern is not with ourselves, but with the whole. Finally, we are asked to love the self for the sake of God. At this stage our self-identity has been completely transformed from the limited vision of self we had maintained earlier. We identify with God’s perspective and so come to love ourselves and other selves because of their importance to God.

To the people who inhabit the biblical world, God’s existence is more
obvious than their own because they perceive no self without God. This view is borne out in the first pages of Genesis, which describes the world existing prior to the creation of humanity. There can be no humanity without the world, which helps to define its identity. People are also formed in relationship to one another: Cain needs Abel—the other—to show who he is. So we learn from Genesis that the question “Who am I?” cannot be answered without reference to the whole world, inhabitants and all. In this union of the mind with the whole of nature, we recognize God as creator and sustainer and we recognize our interconnectedness with all other creatures. The awareness of our relationship to God provides us with our capacity to relate to others in community. Along with the change in our sense of self comes a change in our experience of this world. “We suffer in so far as we are a part of Nature.” But as we begin to identify more and more with the whole of creation, our suffering is transformed. We are no longer locked into a constricted notion of self, but at last identify with the whole of creation.

Notes

6 See, for example, Susan Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos* (Chico, Calif: Scholars Press, 1985), chap. 3.
10 In the words of Teresa of Avila,

    Let nothing disturb thee,
    Nothing affright thee.
    All things are passing,
    God never changeth.
as quoted in In Love with Love, Anne and Christopher Fremantle, eds. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 73.


13 The Torah; A Modern Commentary (Mishnah. Sanhedrin 4:5), 24.

14 Quoted in The Torah; A Modern Commentary, 24.

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