Minding the Time
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Preface

Each member of our community must wrestle with the challenge of forming one's conscience. This wrestling is essentially a search for the good that will center and organize one's life and provide a framework through which to give shape to one's world. The community of Georgetown University is committed to providing a sustaining and enriching environment in which this wrestling can occur. We do this best by providing access to sources of courage and strength, inspiration, consolation and peace. We hope that the essays presented in this volume prove to be such a source for all those who share the convictions upon which our community is built.

John J. DeGioia
Dean of Student Affairs
June, 1992
Introduction

There is no greater challenge to the future of Jesuit higher education in America than that of critically reading the signs of the times and flexibly adapting to meet them successfully. It will engage the critical powers and the vision of the most talented men and women those schools can attract into their ranks. Successfully meeting the challenge will be the only valid yardstick for justifying their work as indeed promoting "the greater glory of God."¹

The challenge to read the signs of the times and to make appropriate adaptations need not be confused with the challenge facing a cunning candidate for public office, or that facing a stock market gambler. The challenge referred to in this passage is one of the more striking consequences of the characteristic Ignatian conviction that "God is present in our lives, 'laboring for us' [Spiritual Exercises, # 236] in all things; He can be discovered, through faith, in all natural and human events, in history as a whole, and most especially within the lived experience of each individual person."² The search for God in the signs of the times that is the heart of a Jesuit education counts on a nimble mind and a willing heart ready to lend a hand in the ongoing work of creation. Moreover, in the post-Enlightenment world of the twentieth century, a "critical" reading of the signs of the times implies a degree of self-consciousness that precludes a naive, complacent or dogmatic spirit.

The essays included here were originally presented in a series of lectures whose theme, "Minding the Time: 1492-1992," became the title of this volume. An Ignatian discernment of the signs of the times presupposes a contemplative moment. The 500 year milepost served as an occasion to take a contemplative "time out" in which to bring our present time to mind.
“Mind” is a word rich in meaning and significance. Three of its senses are to the point: first, to attend to, to pay attention to; second, to remember, to call to mind; third, to care for, to care about.

In the first sense, we “mind” the matter at hand—any matter at hand. As we give undivided attention to something which presents itself to us, as we become present to something in our midst, its presence is felt and registered and thereby made available for retrieval at another point in time. To mind in the first sense—a very contemplative act—makes it possible to mind in the second sense: to remember, to call to mind. We not only mind our manners; we also mind experiences of all kinds which have entered deeply into the person we have become. I mind the time my brother comforted me. Do you mind my reminding you? “Mind” in this third sense adds a note of caring to the other senses of attending and remembering.

Minding the time, then, involves asking what we do well to attend to, what we do well to remember, what deserves our care in the present moment. Speakers in the series mind the environmental crisis, public and private responses to poverty, cultural pluralism, and Native American experience. In other years speakers gave their attention to women’s issues and issues of cultural and racial diversity.

The challenge to read the signs critically requires a special kind of attention, an attention to an influence so pervasive in our day that it shapes our every endeavor—especially the endeavor to read the signs of the times. One’s world view is like the air we breathe—absolutely necessary to support everything we do, yet virtually impossible to see. Attention to the mentality of modern science and its implications is inescapable for a series intending to give critical attention to the signs of the times.

Patrick Heelan’s opening essay heightens our awareness of the scientific mentality which marks our age and deeply affects the
way we understand ourselves and our world. The mark of our age, in Heelan’s view, is the conviction in every field of inquiry that truth is pluralistic, hermeneutical (that is, already caught up in interpretation), political, and historical: “there is no longer any certainty that there is a single, privileged, shareable human experiential praxis.” At first it seems that science transcends cultures and classes, but Heelan observes that as soon as science leaves its privileged location, the place of scientific research, it becomes pop-science. Furthermore, scientific practitioners “whose expertise is in the special environment of the laboratory and in scholarly research . . . have no special expertise in human life as it is lived by citizens and may not know how to make strategic life decisions.” Science, then, though it profoundly shapes the way we approach every theoretical and practical problem, falls short of enabling us to make strategic decisions.

The strategic question is, Heelan observes, “what do we want? This decision comes before all other decisions and subsequently makes facts relevant, arguments persuasive, and, when done right, connects human activity with divine power.” The Spiritual Exercises provided Ignatius with “a training ground in ‘spiritual discernment’—in how to make strategic decisions that moved the world and changed the course of life.” Jesuit educators have in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius a powerful resource to offer their students who seek training in spiritual discernment—who wonder what facts are relevant or who wonder what is going on in their life and times.

Spiritual discernment, suggests Carl Starkloff, enables one to become an “organic intellectual”—one who learns by involvement and experience and who “does research, makes arguments, seeks data in service of an explicit ideal of emancipation for the poor and marginalized in society.” For Starkloff, the Native American experience of the colonization of the continent is an occasion to rethink the Christian mission, to understand the difference between evangelization and colonization. Starkloff
moves from his own experience of desolation arising from his realization of the injustice done Native Americans, through religious, moral, and intellectual conversion, to an experience of consolation. He further suggests that the mission Church herself must make this journey. The successful outcome of the journey turns upon "intellectual conversion," the explosion of powerful myths which have operated for centuries to dismiss Native American cultural achievements and to perpetuate stereotypes of Native American inferiority. On the road to consolation, the gospel is no longer "masked by the evils of oppression"; the struggle for justice is fired "with the love of God" that brooks no opposition. Just so, he suggests, God can be known in our own experience as integrated intellectuals in solidarity with the poor and the marginalized.

Starkloff finds another resource in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises for one who would seek to be an organic intellectual. He speaks of searching for the truth in the conversation partner, which might mean that, "if I cannot accept my partner's position, I must inquire more deeply into what his or her true meaning might be." For Starkloff that has meant, since 1970, "listening" to the symbols and life of Arapaho culture, "learning from involvement and experience as well as from books." The prize? "The consolation we are called to through such a shattering of false myths promises to lead us to the consolation of the vision of a new creation."

John Haught probes the new "creation-centered" theology of Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox in the course of examining an appropriate Christian response to the present environmental crisis. Like Berry and Fox, Haught does not so much prove as presuppose that God labors for us in all things and can be discovered in all natural events. The trick is to speak accurately about that action, to read the signs of the times critically.

The creation-centered theology of Berry and Fox proposes an entirely new interpretation of classic Christian doctrines. Sin,
for example, means estrangement from the natural world as well as from God and from each other. Reconciliation implies reintegration not only with God and others but with the entire universe. For them, salvation of the soul apart from the renewal of all nature is unthinkable. The ascetic spirit does not renounce nature but accepts "the arduous discipline of taking into full account the fact of our interdependence with a wider earth-community." At the core of creation-centered theology is the conviction that the mystery of God is unfolded in the evolution of the cosmos. Nature deserves our care because "it is the showing forth of an ultimate goodness and generosity. If we lose our environment, Thomas Berry is fond of saying, we lose our sense of God as well."

John Haught would like to ensure that the cosmological turn in theology which Berry and Fox favor is "adequately framed . . . by the theme of hope and promise." Haught sees the cosmos not as a straightforward epiphany of God's presence but as a promise of future fulfillment. "The natural world itself is an installment of the future, and for that reason deserves neither neglect nor worship, but simply the kind of care proportionate to the treasuring of a promise." Conversely, he suggests that we condemn environmental abuse and the intemperate use of diminishing resources because these are forms of despair—a cynical belief that the earth and the universe do not have much of a future. In contrast, the biblical vision of a future perfection of creation invites participation in an ecological call to action in a divine drama.

Heidi Byrnes, in her essay "Cross-Cultural Communications: Identity in Diversity," builds on points made earlier by Patrick Heelan and Carl Starkloff. Her realization that communication is interpretative, that meaning is a culturally constructed reality, is ample indication of her own "intellectual conversion." Such awareness immediately presents one with the problem of cultural relativism. Admitting that a sense of cultural relativity is bracing, Byrnes argues that it is a virtue to be aware of the limiting
relativity of our "world," that different "worlds" have legitimate
claims for existing simultaneously as ways of giving meaning to
human existence. She speaks of a need for "deferential openness"
and "reflective self-assessment" that recalls StarklofF's listening
posture and conversion. When walls in the head are broken down,
she suggests, community can be created through conversation. By
implication, we learn thereby to reach out and embrace others who
look and sound different from us, who in their difference from us
can offer important insight into who we are.

Mary Jo Bane demonstrates what an "organic intellec-
tual" might do in twentieth-century America. A graduate of
Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in 1963, she
became one of the nation's first Peace Corps Volunteers. For most
of her academic life, she has sought to understand the dynamics of
child poverty in the United States and to propose policies, public
and private, which address its root causes. Her remarks on that
subject, included here, were delivered on the eve of her departure
from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University to
Albany, New York, to become Commissioner of the New York
State Department of Social Service.

She begins by challenging stereotypes. Most children
whose parents' income falls below the poverty line are white, do
not live on welfare, and live either in the suburbs or in non-ghetto
central cities. They are children of the "working poor," two
parents whose combined income is so little that it would literally
pay them to go on welfare; or they are children of single parents,
usually women, who receive little if any child support.

Without denying the difficulty in coming to grips with the
problem of child poverty in the United States, it is clear from her
analysis that the crucial strategy to combat poverty is to increase
the economic value of work: to "make work pay." In this light,
she sees the enactment of the earned income tax credit as a step in
the right direction. For single parent families, a poverty fighting
strategy would include a system of child support enforcement through automatic wage withholding (just as the government collects taxes) and would be an important step toward guaranteed child support. "If we had some of these pieces in place we could also see the welfare system much more as a system which helps people move toward independence, a system in which they invest in training, invest in education, invest in getting themselves ready to work." Such changes, she feels, would begin to get at the causes of poverty and make possible a more hopeful future.

"By our choices in the present we seed the future," says Otto Hentz in the course of his reflections on the significance of the Georgetown years for graduating students. If their teachers succeeded in their mission, Georgetown graduates should be prepared to meet the challenges that life will inevitably bring their way. They will be prepared because they will know how difficult it is to achieve personal integrity and how important love formed in friendship is for that achievement. They will have been challenged by a vision of love, justice and peace, "a story of relationships that are right, of relationships embodied in and sustained by social structures that are right." They will know that peace presupposes justice, and that justice demands reverence for one another. They will resonate with a Church that "has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel."

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: Lucretia Murphy, Rebecca Dailey, Sheila Janofsky, Amer Mushtag, who helped prepare the talks for publication; Shelley McEachern and William Gordon, whose assistance in editing and layout was invaluable; and the Office of Student Affairs, which sponsored the lectures and made possible the present edition.

William J. O’Brien
Notes


3 “Desolation” is a technical term whose meaning was originally given by Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises as follows: “I call desolation what is entirely the opposite of what is described in the third rule [consolation], as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord.” The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 142.

4 Ignatius likewise defines “consolation” as “an interior movement . . . aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one’s soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.” Ibid.

Patrick A. Heelan, S.J.

Ignatian Discernment, Aesthetic Play, and Scientific Inquiry

Patrick A. Heelan, S.J. is Executive Vice President for the Main Campus at Georgetown University.
Five hundred years ago, in October 1491, Inigo Loyola—otherwise called Ignatius Loyola, or Saint Ignatius—was born into a provincial family in the small town of Loyola in Northern Spain. The year 1491 was one year before Columbus opened up the continents of America to European power, commerce, and religion. Ignatius Loyola was to found the Society of Jesus which, within a century of its foundation, had opened colleges, universities, and research institutes all over the world, before Harvard and Yale were gleams in their founders’ eyes. Georgetown was one of those institutions, not as old as Jesuit institutions in India, China, Brazil, and Mexico, but certainly among the most glorious.

The Legacy of Ignatius

It is a matter of surprise to learn that Ignatius was not a writer or scholar, nor did he come from a wealthy or princely family. His influence on his times came from the fact that he was a great strategist in life, a decision-maker in great things and in small things. His legacy to the young men who entered the Society was a course of training he called Spiritual Exercises. They were a training in “spiritual discernment”—in how to make strategic decisions that moved the world and changed the course of life. You ask, what is there to making good strategic decisions over and above knowing the facts, being able to defend your choices with good reasons, and having the power to enforce them on others? There is something more. Let me respond in the form of some questions. How is one to determine what facts are relevant? Arguments persuade others; how does one persuade oneself? What greater power is there than having God on your side? Relevant facts, public arguments, and effective power follow—do not precede—the right strategic decision. Though we usually think of decisions as means to get what we want, the question is: what do we want? This decision comes before all other decisions and
subsequently makes facts relevant, arguments persuasive, and, when done right, connects human activity with divine power.

Beyond facts, arguments, and power, we need something more. Ignatius, in line with a very long tradition that we have largely forgotten, answers that we need the help of “spiritual senses”—a paradox of terms, as if the spirit had a bodily organ for “spiritual discernment.” Through these “spiritual senses,” we “feel” our way toward “God’s will,” toward what Ignatius called “the greater glory of God,” the motto of the Jesuit Order which in Latin is Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.

You may find this language archaic, out of place today. The phrase means that, since God’s will for the good Christian person is doing his or her job as a kind of contract with God whose abiding presence gives meaning to life, doing one’s job with intelligence and generosity is acting “for the greater glory of God.” This view presupposes the Christian position that God is personal, interested in people’s lives, and that God gives them help and insight into how best to live--strategically, what job to take and how best to live. These helps and insights are very personal phenomena, which Ignatius describes in such sensory terms as “divine touches.” He speaks of “the bitterness of remorse” and “the sweetness of good deeds,” implying that there is spiritual taste. He speaks of “tears of divine love and sorrow” and the “vision of the Trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

These are strange psychological phenomena, surely, and not easy to research in a scientific way. For Ignatius, these psychological phenomena were associated with strategic decision making for the greater glory of God. For an organization dedicated to education, scholarship, and science, it does seem strange that the legacy of its founder was neither theological, scholarly, nor scientific, but a practical, almost technical, training in spiritual discernment—in the religious, prayerful use of spiritual senses to make strategic personal decisions.
How did Ignatius practice this art? He left a diary that covered some years of his administration as the general of the Jesuits. As general, he lived in three tiny rooms. While doing the business of a farflung empire of houses, missions, colleges, and universities, Ignatius rarely travelled. His routine was to rise, and, while walking to the chapel, think about the business of the day and meditate on the gospel and the prayers of the Mass. As he did so, he was usually engulfed in spiritual feelings, tears, divine touches, and visions that he later noted using a code for the kind, intensity, and occasion of the feelings. These spiritual feelings helped him to make up his mind.

How do the Spiritual Exercises provide training in spiritual discernment? The method consists in retelling stories from the gospels and imagining oneself as an actor within the stories—listening, questioning, helping, engaging actively in the events narrated. For instance, one might imagine oneself accompanying the holy family—Mary with child and Joseph—on their journey to Egypt. Travelling with them, one senses the quality of the light and the colors of the stones. One smells the perfumes of aromatic plants by the road and enjoys the cool shade of date palms in the desert. All the while one hears the members of the holy family speak about their hopes, troubles, fear of betrayal, and of the divine fulfillment of biblical prophecy that they carry with them. In this way one becomes in thought and imagination an actor within the mythic narratives of the Christian faith.

While playing this role, one can ask the travelling company—in imaginative discourse, of course—whether one should for example, accept a current opportunity to uproot one’s family by taking a job in California. Under the right conditions—what they are we will not go into, but they are important—one will experience (so says the Ignatian tradition) the activity of a range of new and spiritual feelings that Ignatius speaks about in the phrases I have quoted: “‘touches’” of the divine, “‘tastes’” of goodness, “‘tears of
divine love and sorrow,” and, if one is especially favored, the “vision of the Trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” These spiritual feelings were called by the characteristically Ignatian terms “consolations” and “desolations.” Unlike everyday feelings, they are spiritual feelings learned by living the biblical stories in familiar, daily comity with Jesus, Mary, and the disciples of Jesus, drawing from the deep Christian memory of the biblical stories. Once the character of these spiritual feelings is recognized, they can be used because they contain promptings to take one kind of action rather than another. One can develop on the basis of these promptings of the spiritual senses an expertise in making decisions in the spirit of a Christian life. This art of making decisions is Ignatian spiritual discernment.

To the modern mind, the method just described seems anti-rational and anti-scientific because our common notion of science and rationality is dominated by theory—by the search for underlying control systems, models, and structures that explain why things come to be the way they are. In science, these are, for example, atomic configurations, molecular structures, neurophysiological, computational, mathematical, linguistic structures. Ignatian discernment is different. It is a practice explained by a certain way of participating in religious mythic narratives, such as the biblical stories. If you wanted to be impish, you could say that the atomic and molecular structures of things are invisible and impalpable, that the mythic biblical stories are also invisible and impalpable, but that both produce real effects in the real world.

In the real world, the Jesuit Order created what for nearly two hundred years at the beginning of the Columbian era was the greatest and most far flung educational, scientific, and missionary movement of all times. The schools the Jesuits founded were the first free public schools. They were multicultural where permitted by the sponsors; they were open to rich and poor, European and native born. This great enterprise was stopped when the European
princes felt threatened by the enormous influence of these schools and engineered the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773 and confiscated its properties. Georgetown was founded about the time of the suppression by ex-Jesuits who were refugees from the European pogrom of ecclesiastical institutions.

Returning to the far flung empire of Jesuit schools reaching from China and India to Brazil and Mexico, its lines of communication were such that an exchange of letters often took a year and more. The universal method of “spiritual discernment” coordinated its governance. Spiritual discernment, common rules, and a common curriculum in the Ratio Studiorum turned the entire enterprise toward the greater glory of God. The training and the method were for two hundred years spectacularly successful for the purposes of the enterprise. Then, in 1773, the Jesuit order was suppressed and its training manuals relegated to the oblivion of library archives. After the restoration of the Jesuit Order in 1814, things were not the same; the tradition was broken. No one remembered how the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius were to be interpreted or how the training manuals worked.

The Contemporary Relevance of Spiritual Discernment

Can Georgetown University, which is Catholic and Jesuit, learn anything from this piece of history? Or is this a piece of dead history with no relevance today? Is there a difference between a Catholic and a secular university that is relevant to the question of spiritual discernment? In this age of instant electronic recall, faxes, satellites, computers, and telephones, where difficult and complex decisions are aided by computational models and comprehensive data-bases, can Ignatian “spiritual discernment” be significant with its seemingly naive, premodern assumptions based on the power of story telling and belief in the invisible hand of God’s providence?
MINDING THE TIME

From the point of view of pure academics, one has to say that there is very little difference today between a Catholic University and a secular one. Catholic universities have for a long time adopted the academic goals, standards, and procedures of secular universities. They have endorsed the intellectual model of academic freedom to inquire and to teach, and they accept academic productivity as the mark of a successful career. The assumptions in both cases are the same: that universal, perennial, and objective truth—sacred and secular—is available to human reason unhindered by bias. This is a myth—that is, a very important story relating to ourselves and who we are—the Western myth of classical reason, the Apollonian myth. For Catholics, an extra assumption not shared by their secular colleagues is that the constraints of religious dogma do not constitute a bias but are an added help toward discerning the location of truth.

Both Catholic and secular universities share the Apollonian myth of classical reason; namely, that truth is independent of human culture and history. Both then have come to share the same current crisis of disillusion with such a truth. For by now in every field, truth seems to be pluralistic, hermeneutical, political, and historical. As Martin Heidegger put it, the essence of human understanding is being-in-the-world; that is, truth as the object of human understanding is from the very start interpretive. To the extent that historical humanity knows itself only as a function of its world, this world reveals itself as essentially the domain of human significant action. In this sense, classical metaphysics, an assumption common to both Enlightenment science and to the Church's stance as a teacher about Christian revelation, is an illusion of ahistorical thinking. If that sounds too shocking and insensitive to the greatness of our Western heritage, we can rephrase the conclusion: classical metaphysics is—or may be—the product of local thinking, restricted to the practical constancies which constituted the effective cultural and historical background of the Church since the time of the first great councils.
Unity, order, and reason—divinely established, humanly disrupted, and re-established by grace—comprised the effective hermeneutic and historical background within which it became possible to interpret the content of Christian revelation using the philosophy of ancient Greece (or, to be more precise, using those ancient authors for whom unity, order, and reason were of paramount significance—or could be read as making this affirmation). A choice—indeliberate, perhaps, but historical nevertheless—was made in favor of the Apollonian Plato rather than the Dionysian Plato, in favor of Aristotle rather than Heraclitus, of the Plato of the forms rather than the Plato of the mysteries, of the Aristotle of cosmology rather than the Aristotle of the Nicomachian Ethics and Poetics. Theology and Christian dogma began with such "local" interpretation. Science and the secular Enlightenment came a long time later to re-appropriate the same values and relocate them in the secular university.

What characterizes our contemporary intellectual crisis—call it "the post-modern condition of knowledge"—is a pervasive disillusion with the human capacity to discover ahistorical, perennial, and universal truths in literature, theology, science, even in mathematics. The post-modern condition of knowledge affects both secular and Catholic universities. Students in our universities, secular or Catholic, experience a veritable Babel of competing and incompatible theories or models of the human person, of human life and society, taught or suggested, assumed or postulated, by teachers and researchers in different disciplines, even in the same discipline. People are just constellations of molecules programmed by genes, or just systems of biological functions, or just complicated computers, or just programmed robots, or are described by whatever metaphor is useful or fashionable for a while within a discipline.

Most bright students eventually come to discount all of these metaphors, if they sample a sufficient variety of courses.
Some, however, select from this heady menu one or other of the metaphors of life to suit their taste. In a secular university, there is no office or function, no department or discipline with the mission to assess these incompatible metaphors or models or to make sense of them for the purpose of personal, spiritual, or civic life. Philosophy no longer does that; and theology in the traditional sense does not exist in most secular universities. Philosophy just adds its own metaphors to the menu of human life, usually oversophisticated variations to the scientific metaphors. In addition, the humanities often serve today as the pulpit for a variety of ideologies or substitutes for theology—materialism, Marxism, utopianism, feminism, fundamentalism—but rarely for Christianity in any of the traditions that Ignatius would have recognized. There is usually a dominant disciplinary ideology in every discipline without which a student cannot pursue his or her studies or succeed in them. In addition, individual professors may have their personal ideologies with which students have to cope.

The academic environment today in Catholic and in secular universities is pluralist with respect to ways of assessing the significance of various models of being human. Unlike secular universities, Catholic universities, through mission-oriented theology and philosophy departments, have generally tried to provide resources for addressing intellectually and deliberately lifestyle questions and the question of the ultimate significance of human life. The latter question is by definition religious. Theology I take to be the reasoning arm of a religious tradition.

On secular campuses, as I have said, there is no academic department with such a mission. Even worse, there is no longer any common religious language which one can use to discuss such questions without fear of colossal misunderstanding. Though on some secular campuses, one may find a department of religious studies, it is usually a department of comparative religion and does not function as a theology department. I should point out that
theology can be taught even in publicly supported universities provided the goal is not to train priests or ministers, but it is rarely taught in public universities because of fears of a political backlash or because religiously oriented universities have blocked the development of a theology program in publicly supported universities believing that such a program would diminish the distinctiveness of religious-oriented schools.

One might think that the situation in Catholic universities is better because there exist mission-oriented programs in philosophy and theology to assist students to make sense of the Babel of academic theories, models, and metaphors. In principle, Yes! but in practice No! because philosophy and theology have themselves succumbed to the post-modern condition and have spawned their own menu of human and religious models exhibiting with a vengeance the same kind of pluralism and indeterminacy as the other disciplines. Hermeneutics and historicity have become as great a problem for theology, philosophy, and the humanities as they have for the sciences.

Let me clarify where the problem in question lies. It is not that we know or expect only one of the Babel of voices to be correct but happen not to know how to discern the one true voice. This “resolution” would be a return to the old Apollonian position which has been thrown into doubt. Rather the problem is that each voice speaks from a different background, and we have no sure way of discerning how to create that background, how to share it, so as to be able to pass judgment on the truth or falsity of what the voices say. We hear scientific and pop-scientific voices in many reductionist registers, we hear in addition feminist voices, African American voices, hispanic voices, voices of the disabled and the oppressed. How can we get into so many skins so as to discern truth or falsity? This is the problem of hermeneutics and the historicity of knowledge highlighted by the post-modern condition of knowledge. It stems from the realization that theory--or language-as-
theory—speaks only out of a common experiential praxis. And it stems from the post-modern realization that there is no longer any certainty that there is a single, privileged, shareable, human experiential praxis. This last realization is perceived as a threat to human comity.

Deeply ingrained in our modern culture is the persuasion that science at least is a privileged, shareable, experiential praxis. Is this belief mistaken? In one sense, No! Science is cosmopolitan and transcends ethnic cultures and economic classes. But it is a moving and diversifying culture, a dendritic or branching culture, like a river system, changing continuously as the flow of water, the sediments, and topography shape the pattern of channels in which rivers flow. At any time the channels look fixed and permanent, but they are not; the channels of science change when, on the basis of new research, scientists decide that the channels of science must change.

Who are those scientists whose decisions shape the change? What are their names? Where are they? How do these decisions get made? Scientific decisions take place in a privileged location, the place of scientific research, where experts meet. But once science leaves this privileged location and the society of experts, it quickly becomes something else, pop-science, that uses the language of science to displace and make unreal the verities that we know—or are now persuaded that we falsely thought we knew. Pop-scientific substitutes, like cuckoo’s eggs, masquerade for the true and tried progeny of human experience. Pop-science replaces the world with an invisible, impalpable set of structures--atomic, molecular, neurophysiological, computational, linguistic, and so on--that for us citizens lie as it were behind a glass wall. We see them, for science shows them to us in electronic pictures or other representations; but we do not experience them as functioning quite the way the old and familiar objects did. Their values as human objects have been neutralized or changed.
In a study I made a few years ago, I found that the Euclidian space of physical measurement, scientific space, is not the space in which we walk or play or go to the supermarket; the former is infinite and homogeneous, the latter is finite and qualitatively different in near and far, like Aristotle’s space. The rays of the sun from the edge of a cloud are seen to emerge from a golden disk and shoot in curving arcs across the vaulted heavens, in contrast to the scientific description of this phenomenon. Psychologist James Gibson has shown that electromagnetic radiation has a different structure from the light that illuminates our world, for what we see is not light but colored surfaces that appear to be of constant color despite falling shadows and changing illumination. Historian of medicine Barbara Dudon has shown that the pregnancy women experienced before modern medicine is different from the pregnancy they experience under the instruction of modern medicine, and sometimes dangerously different to both mother and child. She contrasts modern phrases such as “having a fetus” or “carrying a new life” that need the intervention and validation of medical experts with older phrases such as “quickening” in which the expert voice is that of the woman alone.

Once science hits public and popular culture it becomes no longer science with its special environments and local research and laboratory interests but takes on the form of a rogue culture—Dudon calls it “pop-science”—that, like the young cuckoo, ousts the genuine chicks from the nest. Living as I fear most of us do behind this glass wall of pop-scientific unreality, we easily lose faith in our own powers of discernment and easily hand responsibility over to others—trained in natural or social science, psychology, linguistics, and so on—whose expertise is in the special environment of the laboratory and in scholarly research but who have no special expertise in human life as it is lived by citizens and who may not know how to make strategic life decisions. Perhaps, you expect me to say that theology is the one privileged, shareable, human
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experiential praxis. Could, for example, the pluralism and undecidability of, say, theological truth be resolved by the Church's magisterium, by the voice of the pope and bishops? For practicing Catholics in a Catholic school, the intervention of the magisterium is profoundly significant. However, to understand what the magisterium has uttered, the hearer must be able to share the common historical experiential praxis—the Catholic world—which mediates between language as theory and the real life of Catholics in the world. This hermeneutical and historical dimension of truth is presupposed by the magisterium; it is not created by the magisterium but is discovered by learning how to live as a Christian so as to experience the truth of the message. But then there are many ways to live expertly as a Christian, not just one; the Christian imagination is itself open and creative of new forms of Christian expertise, just like the scientific one.

What then is the relationship of the universities to truth? Are they the places where truth is found in its final public expression? Recalling the Babel of contradictory voices one hears on campus, it is clear that, whether or not universities are the site of definitive truth, old and new, the fact of the matter—regrettable, possibly, to some—is that it seems to be not so. Universities are less places where definitive public truth is found than vast playgrounds where intellectual possibilities are explored by experts in new forms of discourse. For experts in the specialized disciplines, these discoveries make sense. But we have not as a culture taken cognizance of the dangers of letting scientific language oust natural language—dangers that stifle our ability among other things to find and use the spiritual senses, because the language in which the great and mythic stories of our religious heritage were written was not pop-scientific language but the language of strategic living, some of which predates science. We still use this older language in our moments of innocence, for example, when we see the sun's rays curving across the vaulted sky, when we see objects of a stable
color across which variegated shadows fall, or when a woman feels the child within her and says, "There is my child Brendan talking to me."

The discourse of the academic and scientific community is the discourse of experts, suitable for specialized laboratory environments and the special interests of particular historical research communities. Academic and scientific languages are many, each specialized to its own cultural niche within the university. All are— or can be—true within their own cultural niches, but they should not be conceived as constituent parts of the language in which strategic life decisions are made; rather are they parts of what explains why the language of strategic living does its job so well. When we see colors, it is because our neurophysiological networks are working well. Seeing colors, however, is not just a function of the good working of neurophysiological networks but is subordinate to the human functions of sight; therefore, a person may fail to see colors as others see them for reasons that have nothing to do with the retina and visual cortex.

Science then should not be thought of as a way of correcting the language of strategic life decisions. However, science creates new contexts in which this language can expand and re-express itself. It does this, not by displacing the language of strategic living in favor of scientific language—this route leads to pop-science—but by using the discoveries of science to create new technologies which enlarge human culture, human interests, and human desires.

Electronic systems, molecular structures such as genes or proteins, neurophysiological networks such as the retina and the visual cortex, are for us ordinary people in the midst of everyday cares, as it were, objects behind glass; they can be shown to us with the aid of specialized instruments, but they are not everyday furniture of that world in which we fulfill our social and personal responsibilities or, in Ignatian language, in which we work for the greater glory of God.
Conclusion

To sum up, I would like to revisit the places—"compositions of place," as Ignatius liked to call them—where we have been. First, I invoked the image of Ignatius in his suite of tiny rooms near the Vatican in Rome where he read and answered letters, making strategic decisions that governed a far-flung empire of college and universities, keeping a diary in the form of an account book of the tears he shed, of the tastes and visions he had, playing the game of living within the biblical narrative.

Second, I invoked the image of the university as a playground where a wide and disparate variety of language-games are played by experts, occupying specialized research and laboratory niches, insulated from the world of strategic living. These specialized languages, however, have aggressively colonized our language for strategic living and set up a glass wall between what we think we know and what we need to know, making it impossible for us to do what Ignatius did, to relive the mythic narrative of biblical faith. Science has become pop-science and, as pop-science, it has no resonance with the biblical myth of our faith.

What, finally, have these images of places got to do with Georgetown today? At Georgetown we dwell in a place where genuine science mixes with and inevitably produces trendy pop-science. Should we oppose the aggression of pop-science or should we live with it? Pop-science is glamorous and trendy and easier to live with, but the price may be to lose one’s soul. In contrast with the modern campus, we recall the sparse rooms where Ignatius made strategic decisions for a global network of institutions. It is not the contrast in size that concerns us, but whether and to what extent what goes on at the university campus can be used to enrich the language of strategic living rather than to build glass walls that separate us from life. I trust that there is an art for enriching the language of strategic living. If so, we, faculty and students, will be able once more to renew our contact with the
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seemingly antiquated biblical myths and recover the spiritual senses and the power of spiritual discernment that made Ignatius a master of making up his own mind.

Notes

1 See Antonio de Nicholas, Powers of Imagining (Washington: Paragon, 1987).
Carl Starkloff, S.J.

Conquest, Conversion and Consolation: An Ignatian Perspective on 1992

Carl Starkloff, S.J. is Associate Professor of Missiology at Regis College, Toronto School of Theology.
It is symbolically significant that, just as Christopher Columbus was disembarking on a beach in the "new world," the infant Inigo de Loyola was just beginning to try to stand on his own feet. In this light, Jesuit education today does well to be "mindful of the time"—a five-centuries-long "time"—involving the Church so intricately in the political fate of the world (not just Europe, but the world). It is incumbent now on Jesuit educators to use every available power of discernment to understand the difference between evangelization and colonization.

More than ever before, our educational institutions and processes must bring forth what John Coleman calls "the organic intellectual." Citing an anonymous Jesuit educator, who in turn is citing Antonio Gramsci, Coleman writes: "The organic intellectual is the man or woman who does research, makes arguments, seeks data in service of an explicit ideal of emancipation for the poor and marginalized in society." Coleman later adds that "an essential component of a genuine commitment to a Jesuit intellectual life demands a closer integration of spirituality and the intellectual life than has always been usual in Jesuit circles."

We North American Jesuits and you collaborators with us are heirs to a Church whose evangelical and educational work has been interwoven from the beginning with conquest. Or, as one middle-aged and sociologically trained Ojibway woman in my native ministry class said recently, "I can’t think of conversion except as ‘assimilation.’" And, indeed, assimilation is in a way a conquest. For this reason, I wish to treat conversion in a more critical way and argue that the lack of conversion results in what Ignatius Loyola called "desolation." I intend to conclude on the note of "consolation," again in the sense intended by Ignatius—as a gift granted to persons whose intellectual life has been transformed into a more authentic "spiritual life."

The thesis of my address is that two traditional Ignatian spiritual dynamics, one of them well-known and documented and
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the other sadly neglected by scholars, are essential to the growth of creative intellectual life for any Christian. I have also found it helpful to reconsider, with the help of Bernard Lonergan, that word persistent in the history of Christian mission—that is, "conversion"—and to extricate it from the language of conquest. First, however, I must define my terms.

Conquest

There is nothing obscure about the word "conquest." It would seem to have meant originally "to seek along with," but soon enough it became a euphemism for overcoming anyone and anything that stands in the way of that search. The word has a very special connotation in the history of the Spanish Empire. At the very time Columbus made his "discovery" and Ignatius was entering the world, Spain was completing its own process of liberation, driving out the Moors. This victory came to be called reconquista, initiating a new discovery of Spanish pride and power. As is true in most such cases, the victory brought its own injustices—further development of the Inquisition, persecution of Jews, and expulsion of many innocent Muslims. Above all, the victory gave further impulse to discover new lands needed for living space. The campaign was not necessarily connected with the re-conquest, but it drew much heart from that victory.

I have no intention here of joining the gleeful "Columbus-bashing" party, and even less of bestowing lavish praise on him. Columbus was, to all appearances, simply a man of his times, with some good practical sense and enough vision to respond to his ambitions, but with little creative philosophical sense. Our calling here is to examine history for its lessons for the present and future lest, as George Santayana once said, by neglecting to study the past we be doomed to repeat it.

Two particular ideologies (I use the word here as an idea with profound social conditioning) enter our purview at this point.
The first ideology shaped the Holy Roman Empire, the union of cross and crown. It was a common practice, at least by Catholic explorers, upon taking possession of a segment of new territory, to introduce an intimidating symbol: a high cross was erected, upon which was attached—or perhaps placed alongside on another standard—the escutcheon of the royal personage in whose name the conquest was achieved. Many times, if not always, a missionary would obligingly point out to utterly bewildered indigenous people that a new and mighty sovereign was now in charge.

The second ideology takes its power from a tendency common to all societies and particular cultures—the ingrained attitude of xenophobia, or fear of foreigners, and the need to experience one’s own culture as superior. This phobia is especially evident in European history in the Greek treatment of “barbarians,” of people whose language is strange. In hellenistic intellectual history, the philosopher Aristotle was the foremost interpreter of policy towards such barbarians, with his explanation of the natural hierarchy inherent in all reality: act over potency, form over matter, man over woman, free man over slave. The fate of slavery belonged to those whose habits and customs were decidedly inferior. It has been called the theory of natural slavery.

It was easy enough for many Spanish scholars to apply this theory to strange beings discovered in new lands, especially if these scholars were unburdened with any direct experiences of such peoples. In this way, they could maintain “scholarly objectivity”—a claim not unheard of today. The fact that Europe and, indeed, Aristotle were now “christianized” further made conquest an act of praise to the almighty. Not that these inferior beings were totally unworthy to become Christians. Had not Jesus told the parable of the wealthy householder who ordered his hirelings to “force” the guests to come to the wedding? Thus, if the aboriginals should resist, they were to be conquered by force, for their own good and for that of the gospel. Hundreds of thousands, better, millions of indigenous people...
resisted this ideology, of course. But even many of these, finally convinced that their "medicine" was weaker than the medicine of the Europeans, saw fit to capitulate.  

Desolation

I realize that I am painting very broad strokes, and that there is also a history of heroism and sanctity in the persons of many missionaries and some narrative of deeper conversion of many aboriginal people. But I believe my sketch is fair enough, at least to make us attend to the challenge to acquire a deeper intellectual-spiritual integration. Countless hagiographies—eulogies of the saints—created in Catholics (especially in young Jesuits of the 1940s and 1950s) ideals of courage, sanctity and enlightenment in the persons of the great missionaries. We experienced a certain "consolation" (I will explain this Ignatian term more fully momentarily): that is, it provided us with a triumphant encouragement and inspiration—but with very little healthy criticism. My own mission history, spent mostly with North American Indian people, took its early motivation from such examples and reinforced the courage of my convictions.

Not until the ferment behind the Second Vatican Council did some of the moorings of our mighty edifice show signs of rotting out. Rotting was our foundation of unexamined assumptions. Vatican II produced a fine document on missionary activity which helped to provoke the contemporary process of reflection on what we now call "inculturation," or relating the gospel and culture critically and empathetically. In the light of this development, we budding theologians began to ask ourselves very troublesome questions. I began to read the writings of less friendly critics, especially those of a man who later became a friend—Vine Deloria, Jr., a Sioux treaty lawyer and philosopher-theologian. Deloria used a very potent phrase to interpret the results of mission activity among native peoples: "the religious vacuum." Deloria explained
with considerable acuity how missionaries convinced Indians of their cultural and spiritual inferiority, but were unable to fill the gaping hole with anything equally meaningful. I was beginning to sense a growing spiritual and moral malaise, which was further intensified when two native young people, in a friendly but troubled tone, asked me why the Church had been so destructive of their traditional spirituality.

Numerous experiences like this one launched me upon a new phase of intellectual excitement, but one also interlaced with what I have recently come to understand as spiritual "desolation." I was coming to understand it, not simply as "dryness in prayer," but as a much more profound experience, and one that I have come to see as the lot of many aboriginal persons as well. In fact, even now, long after beginning my more critical "conversion" process, this desolation still overtakes me on many occasions. Take for example the workshop on native ministry at the 1983 Tekakwitha Conference. For some years, mission personnel and many native collaborators had been in dialogue about "harmonizing" native ritual and "Christian" (that is, traditionally Euro-American) liturgy. But many lifelong and rather conservative Indian Catholics had been shocked and troubled by these practices, as hard as we tried to encourage their participation in the process. The result was that an intimidating accusation arose in the person of Sioux Deacon Victor Bull Bear: "You Jesuits have wasted a hundred years!"

What, then, is "desolation"? David Fleming renders Ignatius’s description in this way: desolation occurs "when we find ourselves enmeshed in a certain turmoil of spirit or feel ourselves weighed down by a heavy darkness or weight." Thus, we experience a lack of faith or hope or love, a certain distaste for spiritual things (as we have known them, I might add!), and "a certain restlessness in our carrying on in the service of God." It is not my purpose here to consider the dynamics of individual spiritual direction. My point is that the entire missionary church has found itself recently in such desolation of spirit. In many
ways, it parallels the crisis of confidence in the Church of so many Catholics (not to speak of countless other Christians as well). It has most certainly created inroads into the spiritual dimension of our intellectual life as we read innumerable "revisionist histories" condemning or at least severely criticizing mission activities hitherto characterized as heroic.

But permit me to apply here the wise spiritual counsel always proposed to any individual under spiritual direction. While never ceasing to persevere in our spiritual vigor, we should nonetheless consider that perhaps the desolation has been permitted for a good reason. Just as the individual person may find it necessary to alter, adapt, or even eliminate some of his or her practices or ways of thinking, so too does the counsel apply to all involved Christians being guided by the Spirit. Through a collective desolation, a community may have to undertake new energetic and hope-filled revisions in theory and practice of evangelization, and thus too of intellectual life. This point brings us to the matter of conversion.

Conversion

That in reality no one "converts" another is also an Ignatian principle. The spiritual director is at most a facilitator of the movements of grace (no less important for that), and God alone is the true director. Conversion takes place deep in the person’s interior life. The fact that missionaries so often allowed duress of one kind or another to bring Indians into the Church must explain to us now those cases we have so often referred to as "recidivism" (falling back). But the notion of conversion I am proposing here involves the interior life of the mission Church itself. There is no desire here to question the astounding courage or sincerity of those early heroes, far overshadowing that of us who might want to cast such aspersions.

But what, then, was the problem? A helpful answer comes
from Bernard Lonergan, S.J., for whom conversion is multi-dimensional. In Lonergan's framework, conversion must be intellectual, moral and religious.\(^\text{10}\)

Looking at religious conversion first, we find that it is, in Lonergan's words, "being grasped by an ultimate concern... an otherworldly falling in love... God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us."\(^\text{11}\) In the very general sense, a religiously converted person will also be a morally converted person; that is, one who makes decisions on the basis of values rather than on the basis of mere satisfaction.\(^\text{12}\) But the irony is that a very religious and very moral person can often make bad decisions because of the absence of intellectual conversion.

What then is intellectual conversion? It is "the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality."\(^\text{13}\) This point is so vital that I must select a striking example. In fifteenth century Spain, many well-meaning intellectuals were able to support the activity of the conquistadors, even to rationalize the hideous atrocities committed against the Indians, based on the myth of racial inferiority and of the fundamental insincerity of non-Christians.

Let me propose to you a famous historical case of threefold conversion (intellectual, moral, and religious), and certainly one of the most dramatic in the history of ideas, of religion, of culture or of political life. Some ten years following the arrival of Columbus to the western hemisphere, a young cleric named Bartolomé de Las Casas arrived somewhere in southern Mexico or Central America. He was eventually to become in all probability the first priest ordained in the "new world." This young ecclesiastic enjoyed the privilege of sharing in the system of the encomiendas: an encomienda was a piece of territory granted the crown to conquistadors as a kind of fiefdom. The Indians who lived on the land, or who might be dragged onto it, were awarded to the landowner to serve him as serfs or even as slaves, paying him in addition a tribute in goods,
especially gold that they themselves were forced to mine. Naturally, many resisted and suffered such reprisals as severed noses and hands, disembowelment, beheading, burning, and more refined tortures. Indian women who were pregnant had the fetuses cut from their wombs. All of this activity received its justification on the basis of the theory of natural inferiority and the right of Christianity to eliminate paganism.

However, there were also many theologians, most of them Dominicans, who despised these forms of hypocrisy in the name of Christianity and who did not hesitate to say so. Historical record tells us that Las Casas, for some years apparently denying the reality of such atrocities, was able to continue as a chaplain to the encomenderos and to have such property of his own. But he apparently heard many of the denunciations of the reformers and seems especially to have paid attention when one of them denied him absolution. His first conversion, I believe, was a moral conversion, because he suddenly came to place the value of human dignity above his own advancement. Thereupon he first attempted to reform the encomienda system by trying to provide rules for humane treatment of the Indians. The myth of conquest seems to have dissipated rapidly for him, because in 1521 he came to the intellectual realization that the system itself could not be reformed and was inherently evil. For the rest of his life he preached and taught that the only way to make amends to the Indians was through complete restitution, and that the only way to win them to Christianity was through gentle witness.

In the year 1522, when he was forty-eight, Las Casas seems to have had a radical religious conversion and entered the Dominican novitiate, continuing to remain cloistered for some five years. When he emerged, he embarked on an astounding struggle for justice and became one of the true giants in new world history, indeed in world history. Las Casas devoted all his life and energy until, almost literally, his final breath at the age of ninety-two to the
defense of the Indians. As bishop of Chiapas, his life was often threatened by angry colonists, and he was at least once the target of an arquebus fusillade. He spent his final quarter century back in his native Spain as a theologian and pamphleteer combatting the existing theological justifications of the ideology of conquest.

In Las Casas’s later writings, we find examples of what we are calling religious conversion. He seems to have found the personal ideal of Jesus Christ. Over against elevating Aristotle as the final source of morality, he constantly proclaimed Jesus and his gospel witness as the one true source of Christian social activity. He seems to have entered into “the mind of Christ” in countless passages where he calls upon his readers to try to imagine how Jesus himself would have acted, of how the Indians themselves were part of the body of Christ. His one persistent personal anxiety was that, in earlier times after his moral conversion, he had let himself be deceived into allowing African slaves to be imported into the western hemisphere, thinking them to be legitimate prisoners of war. But upon discovering the truth, he never ceased to ask forgiveness and to state his fear that this sin might still be held against him at the moment of final judgment.

So, Bartolome de Las Casas stands out as an example of one who saw conquest for what it is. To him, conversion could never be anything but an interior choice, and the gospel could never be made evident to anyone while masked by the evils of oppression. Out of his own desolation came a new integrated conversion, after which he could continue to struggle, even in the face of the failure of his campaign (the atrocities continue, as we all know, under other names). Las Casas himself seems to have been in “consolation” in its deepest sense. I ask you now to join me in an effort to understand this Ignatian concept.

Consolation

This great Dominican died some ten years after Saint Ignatius died, and we have no evidence that he was familiar with
the Spiritual Exercises, though we do know how deeply the Jesuits of the Paraguay Reductions were influenced by him. But I believe that Las Casas was granted true spiritual consolation. "Let us consider how Ignatius describes "consolation." In it, "we find ourselves so on fire with the love of God that neither anything nor anyone presents itself in competition with a total gift of self to God in love."16  We are saddened by our sins, but we know God as Savior. "We find our life of faith, hope, and love so strengthened and emboldened that the joy of serving God is foremost in our life."17 The old man Las Casas, I submit, had become a true "organic intellectual." One historian could write of him, "His life is a magnificent lesson and example of the conduct (the honesty, study and valor) that should guide the actions of the Christian intellectual confronting a hostile political environment."18

The Ignatian Presupposition

We return now to our own times and to our own struggles to be integrated intellectuals. I have elucidated one of the two spiritual dynamics of Ignatius—that of desolation/consolation—and the related conversion process. I believe the second dynamic, to which I will now turn, has been neglected by commentators. At the outset of the book of the Exercises, there appears a very brief and laconic instruction which I find moving, partly because of its lack of rhetorical ornament. Here I do not use Fleming’s popular translation because I think it loses some of the force of Ignatius’s austere expression. In the context of the giving and receiving of the Exercises, Ignatius says:

... it is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false. If an orthodox construction cannot be put on a proposition, the one who made it should be asked how he understands it. If he is in error, he should be corrected with all kindness. If this does not suffice, all appropriate means should be used to bring him to a correct interpretation, and so defend the proposition from error.19
I will now make some adaptations of my own for our age, trying to preserve the underlying intent. The first sentence should stand unaltered: a Christian, living Saint Paul’s great hymn to Christian love, should always “rejoice in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6). Taking no delight in falsehood, the Christian searches for the truth in the conversation partner. The second sentence, I believe, needs adaptation: that is, while orthodoxy properly understood is a desirable goal, more important is the point that every person in a conversation seeks to find and express the deeper truth behind doctrine and its implications for life and practice. The beauty of the statement lies in the counsel of Ignatius, who had suffered greatly at the hands of the Inquisition, that, if I cannot accept my partner’s position, I must inquire more deeply into what his or her true meaning might be. Finally, Ignatius counsels that, if I cannot agree with the other, I should then seek in a Christian way to convince him or her of a better understanding.

How does this at times forgotten piece of instruction impinge on our discussion? To answer this question, I will call upon my own mission history, where my conversations generally had to be carried on not so much on the “prepositional” level as on the level of symbolism or living examples.

My life since 1969 has been shaped by an attempt to respond to the troubled query of a young Arapaho student. The dialogue that has ensued has challenged me more than anything else in my life to intellectual, moral and religious conversion. It has often plunged me into desolation, especially upon experiencing the anger of persons kept down by a history of oppression. It has also filled me with consolation, with an assurance that, though I still share in the sins of my own culture and of my own Church, God is present to forgive, strengthen and enlighten me as long as I remain open to the ways in which God comes to me through people.

Along with so many fellow missionaries, I had spent my early years believing that aboriginal spirituality and ritual was
“superstitious.” But in 1970, I began to be a listener, not so much to intellectual propositions (though also to these when I could understand them), but to the symbols and life of a culture. With the help of elders, I received rudiments of the Arapaho language, from which we eventually produced liturgical and devotional texts. I never became fluent, but I was allowed to share in many images of this unwritten ancient language and its descriptive power. Even today, the most powerful prayer I can make goes, “One-over-all-things, have pity on me. I am sitting here on the earth praying to you. Give me pity, truth and love.”

I have been permitted to view many ceremonials and to participate in others. I have learned to appreciate that one will understand more of a culture if one feels the power of its solitary vision quests, the brief, cleansing suffering of the sweat lodge, the prayers of the suffering in a peyote meeting, the family’s love of a child in a naming ceremony, or the assuagement of grief and mourning in a paint ceremony. Elders and other leaders have explained much of these things to me, where explanation is possible, and contemporary native Catholic ministers have shared with me how they discern what is good or bad within their traditional spirituality. (As with any religious system, there are problems in aboriginal systems, too.)

However incomplete, religious conversion is also a further intellectual conversion, because it always tells me that my God is still too small. I have come to prefer the name “Creator” for God, because this name calls me to attend to all four directions of the universe. On my wall at home, my Jesuit vow crucifix rests within the necklace of a black and white beaded medallion that has on it the silhouette of a turtle. The turtle figures in countless tribal mythologies because it is the symbol of creation. In the Arapaho creation story, this little creature dives to the bottom of the watery abyss to bring back mud for the culture hero to use in refashioning the earth for the people to live on.
However imperfectly, by being attentive I have been brought to many moral conversions. At times when I was discouraged by the alcoholism of reservation life, by listening to the right people, I learned to appreciate how deeply oppression had figured in this terrible disease. I am also able to rejoice as I see a number of native adults now ministering to their own people and challenging them through the integration of traditional Christian and aboriginal symbols. By hearing the old myths, I have come to appreciate, hopefully without tawdry romanticism, that the earth is a precious gift to us all, and that all of us have a right to call some of it our own for the duration of our life upon it.

In conclusion, I hope that we all can learn increasingly how to become “organic intellectuals” by learning from involvement and experience as well as from books. We will all pass through further desolations; may we see them in faith as challenges to new conversions. Certain myths may be shattered, as has been the case for so many previously convinced of the ideology of European superiority. But the conversions that we are called to through such a shattering of false myths promises to lead us to the consolation of the vision of a new creation.

Notes

2 Ibid., 43.
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1989); Lewis Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959); Lewis Hanke, All Mankind is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); Juan Friede and Benjamin Keen, Bartolomé de Las Casas in History: Toward an Understanding of His Work (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971).

4 For accounts of this practice, see Green and Diskason, 7-17.

5 The modern Cheyenne author, Hyemeyohsts Storm, tells an imaginative story that I am sure could be substantiated many times over for aboriginal peoples. During the time of early contact with Europeans, when Left Hand shows deep bewilderment over the fact that so many hundreds of his tribe have died of the terrible sickness (smallpox), Night Bear explains to him that the white people have the power to command even the death of sickness. The name of that terrible medicine power is "Geezis." The white man has named his terrible medicine power with this name." Hyemeyohsts Storm, Seven Arrows (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 274.


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 13.


11 Lonergan, op.cit., 240. See Romans 5:5.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 238.

14 See Las Casas, In Defense of the Indians: The Defense of the Most Reverend Lord, Fray don Bartolomé de Las Casas, of the Order of Preachers, Late Bishop of Chiapas, Against the Persecutors and Slanderers of the Peoples of the New World Discovered Across the Seas (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), passim.
15 See Juan Friede, "Las Casas and Indigenism in the Sixteenth Century" in Friede and Keen, op. cit., 166.
16 Fleming, op. cit., 207.
17 Ibid.
18 Manuel Giménez Fernández, "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas; a Biographical Sketch" in Friede and Keen, op. cit., 117.
John F. Haught

Theology and the Environmental Crisis

John F. Haught is Professor and Chair of the Department of Theology at Georgetown University.
I will not begin with a lengthy description of the environmental ills that beset us today, even though we all need to be more fully educated on the harsh facts of the matter. Nor is it my purpose here to dwell on the practical things we need to do as a society and as individuals, especially in the way of reshaping public policy, in order to improve the natural environment.

Instead, I offer the following reflections from the limited perspective of a Christian theologian seeking an answer to the question: precisely why should we care about the non-human natural world? Most of us probably believe that caring for nature is a good thing to do, and we can even give some very good pragmatic answers to the question. But theology is concerned with the religious justification of any moral concern. And so it is the task of environmental theology to spell out, from within the context of a particular tradition, the religious reasons for caring about the cosmos.

In a recent speech Russell Train, who chairs the World Wildlife Fund, listed the main threats to our natural environment: the destruction of the rain forests, the erosion of our soils, the loss of sources of fresh water, the spread of deserts, the pollution of land, water and air, the alarming rate of extinction of species, global warming, and the thinning of the stratospheric ozone layer. Overarching all of these is the burgeoning human population: "Almost every significant threat to the environment," he says, "is contributed to and compounded by human numbers."

It is disturbing to Train, who has been part of the environmental movement for over thirty years, that during much of this time organized religion has been almost totally unresponsive to the threats he enumerates. For that matter, so have other institutions like governments, big business and universities, but the obliviousness of religion to the environmental crisis, he notes, has been nothing less than extraordinary. Here we have had one of the most fundamental concerns to agitate human society within
living memory. Here we have issues that go to the heart of the human condition, to the quality of human life, even to humanity's ultimate survival. Here we have problems that can be said to threaten the very integrity of Creation. And yet the churches and other institutions of organized religion have largely ignored the whole subject.2

Train acknowledges that here and there a few alert religious thinkers have dealt with the issue, but our religious institutions have been, he says, "largely silent and on the sidelines."3

Partly in response to the complaints of environmentalists like Train, I have been pondering the question whether the religions of the world, and in particular Christianity, have the resources to contribute substantially to the resolution of our current environmental predicament. What Train says about religion's past lack of interest in the welfare of nature seems to me to be accurate. The churches, synagogues, temples and mosques have not expressed a great deal of concern, nor have academic theologians. Today a few theologians are beginning to address the matter, but environmental theology still remains pretty much on the periphery of serious religious thought.

Nevertheless, I think that the current environmental crisis can be taken as an invitation to the ongoing self-transformation of our theology. The threat of global ecological collapse need not be the occasion either for abandoning our traditions or for enshrining their silence on environmental issues. Rather it could be a major historical stimulus to the revitalization of religion and theology.

In the case of Christianity, however, such a suggestion may seem too optimistic. Critics of this tradition, as well as some Christian authors themselves, have complained about Christianity's complicity in the Western war against nature. Has not Christianity been too anthropocentric, too otherworldly and too cavalier about the intrinsic value of nature? Has not its theology so stressed the need to repair an original fall of humanity that it has almost completely ignored the original goodness of creation? And has it
not heard the words of Genesis about human "dominion" over the earth as an imperative to exploit and deface it?

Whether these accusations are justified or not, it is at least certain that many Christians, perhaps most of them, continue to interpret the physical universe as though it were little more than a "soul school" wherein we are challenged to develop our spiritual and moral character but which itself has little significance apart from human beings. In this interpretation nonhuman nature is merely a set of props for the drama of human salvation or a way-station for the human religious journey. Because of its longing so much for another world, British philosopher John Passmore doubts that Christian theology can ever reshape itself in an ecologically helpful way without ceasing thereby to be Christian. Since Christianity actually sanctions our hostility toward nature, he argues, the only healthy ecological alternative is a radical secularism:

Only if men see themselves... for what they are, quite alone, with no one to help them except their fellow-men, products of natural processes which are wholly indifferent to their survival, will they face their ecological problems in their full implications. Not by the extension, but by the total rejection, of the concept of the sacred will they move toward that sombre realization.¹

While Passmore's indictment of Christianity may be harsh, I think we have to admit that, environmentally speaking, this tradition has been at best ambiguous.⁵ While the doctrines of creation and incarnation clearly affirm the value of the cosmos, most Christian spiritualities, saints and scholars have been relatively indifferent to nature. The welfare of the natural world has seldom, if ever, been a dominant concern. We can boast of St. Francis of Assisi, or of Ignatius who urged us to see God in all things (and that would have to include nature as well). But we cannot forget about the other saints like Martin and John of Ephesus, each at opposite ends of the Mediterranean during the
rise of Christianity, both of whom are famous for their prowess in the art of deforestation. And if there is a deep love of nature expressed in some Christian hymnody and hagiography, there are just as often occasions like the one recalled by James Nash when an Anglican vicar in 1772 preached against the abuse of animals and "his appalled parishioners concluded that he had either gone mad or turned Methodist!"

Concern for either local or global environmental welfare is not a very explicit part of the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, I agree with Paul Santmire that there is great promise for theological renewal in the ecologically ambiguous Christian tradition. In fact a rethinking of Christianity in terms of the environmental crisis is already underway, and it is the cause for some optimism that this tradition could potentially be enlivened by an ecological transformation. The new theological reflection comes in several different strains, of which I shall discuss three. I will call these respectively the apologetic, the sacramental and the eschatological attempts to formulate an environmental theology. None of these can be found in a perfectly pure form, and aspects of all three may be found in the work of any single author. Nevertheless, they vary considerably in theological method, and so I hope it will prove illuminating to treat them here as distinct types.

I.

The first, and the least revisionist of the three, is the more or less apologetic enterprise of trying to show that there is already a sufficient basis in scripture and tradition for an adequately Christian response to the environmental crisis. According to this approach, which runs the range from biblical literalism to very sophisticated scholarship, we have simply ignored the wealth of ecologically relevant resources in the tradition. Therefore, in order to have an adequate environmental theology, we need simply retrieve the appropriate teachings and texts and allow them to
illuminate the present crisis. Sometimes this apologetic method merely scours the scriptures for nuggets of naturalism in order to show that the Bible cares about the cosmos after all. At its most simplistic extreme it does little more than repeat Jesus’ lyrics about the lilies of the field or the psalms that proclaim creation as God’s handiwork. But in its more erudite manifestations it sets forth the themes of wisdom, incarnation, creation and covenant as sufficient theological foundations for an environmental theology. In addition it digs out environmentally sensitive, and previously overlooked passages in the patristic literature and other classic theological writings. More than anything else, though, it emphasizes the biblical notion that God has given us “dominion” and “stewardship” over creation. In this first of our three types of environmental theology, the call to stewardship is the main religious reason for taking care of our natural environment.

This theology also argues that if only we practiced the timeless religious virtues we could alleviate the crisis. Since one of the main sources of our ecological predicament is simple human greed, the solution lies in a renewed commitment to humility, to the virtue of detachment, and to the central religious posture of gratitude by which we accept the natural world as God’s gift and treat it accordingly.

I call this approach “apologetic” because it defends the integrity of biblical religion and traditional theology without requiring their transformation. It holds, at least implicitly, that Christian theology is essentially okay as it is, that environmental abuse stems only from perversions of pure Christianity, and therefore that it does not need to undergo an internal change in the face of the present emergency. Rather, we need only to bring our environmental policies into conformity with revelation and time-tested doctrine. With respect to the present state of the environment, the fault is not with Christianity but with our failure to accept its message.
Evaluation

How are we to evaluate this apologetic approach (some version of which probably most Christians, and I suspect most theologians, take today)? On the positive side, I would say that it does develop an indispensable component of environmental theology: it turns our attention to significant ecological riches in the Christian classics that have not been sufficiently emphasized before. Its highlighting the environmental relevance of traditional teachings, forgotten texts and religious virtues is very helpful. We need this retrieval as we begin the work of shaping a theology appropriate to the contemporary crisis.

Moreover, a good dose of apologetics is certainly warranted today in the face of many incredibly simplistic complaints by some historians of the environmental crisis that Christianity is its sole or major cause. The anti-nature motifs in Christianity, highlighted by its critics, actually comprise only one aspect of a very complex set of ingredients leading to the present destruction of the ecosphere. An unbiased historical analysis can demonstrate that other elements in Christian faith have firmly resisted the exploitive tendencies of modern industrialism that have contributed so much to the present situation. And it can show that the main factors of the crisis may have very little to do with religion after all. Thus some defending of Christianity seems entirely appropriate.

However, I do not think this apologetic type goes far enough in opening itself to the radical renewal of the Christian tradition that the ecological crisis seems to demand. I seriously doubt that we can adequately confront the problem of the environment, theologically speaking, simply by being more emphatic about familiar moral exhortations or by dwelling on scriptural passages about the goodness of nature or the importance of stewardship. Such efforts are not insignificant; indeed they are essential. But I wonder if they are fundamental enough. In the face of the chastisement Christianity has received from secular environmen-
talists, the apologetic recourse to accepted texts, teachings and virtues does not go far enough. I doubt that even the most impressive display of biblical or patristic passages about God and nature will allay this criticism or, for that matter, turn many Christians into serious environmentalists. In order to have an adequate environmental theology Christianity may need to undergo a more radical transformation.

II.

The beginnings of such a change are now taking place in what I shall call the sacramental approach to environmental theology. This second type focuses less on normative religious texts or historical revelation than does the apologetic approach, and more on the allegedly sacral character of the cosmos itself. It is more willing to acknowledge the revelatory character of nature. It comes in a variety of theological forms ranging from what has been called "natural theology," which focuses on the apparent evidence of God in nature, to the cosmic spirituality of Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox and their many followers. It is also found, in different ways and degrees, in non-Christian religions, as well as in the spirituality of ecofeminists and some so-called "deep ecologists."

In its typical form this sacramental approach interprets the natural world as the primary symbolic disclosure of God. Religious texts and traditions are still important, but the cosmos itself is the fundamental medium through which we come to know the sacred. In the Christian context today (and especially among Roman Catholics) this revisionist approach finds its most compelling expression in what has been called "creation-centered" theology. It goes beyond the apologetic variety of environmental theology by arguing that our present circumstances require a whole new interpretation of what it means to be Christian. In the face of the environmental crisis it will not do simply to take more seriously our
inherited religious classics. These are still important, of course, but
they must be carefully sifted and refashioned in terms of a cosmo-
logical, relational, non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, non-dualistic
and more organismic understanding of the universe. We must pay
more attention to the sacral quality of the universe and not place
such a heavy burden on pre-modern religious texts to give us the
foundations of our environmental ethic.

Creation-centered theology accepts the doctrines of the
Creed but gives them a cosmological interpretation. It may be
helpful for us to look briefly at its way of understanding several
important Christian ideas.

1) As the label suggests, this new theological emphasis
brings the biblical theme of creation to the center of theology
instead of subordinating it, as it has been in the past, to the theme
of redemption. Theology’s focusing primarily on the redemption
of a “fallen” world has distracted us from an adequate reverencing
of the intrinsic goodness of nature. Moreover, our traditional
understanding of redemption has been too human-centered. We
have been so obsessed with overcoming our human sinfulness and
suffering, that we have forgotten about the travail of nature as a
whole.

2) Creation-centered theology also argues that we need a
correspondingly broader understanding of that from which we are
said to be redeemed, namely, sin. It insists that sin (which has
always had the connotation of relationlessness) means not just our
estrangement from God or from each other, but also from the
natural world. Reconciliation, then, implies not only the restora-
tion of interpersonal communion but, just as fundamentally, our
reintegration with the earth-community and the entire universe. In
order to experience this reconciliation we must abandon all forms
of religious dualism which have sanctioned our self-distancing
from nature.

3) Creation-centered theology insists also that we need to
rethink what we mean by revelation. Revelation is not just God’s self-manifestation in history, let alone the communication of divine information in propositional form. We need to think of revelation in more cosmic and less supernaturalistic terms. The universe itself is the primary revelation. In its fifteen billion-year evolution the cosmos is the most fundamental mode of the unfolding of divine mystery. The mystery of God is revealed gradually in the evolution of matter, life, human culture and the religions of the world (and not just in biblical religion either).

Seen in terms of cosmic evolution our religions can no longer be explained or explained away as simple heartwarming gestures that estranged humans engage in on an alien terrain as we look toward some distant far off eternity. In the first place, we are not strangers in the universe but natural evolutionary products of a lengthy but unbroken cosmic story. Our religions, therefore, may also be understood cosmologically as even further developments of the universe as it seeks, through our symbols and myths, to disclose its mysterious depths. The existence of a multiplicity of religions, in this view, is in perfect keeping with evolution’s extravagant creation of variety and difference. Hence an ecological theology should be no less committed to preserving religious plurality than it is to the salvaging of biodiversity. Religions are also products of cosmic evolution, and they are just as deserving of conservation in their revelatory uniqueness as are the multiple species of plants and animals.

4) Not surprisingly, creation-centered theology also appreciates both ancient and modern efforts to understand the Christ as a cosmic reality, and not simply as a personal historical savior. Cosmic Christology, already present in ancient Christianity, is being recovered today by creation-centered theology in terms of an evolutionary and ecological world view. The entire cosmos (and not just human society) is regarded as the body of Christ. A cosmic Christology, then, provides the deepest foundations of a distinc-
tively Christian environmental theology. And in keeping with this cosmic Christology the eucharist represents the healing not only of severed human relationships, but also of the entire universe.

5) The theological experiment of creation-centered theology culminates in an ecological understanding of God. Here the Trinity is taken as the supreme exemplification of ecology, a term which highlights the fact of relationship. An ecological theology is consonant both with contemporary science and Trinitarian theology, which we can interpret to mean that God exists only in relationship rather than in isolated aseity. Thus, creation in the image of God means that the world itself has intensity of being only to the extent that, like God, it exists as community.

6) This ecological contextualization of Christian teaching leads us in the direction of a whole new spirituality. Creation-centered theology encourages an enjoyment of the natural world as our true home rather than simply as a vale of soul-making. Traditional spiritualities, often characterized by a discomfort with bodily existence, spoke of humanity’s fundamental homelessness in nature. The classics of Christianity have been tainted by a dualistic bias that lifts us out of nature and the body. Creation-centered theology, on the contrary, stresses our inextricable links with the wider cosmic ecology. There can be no salvation of the soul apart from the renewal of all nature.

7) To those who might doubt the spiritual rigor of this theology, it should be noted that an ecological spirituality carries with it a very demanding kind of asceticism. This asceticism does not consist in an unhealthy renunciation of nature but rather in a rejection of the very anti-ecological Enlightenment ideal of autonomous, isolated rational selfhood. It subjects us to the arduous discipline of taking into full account the fact of our interdependence with a wider earth-community. A wholesome spiritual life, one in which we acknowledge our complex relation to the universe, widens our sense of selfhood and its responsibility. It invites us to
adopt a continually expanding inclusiveness toward all the otherness that we encounter, including the wildness of the natural world.

8) Creation-centered spirituality in turn inspires a restructuring of Christian ethics in terms of an environmental focus. Ethics cannot be adequately grounded only in the classic moral traditions which usually left the welfare of nature out of the field of concern. An environmental awareness gives a new slant to social ethics and life ethics. For example, in the place of (or along side of) social justice it advocates a more inclusive “eco-justice” according to which we cannot really repair human inequities without simultaneously attending to the prospering of the larger ecology. And being “pro-life” means going beyond the focus simply on the ethics of human reproduction. An environmentally chastened life ethic questions the depth of a morality which, while protective of human fertility in the short run, is often blind to the complete “death of birth” that may eventually result from the complication of every one of our ecological problems by the pressures of overpopulation.

These are just several specific ideas of creation-centered theology, but its most characteristic feature is its focus on the sacramentality of nature. (By “sacrament” I mean here any aspect of the world through which a divine mystery becomes present to religious awareness.) Ever since the Old Stone Age aspects of nature such as clean water, fresh air, fertile soil, clear skies, bright light, thunder and rain, trees, plants and animals, human fertility, and so on, have symbolically communicated to religious people at least something of the reality of the sacred. Sacramentalism recognizes the transparency of nature to the divine, and it therefore concedes to the natural world a sacral status that should evoke our reverence and protectiveness. The sacramental perspective reads in nature a kind of importance that a purely secularistic point of view cannot discern. Nature is not primarily something to be used for human purposes or for technical projects. In this second type,
therefore, the fundamental religious reason nature deserves our care is that it is the showing forth of an ultimate goodness and generosity. If we lose our environment, Thomas Berry is fond of saying, we lose our sense of God as well.

Evaluation

By way of evaluation, I would say that this sacramental type, with some qualifications, is an important step toward an environmental theology. It goes beyond the first type which, we may recall, consists primarily of an apologetic search for texts that allegedly contain a ready-made environmental theology adequate to our contemporary circumstances. Our second approach seeks a more radical renewal of Christianity in the face of the present crisis. Creation-centered theology is aware that religious texts, like any other classics, can sometimes sanction policies which are unjust socially and questionable ecologically. So it allows into its hermeneutic (its interpretation of texts) a great deal of suspicion about some of the same motifs that our first approach holds to be normative.

For example, the ideal of human dominion or stewardship over creation, which is fundamental in the first type, turns out to be quite inadequate in the second. Stewardship, even when it is exegetically purged of the distortions to which it has been subjected, is still too managerial a concept to support the kind of ecological ethic we need today. Many ecologists would argue that the earth's life-systems were a lot better off before we humans came along to manage them and would get along better if we just disappeared. So even if we refine the notions of stewardship and dominion in the light of recent scholarship, the biblical tradition may still seem too anthropocentric. And since anthropocentrism is commonly acknowledged to be a root cause of our environmental neglect, creation-centered theology seeks to play down those theological themes that make us too central in the scheme of things.
I personally believe that, appropriately exegeted, the theme of stewardship is not anthropocentric, but theocentric, and that it is still an essential part of a Christian environmental theology. But I also think that any attempt to construct an environmental theology today must build on the sacramental interpretation of nature and thereby relativize us humans somewhat in the scheme of things. Today Christianity desperately needs to be re-cosmologized, and creation-centered theology is an important part of this project.

However, if we are seeking to find out whether Christianity is relevant to the environmental crisis I think in all honesty we have to ask how important ecological integrity is when we look at the world in terms of the Bible’s most distinctive theme, that of a divine promise for future fulfillment. In other words, we need to ask whether the eschatological dimension of Christianity, its characteristic hope for future perfection founded on the ancient Hebrew experience of God’s promise and fidelity, can become the backbone of an environmentally sensitive religious vision. If a return to cosmology is theologically essential today, then, from the point of view of biblical faith, we need assurance that this cosmology remains adequately framed by eschatology, that is, by the theme of hope and promise.

III.

Hence, as an alternative to the apologetic and the sacramental types I would propose a more inclusive eschatological cosmology as the foundation of environmental theology. Here the cosmos is neither a soul-school for human existence nor a straightforward epiphany of God’s presence. Rather, it is in essence a promise of future fulfillment. If we are proposing a theology of the environment that still has connections with biblical religion, we need to make the theme of promise central, and not subordinate, in our reflections. The way we can do this in an environmentally
helpful way is to acknowledge that the natural world itself is an installment of the future, and for that reason deserves neither neglect nor worship, but simply the kind of care proportionate to the treasuring of a promise.

It is easy enough to argue that religion’s sacramental quality, one which incidentally Christianity shares with many other religions, affirms the value of nature. But the Bible has a very nuanced view of sacramentality. It is aware, for example, that something is terribly wrong with the world and that any sacraments based on the present state of nature inevitably participate in this imperfection. Sacramentalism, therefore, is not enough. Biblical faith looks less toward a God transparently revealed in present natural harmony than toward a future coming of God in the eschatological perfection of creation. So, if we are seeking a Christian theology of the environment, we need to ask especially how the future-oriented, promissory aspect of this tradition connects with contemporary environmental concern.

But some religious thinkers will immediately complain that the Bible is not very helpful in theological efforts to ground environmental ethics. Thomas Berry, following Arnold Toynbee and Lynn White, argues that it is precisely biblical influences on Western culture that have wreaked ecological havoc. For example, the future orientation of the Bible has, he thinks, bequeathed to us the dubious dream of progress. This dream has now been transformed into the ideal of unlimited economic growth which is bleeding off the earth’s natural resources at an alarming pace. Thus Berry seems to hold that biblical eschatology, with its unleashing of the dream of future perfection, is inimical to environmental concern. According to this leading creation-centered “geologian,” hoping in a future promise can lead us to sacrifice the present world for the sake of the future. Although he is a Catholic priest himself, Berry distances himself from the prophetic tradition that many of us still consider to be the central core of biblical faith and the bedrock of Christian ethics.
I cannot discuss here Berry's thesis that the ecologically disastrous dream of unlimited economic progress really has its deepest roots in the biblical prophets.\textsuperscript{16} Instead I must be content simply to ask whether we may legitimately characterize an environmental theology as consonant with Christian faith if we leave out the prophetic theme of future promise? A sacramental emphasis has the advantage of bringing the cosmos back into our theology, and this is essential today. The sacramental accent in Catholicism, for example, gives it a special environmental significance. Moreover, it is well known that a sacramental outlook is central to the Ignatian vision as well. But we cannot forget that in the Bible sacramentality is taken up into eschatology. Biblical hope diverts our religious attention away from exclusive enrapturement with any present world harmony or with nature's alleged capacity to mediate an epiphany of the sacred. Instead it encourages us to look restlessly toward the future for the revelation of God. In terms of such a religious development any reversion to pure sacramentalism is suspect. It has in fact been condemned outright by the prophets and the reformers as faithless idolatry.

We need not deny the ecological importance of the sacramental approach, but we must assimilate it to the theme of promise. To suppress the theme of hope and promise whenever we do any kind of theologizing from a Christian point of view, no matter what the occasion or the issue, is to fail to engage the heart and soul of the biblical heritage. I am more sympathetic, therefore, with the theological program of Jürgen Moltmann who for almost three decades now has convincingly argued that \textit{all} Christian theology must be eschatology.\textsuperscript{17} Theology must be saturated with hope for the future. And what that means for our purposes here is that environmental theology must also be future oriented, no matter how tendentious this may initially appear from the point of view of a pure sacramentalism.

I am afraid that the creation-centered approach, valuable
though it is in retrieving the cosmos that has been tragically lost to our theology, has not paid sufficient attention to the promise-laden character of Christian faith. It has helpfully promulgated what has been called a “lateral transcendence,” that is, a reaching out beyond the narrow boundaries of our isolated selfhood in order to acknowledge the ever expanding field of relationships that comprise the wider universe. But this horizontal transcendence must be complemented by a looking-forward-beyond-the-present. Transcendence, understood biblically, means not only a movement outward beyond narrowness toward a wider inclusiveness, but also a reaching forward toward the region of what Ernst Bloch calls “not-yet-being,” toward the novelty and surprise of an uncontrollable future.18

What needs to be emphasized today (and here science is on our side) is that this eschatological reaching toward the future is a mark not only of human consciousness and human history but of the entire cosmic story. The cosmos, as St. Paul insinuates, has always had yearnings of its own. The natural world is not a mere launching pad for the human spirit to abandon as it soars off toward some incorporeal absolute. Our human hoping is the faithful carrying on of a much wider cosmic orientation toward an unknown future. In looking hopefully toward this future we are carried along by impulses that have energized the cosmos long before our recent evolutionary arrival here. If we truly want to recosmologize Christianity then we also need to “eschatologize” the entire cosmos and not just human history and subjectivity. So I would like to persist in my suggestion that the distinctive contribution Christian theology has to offer to ecology (since many of its sacramental aspects are present in other traditions) is its vision of cosmic promise.19 A biblical perspective invites us to root ecology in eschatology. It seeks to imbue the cosmic and the sacramental with a persistent straining toward the future. We need to keep the cosmos in the foreground of our theology, but without
denying the restlessness forced on any present state of the universe by the yet-to-come.

In terms of this perspective, incidentally, it seems to me that the persistent presence of areas of utter wilderness can serve to remind us that the future of the universe is not exclusively determinable by our human projects. We need to protect vast areas of the wild not just for recreational purposes, but also in order to have concrete representations of the possibility that the world and its future, fortunately for us, are not completely under our sway.

Implications for Environmental Ethics

By way of conclusion then let us return to our opening question: why should we be concerned about the non-human natural world? A biblically grounded Christian theology would answer this way: we care for nature not only because of the divine call to stewardship, and not only because the present cosmos is a sacramental manifestation of the divine, but fundamentally because it is a promise yet to be fulfilled.

In the apologetic approach we condemn environmental abuse because it is ungrateful disobedience to God's call for us to represent the divine image among our fellow creatures. In the sacramental view we abhor environmental degradation because it is the desecration of something sacred, a sacrilege. But in an eschatological cosmic perspective environmental abuse is a form of despair. To destroy nature is to turn away from a promise.

Nature is not yet complete, nor yet fully revelatory of God. Like any promise, it lacks the perfection of fulfillment. To demand that it provide complete satisfaction now is the mark of an impatience hostile to hope. Nature is wonderful, but it is also incomplete. We know from experience that it can also be indifferent and ugly at times. A purely sacramental or creation-centered theology of nature cannot easily accommodate the shadow side of nature. By focusing on ecological harmony it expects us to see
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every present state of nature as an epiphany of God. This is a projection which neither our religion nor the natural world can bear.

An eschatological view of nature, on the other hand, allows ambiguity in as a partner to promise. Nature’s harshness, which so offends both religious romantics and cosmic pessimists, is entirely in keeping with its character as promise. The perspective of hope allows us to be realistic about what nature is. We do not have to cover up its cruelty. We can accept the fact that the cosmos is not a paradise but only the promise thereof.

The world, including that of nonhuman nature, has not yet arrived at the final peace of God’s kingdom, and so it does not merit our worship. It does deserve our valuation, but not our prostration. If we adopt too sacral a notion of nature’s significance we will inevitably end up being disappointed by it. If we invest it with an undue devotion we will eventually turn against it, as against all idols, for disappointing us--as it inevitably will. For that reason an exclusively sacramental interpretation of nature is theologically inadequate. A promissory vision, on the other hand, invites us to temper our devotion to its beauty and goodness with a patient acceptance of nature’s unfinished status. Embracing the cosmos as a promise allows us to cherish it without having to deny its transiency.

Finally, though I cannot argue the point fully here, I am convinced that an eschatological vision of nature provides the soundest of reasons for our saving the earth for all the future generations of living beings that will follow us. Without a future opened up by hope, it is hard to imagine why we would seriously concern ourselves with environmental ethics at all. It seems possible that the intemperate way in which we are using up the earth’s resources at the present time is to a great extent born out of a despair about the future. Perhaps we do not really believe that the earth and the universe have much of a future. But the only
response to such despair is hope. And the biblical vision of a future perfection of creation, its anticipation of the eternal sabbath which celebrates the completion of creation, can, I think, serve quite well as a religious foundation for ecological concern and action.

Notes

2 Ibid., 664.
3 Ibid.
8 This is the central thesis of Santmire’s book, *The Travail of Nature*, cited above.
9 One of the best examples of the apologetic type, from a quite conservative Catholic standpoint, is Charles M. Murphy’s *At Home on Earth* (New York: Crossroad, 1989). From a “liberal” perspective, but still within the framework of what I am calling the apologetic style of environmental theology, is John Carmody’s provocative *Religion and Ecology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983). Most current Christian theology of the environment falls within this first type.
10 See James Nash, *Loving Nature*.
14 See Lynn White, Jr. “‘The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,’” *Science*, vol. 155, 1203-1207.
15 Berry makes this point in nearly every chapter of his book, *The Dream of the Earth*.
16 For further discussion see See Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards, ed., *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology* (Mystic, Connecticut:
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19 When I use the term "distinctive" here I mean only to contrast Christian eschatology with a purely sacramental type of religion. In fact Judaism and Islam, the other Abrahamic religions, may also embrace the notion that nature is essentially a promise. It seems that there is potential here for broad interreligious agreement among Jews, Christians and Muslims on the fundamental religious reason for our valuing cosmic reality.
Heidi Byrnes

Crosscultural Communication: Identity in Diversity

Heidi Byrnes is Chair and Professor of German at Georgetown University.
Last summer, when I decided on the title for this lecture, I looked upon its theme as a welcome opportunity for summarizing issues that I have been mindful of for some time, in my personal as well as my professional life. The major points that I would address were generally clear: "crosscultural" concerns have been a constant companion for me, brought on, from the personal standpoint, by residing in this country for more than half of my life, while maintaining close intellectual and emotional affinities and ties to Germany, the country of my birth and growth through adulthood.

Aspects of what it means to "communicate," particularly through and with language, a native language or a non-native language, were the focus and fascination of my formal studies and they continue to reverberate through my professional life, with now almost two decades of university level teaching of the German language and its culture in this country. I have been engaged in establishing, maintaining, and changing my "identity" in a foreign country. As part of that task I have ignored, misunderstood, been confounded by, delighted in, marveled at, and rejected the "diversity" that this foreign country, my new home country, the United States, has given me as a challenge. Even so, I felt I had developed multiple workable equilibria. For this talk, then, I sensed I could strike a good balance between broad familiarity with the issues on the one hand and, on the other, a manageable number of unresolved concerns that could then be thematized at just the right comfort-level for an event of this nature.

Since that original conceptualization of my presentation the balance has become more delicate, the comfort-level is reduced, the questions are more numerous, the tidy answers fewer—a condition brought about both by the opportunity to reflect further on the topic and also by specific events. In minding the intervening time—though at little more than six months a time span roughly one thousandth of the 500-year span referred to in the theme of this
lecture series--additional connections developed, but also more barriers, and terms became curiously destabilized as previously undisputed relationships disappeared or were reconfigured.

As a result, the ubiquitous use of a number of terms that are in close proximity to crosscultural issues now causes me to hesitate. Among them are such seeming oppositions as "unity" and "diversity," "nationalism" and "multiculturalism," "integration" and "pluralism." Upon closer inspection the assumptions about our personal and social reality that they strongly convey are themselves worth questioning. For example, although I will end up using it myself, the prevalence of the term "identity," a noun used in the singular, not in the plural, the presumed desirability of and search for that singular, somehow fixed identity, and the attendant efforts at defining such a singular identity, trouble me. Similarly, we celebrate ethnicity as definitive of American culture and the American nation even as we fear that ethnicity is potentially destructive of the ideal of American nationhood. We fear an ethnically-derived emerging nationalism in Eastern Europe while we approve of the breakup of the vast Soviet empire of enforced egalitarianism. Clearly, the underlying presuppositions for these contradictory sentiments deserve to be sorted out.

Closer to home, in academia, I have retreated from the daunting thicket of the accusations and counter-accusations about what it means to be "politically correct" and about the significance for our times of such presumed "political correctness." I favor an opening of the curricular canon, yet am distressed by actions that merely replace one set of claims about uniqueness and superiority of status with another. It seems appropriate for all of us to develop greater empathy with those whom we have previously disregarded. But, at times, we do so while engaging in a fuzzy romanticism that potentially leads to emphasizing the very differences that should really be scrutinized, particularly those that pertain to the relationship between race and culture in non-Western
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traditions. In all too few cases are multiple perspectives included in the old canon, presumably the point of it all.

Not surprisingly, what has mobilized me to reconceptualize the topic "Crosscultural Communication: Identity in Diversity" are both publicly shared and privately held experiences.

I mention but a few events that have beckoned all of us to rethink premises and their implications in the short six month period just behind us: the collapse of the centrally controlled totalitarian state that used to be the Soviet Union and the rise of diverse new entities in its place; the adamant separatism that pervades the political situation in Ireland and the tremendous efforts expended by Germany to unite its formerly divided parts; the rise of the stature of the United Nations and the rampant particularism in regions like Yugoslavia; the bold moves in South Africa to overcome apartheid and the perverse struggle by groups on both sides to thwart that development; the proclamation of a single currency for the European community and the demand for separate currencies in the diverse republics of the former Soviet Union; the seemingly boundless demand for English as an international lingua franca alongside the rise of linguistic assertiveness in the interest of boundary building or boundary shifting in many parts of the world; the endless stream of refugees and immigrants around the world and the increasing wariness of, at times startling hostility toward the stranger even in countries with an immigrant tradition.

On the personal side, the topics identity, diversity, and crosscultural communication gained further prominence for me during the last six months in other ways, among them:

- a three week stay in Japan, teaching in a Georgetown program,
- extensive reading about current and likely future issues in higher education in the United States in conjunction with Georgetown University’s reaccreditation process,
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- work in professional education-related organizations which make recommendations regarding access, cultural affirmation, educational achievement, curriculum planning, and teacher education in the American context,
- editing a book, *Languages for a Multicultural World in Transition*,¹ and,
- last but not least, the sheer enjoyment of reading a beautiful translation into contemporary English of the ninth century Old Saxon epic poem *Heliand*,² along with its extensive annotations. Here Fr. Murphy, a colleague in the German Department, captures the extent to which this retelling by an unknown monk of the gospel story is essentially an immensely sensitive act of crosscultural communication.

So how do these events, big and public and small and private, fit together? How do they relate to the topic and, more directly, how can they affect an understanding of the topic?

I would like to propose that we look at the dynamic underlying communication in general, crosscultural communication in particular, and use it as a way of analyzing these seemingly disparate events. My claim is that a better understanding of discourse, in its phenomenology and in its functional significance, can shed light on a wide array of contemporary issues. Their range includes those occurring on the international as well as the national scene, in private and in group interactions, in social as well as in public policy decision-making, in education as a whole and in the humanities specifically, in ethical codes of conduct and all kinds of relativizations of such codes, in questions about the role of the individual and of society, in considerations about the significance of systems of belief and of rationality, about determinism and choice.

I make this rather encompassing claim, since, to me, a discourse perspective goes to the heart of how we develop a view
of ourselves and of the world around us. Allow me now to lay out the basis for my position and to illustrate its potential usefulness. I leave it to you to determine whether and to what extent you can find a communicative perspective that encompasses issues of self and other, therefore of identity and diversity, to be a valuable prism for our times.

Language Knowledge and Crosscultural Communication

When crosscultural communication is a topic of conversation in our highly mobile society, it tends to be discussed in terms of miscommunication in second language environments, an experience that is attributed primarily to insufficient second language ability, one’s own or that of the other party. Tales about miscommunication due to incomplete language knowledge, whether tales of woe or tales of mirth, are myriad. Contrition about shortcomings, however, is mostly shortlived, and upon one’s safe return home the experience of miscommunication serves largely to enliven recollections of adventurous times or to engender subtle interpretations that others really should have been able to handle one’s own language a little more adeptly.

You may well expect that I, a German professor, will take this opportunity to extol the benefits of second language study so that your crosslinguistic encounters may all be happy ones. I easily could and probably should do so. However, my presentation is wider than crosslinguistic communication; it is about crosscultural communication.

My use of both terms differs from prevalent interpretations associated with them which, to my way of looking at it, reduce their complexity in inadmissible ways. In the case of crosslinguistic communication we need to distance ourselves from a mindset that takes learning a second language to be nothing more than acquiring another formal system for expressing essentially the same mean-
ings that exist out there a priori. That priority of meaning-giving, by definition, goes to one’s native language, thereby relegating other languages and their ways of sense-making to secondary status, more often to weirdness and absurdity. The experience of generations of students who have memorized interminable dual language word list equivalences and have assumed that, in so doing, they were learning another language is just the most glaring manifestation of this simplistic assumption of the equivalence of meanings between languages.

Likewise, we also need to disabuse ourselves of the facile assumption that learning the language with complete formal mastery, often the primary goal of formal language instruction, will in itself eliminate all occasions for crosscultural miscommunication. For all its importance, knowledge of the language is not a sufficient condition for effective crosscultural communication. And that brings me to the second point.

Failures in crosscultural communication are often seen as deeply rooted in and occasioned by crosslinguistic failure. Certainly, such a view may be nothing more and nothing less than the recognition of the undeniable role which language plays in cultures. Perhaps one can also say that, by placing the blame on insufficient language facility, Americans are merely acknowledging a well-known fact, the country’s abysmal record regarding an educational policy that targets multiple language facility as a goal for all its citizens. Given that state of affairs there would seem to be no reason to look for other possible causes.

But equating the ability to manipulate the formal characteristics of language with successful crosscultural communication and assuming that language defines culture can all too easily mislead us. By taking a separate language as the critical criterion for the existence of a separate culture we may fail to understand culture first and foremost as a shared, though internally differentiated, set of valuations, judgments, narrative interpretations of the past,
expectations of the future, rituals, forms of interaction, and role assignments that are not predicated on the existence of a separate language. To avoid misunderstanding, these interaction patterns will, of course, have decisive consequences for how language is used in a given culture, and, as a result, could be expected to engender crosscultural communication problems. But those problems have very different causes, very different forms of manifesting themselves, and very different repercussions than do failures in crosslinguistic communication that can be attributed to insufficient command of the respective language systems.

In this connection, I refer to a stance taken in a number of her highly successful publications by Deborah Tannen, a distinguished colleague in the Linguistics Department. For her, conversations between women and men in the United States, and perhaps in other cultures as well, are really instances of crosscultural communication since women and men are socialized into very different interaction patterns and therefore operate with different sets of assumptions about how conversations are created, what functions they have, and what they are ultimately all about.³

That is the sense which allows us to use expressions like the "culture of academia," or the "culture of the criminal world," the "culture of politics," or the "culture of American teenagers." As anyone who has parented teenagers and the teenagers themselves can attest to, conversations involving partners who do not belong to the cultural group can occasion the most striking instances of miscommunication, even though the same language is being used.

Crosscultural Communication as an American Challenge

By demanding that cultures be judged by their own unique standards and have their own validity—a concept explored in depth by the 18th century German thinker Johann Gottfried Herder and
interpreted as having rather traumatic repercussions in German history—we are entering territory that has major implications for the international order, for nations as they are currently constituted, and for the American scene in particular. Such a stance clearly reduces the status of certain cultures and introduces cultural relativism. Perhaps the term cultural relativism itself is inappropriate since it still implies a norm by which other cultures are rightfully to be measured. On the other hand, referring to cultural diversity in terms of cultural coexistence might also be misleading in that it could erroneously suggest an equality in the sense of sameness and equal contributions by the various cultural groups, on the international scene as well as within a nation-state.

With respect to the internal workings of nations, diversity and its attendant cultural relativism can unleash both positive as well as negative forces. The vast majority of nations are multicultural, even multilingual, though nationalism in the past has often repressed that fact. Openly acknowledging such multiculturalism now could bolster disintegrative, potentially destructive forces. After all, nation building at the expense of culture destroying and even person destroying is very much part of human history, most particularly the last two centuries. Those advocating a differentiated stance toward culture, on the other hand, claim that openly recognizing cultural diversity would at least acknowledge what already exists in reality and could lead to more humane and richer societies.

In any case, both between and within nations, a differentiated stance toward culture—the concept of culture, its formation, its raison d'être, its stable manifestations, its dynamic changes—might lead to a better understanding of how societies constitute themselves. For example, the drive toward internationalization that we note in some parts of the world does not necessarily mean a denial of the value of the cultures of the cooperating nations, and, in reverse, the building of new nations out of old empires does not
necessarily mean an overzealous or even expansionist assertion of a dominant cultural group.

In the American context, crosscultural awareness is an issue that deserves better understanding for two reasons. First, it is an internal issue of critical importance because of the longstanding tradition of the United States which, as a political and national entity, views itself as an immigrant country that has developed reasonably successful mechanisms for dealing with diverse linguistic groups. Furthermore, as a nation the United States represents the cultural and political ideal that social harmony among distinct ethnic groups, whether they have or have not learned English, and whether they do or do not then use it, is not only possible but gives the country its special character and special signal value in the history of mankind. Thus, despite repeated efforts in that direction it was never necessary to declare English the national language of the country. Nevertheless, we are now experiencing new tides, such as the U.S. English movement, even legislative initiatives such as the English as the Language of Government Act, that interpret the increasing multilingualism and multiculturalism of some parts of the country as culturally, socially, and economically distressing. As growing waves of immigration reach these shores, whether legal or illegal, the American ideal of unity in diversity itself, not to mention the permissibility of diversity, is under severe strain.

We are frequently presented with demographic forecasts that project that a significant portion of the population will, in the very near future, be non-native speakers of English. Referring back to and enforcing a melting pot model of assimilation as a solution for the tensions that are expected to accompany that shift is likely to be insufficient. This is so since, in an interesting twist, the age of communication, which is taken to be the great leveler of differences within societies, has also made it much easier for minority groups to gain access to print and sound media which can then help them maintain their non-dominant native language.
Small wonder that, as a consequence to this perceived instability, a range of proposals has developed that amount to a renegotiation and a reconstruction of the meaning of the American ideal in contemporary society. Among these is the suggested difference between understanding the United States as a democracy and characterizing it as a republic. In the first case one would incur an obligation to provide access to the public forum to as many groups as possible. In the case of a republic, however, no such obligation is said to arise. Assuming that we continue to uphold the cultural myth *e pluribus unum*—and I mean "myth" in the very positive sense of a critical organizing principle for a group—then, what does this myth mean in contemporary society, and for the future for which we are currently planning? Who are the *plures* whose voice is to be heard, or, to whom a voice is to be given?

Secondly, crosscultural awareness is also an external issue for the United States. The ever increasing interconnectedness of communication around the world has obvious crosslinguistic as well as crosscultural dimensions. The global configuration of powers has changed, assigning different roles to different players, among them, most decidedly, the United States. Therefore, improved crosscultural communication is no longer a remote concern, nor is it about such nebulous things as the global village, or about warm and fuzzy feelings like our common brotherhood or sisterhood that reaches out and touches all. Until quite recently, such feelings could alternately get billboard space and air time in ad campaigns or be ignored at will, and neither approach had far-reaching implications one way or the other. Now and into the future, however, the level of awareness and sophistication that we have about crosscultural communication has political, economic, and social implications for every one of us, as we must become citizens of this country who have, as their larger frame of reference, peoples and events around the world.
Building Crosscultural Awareness: Possibilities and Constraints

I had indicated earlier that I see crosslinguistic and crosscultural communication as related but separable issues. Let me now reconnect crosslinguistic abilities and crosscultural awareness in terms of how one might enhance the other, the possibilities and the constraints.

Our perception of what language learning is all about is often restricted to the utilitarian benefits of possessing the tool second language. However, aside from the clear value of language in our ever more closely linked lives, the real value of language learning is its potential to lead to humanistic understanding of sameness and difference between ourselves and others, of the need for boundaries, and the need to shift those boundaries as one finds them to be restrictive and artificial—all of which I take to be at the heart of crosscultural awareness. Only then can society truly benefit from an increase in language learning.

I have stated that crosscultural communication or miscommunication is not so much an issue of language competence. However, it does seem that a deep realization of the issues behind it, and not just an intellectual understanding, is probably best attained through the experience of learning another language and through it learning about another culture. In other words, my initial and weak claim is that learning a second language is one way of gaining a sense of alterity and, thereby, a sense of self that engages one’s whole person, intellectually, emotionally and affectively, and ethically. I recognize that issues of otherness are addressed in a range of academic disciplines, among them the study of literature, philosophy, government, history, psychology, or sociology. But these inquiries take place within the familiar comfort of one’s own language. Thus they are inherently encumbered and restricted by the necessarily unreflected and unquestioned connection between language, thought, and belief and interaction systems into which all of us are socialized. As a consequence, my stronger claim
regarding language study as culture study is that it is a necessary way for coming to realize the limiting relativity of one's own world as one learns to appreciate other ways.

We should have no illusions whatsoever about what is involved. Where we do attempt to break open our familiar reality, we may face chilling winds that might cause us to close the door rapidly, since leaving the comforts of home might make it impossible to return to ourselves, at least to our previous selves. It might also turn us against our identifying groups, reducing our effectiveness as players in our usual surroundings, and turn us into alienated critics and outcasts within our own cultural group. Such prospects, along with a good portion of normal and appropriate inertia in the social construction of our self, can easily lead to retreat. We may well prefer the narrowness and confinement of our own culture, since it is powerfully supportive and immensely comforting, and, on some level, critically necessary for the psychological coherence it gives to our lives as we have built and experienced them. Increasingly, we hear that, much more than the lack of the basics of life—shocking though that may be for Westerners—it is their inability to predict the future due to the vastly enlarged range of options that makes citizens of the former Soviet Union rethink the desirability of their current freedoms. Gaining insights about one's self through others is a roller coaster ride, involving ups and downs, affinities and rejections, fears and exhilaration, seeing things and having them disappear, succumbing to a sense of unreality and thrilling to a heightened sense of reality.

To make matters even more complex, the aim in crosscultural education is not to replace one cultural world with another, although such complete rejection of the familiar old and subsequent adoption of the new world does occasionally occur. The real goal is more complicated. We are to learn to deal with the realization that different worlds, and the groups and individuals which have constructed them, have a legitimate claim for existing simulta-
neously as ways of giving meaning to human experience. In this fashion a measured perspective, fairness and civility, deferential openness toward and benevolent understanding of the other, but, most importantly, reflective self-assessment are a possibility. Through a sense of the self being situated in relation to and because of the other, we should obtain a heightened sense of ourselves and thereby be enabled to develop greater scrutiny, but also greater acceptance and recognition toward ourselves and toward others.

Presumably all of us find the attributes I just mentioned truly enviable ideals. Unfortunately, in large part they remain just that—ideals. On the international scene the dramatic increase in the opportunities for crosscultural communication in our age of convenient travel and instant communication even without travel does not seem to have brought the ideal closer to reality. Somehow the assumption that increased contact equals increased understanding also is not borne out. Pointing to Americans’ notorious inability to handle other languages also does not provide sufficient explanation for crosscultural insensitivity since it does not account for the friction between groups within the country, where language, by and large, is not an issue.

As a result, one must suspect that our entire conceptualization of crosscultural understanding and, by implication, our efforts to make it come about through our educational system and in public discourse may have been built on inappropriate assumptions. Let me venture an answer. We have typically associated it with a denial or loss of self which is necessary for freeing us up toward others. To use the current buzzwords, it seems we have reduced identity in order to make room for diversity. But by conceptualizing crosscultural understanding in this fashion, the calls for diversity have really become calls for the impossible. Instead of engendering greater self-awareness and thereby greater tolerance, they have turned into calls for divisiveness, and identity has been reasserted as superiority in order to re-capture dignity and recognition.
In our efforts to create a climate for greater diversity, for greater acceptance of others, we have learned to be suspicious of dominance and power in relationships. The suggested cure has been for those who have it to abdicate their power. Given how most societies have been constructed, namely essentially on a hierarchical competition model, where the gain of one group or individual is the loss of the other, that effort has not been very successful. What has not been explored is the possibility of a totally different construction of relationships, namely a cooperation model. Though power clearly plays a role here as well, this power comes from a sense of identity, of self, which I take to be the basis of the kind of empowerment liberal democratic societies are most in need of and also best able to provide to their citizens. Possessing power is not so much intended to result in wresting it away from others only to dominate once more, but to enable those who have it to be responsible actors themselves, as individuals or as groups. Though we are clearly steeped in a competitive model, there are signs that intolerant nationalism and brutal dictatorships are giving way to more and more liberal democracies. That is the central argument behind Francis Fukuyama’s recently published book *The End of History and the Last Man*. As Gilder states in his review,

Liberal democracy, capitalism and Judeo-Christian morality are not ethnocentric figments of American or European pride in a culture of "dead white males." Rather, in all its crucial fundamentals, the U.S. constitutional order of liberal democracy and economic system of entrepreneurial capitalism define the end point of human political history, the very end of teleological time.

I do not wish to judge whether that means that the notion of cultural relativism, so new to many, has rather brusquely been defeated once and for all, since thoughts about the basic equality and moral autonomy of the individual, the foundation of liberal democracy and the new global system, originated here. I am
decidedly even more skeptical about such slogans as ‘‘hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture’s got to go.’’ In any case, determining the validity of either cultural relativism or of cultural superiority does not strike me as our greatest priority. Given that there is much unfinished business left to do in our own house, I find it more important to build up the universality of the liberal notions of right and that means looking for ways that give greater recognition to the worth of individuals and groups. To me that is the real reason for increasing crosscultural awareness.

The Construction of Meaning
Returning to my earlier claim, one would have to ask: how might an understanding of communication, how might discourse help us address this task?

Meaning as Culturally Constructed Reality
The first point to be made is that language, and, by extension, communication, is not so much characterized by its reference to a reality that exists independent of the human beholder as it is a re-presentation of the unbroken panorama of phenomena. In other words, it is an interpretation that is constructed by the beholders.

This statement does not deny the existence of phenomena independent of the human species. Our very survival depended and continues to depend on our ability to acknowledge them: we cannot ignore the big forces as they manifest themselves in natural events such as earthquakes, nor the seemingly little forces as they manifest themselves in the devastation of disease. But our awareness of them, our conceiving of them, thinking about them, dealing with them, is by no means a grasping of reality itself, but an act of creative interpretation in a time and in a place. We are used to artistic endeavors being thought of as creative, interpretive acts. But, in a critical way, interpretive creativity is also at the heart of
our science and our technology, an insight that can be gained most instructively in a modern intensive care unit with its understanding of human illness and our approaches to treating it.

*Meaning Construction as a Socially Mediated Activity on the Part of the Individual*

With meaning established as a creative construction of reality, an important second point follows. Individual variation exists between us, nuances, differences, incongruities. Are we then saying that each one of us literally lives in a different world? By no means. The analysis of how we as individuals go about constructing our reality that I just presented is itself a convenient reduction of the complexity of the matter. It provided an entry for talking about meaning construction at all, but, if left unelaborated, at the same time falsifies the issue. We do not live as islands alone. We live as social beings; we are part of diverse and numerous groups. We have been born into them, raised in them, found our places and roles in them, survive because of them.

Perhaps, even these phrases incorrectly express the process. In this discussion which deals with different ways of perceiving, learning, knowing, acting, we as individuals really do not exist in the beginning; instead, our ways of conceiving, structuring, relating, and ordering phenomena gradually develop as a result of and through the interactions that socialization into the group affords us. Inasmuch as these ways of knowing and experiencing the world are critical for our personhood, our very individuality, our individualism, our identity, is not given a priori, but socially constructed.

To summarize, we are taking meaning construction to be a socially mediated activity by the individual, avoiding the extremes of unmediated and unbridled individualism, but also of social determinism and an almost mythical belief in coherent forces that underlie the formation and continuation of a group.
Discourse as a Way of Understanding the Relationship of the Individual and the Group

In order to be able to take such a stance we must have a closer look at how the relationship between the individual and the group is to be imagined, how it is formed and maintained and what dynamic forces are behind the shifting weight of one or the other as one can observe it in different times and places in different cultures.

Crucial for understanding both the individual and the relational perspective of communication are two opposing human needs, played out in infinite variation by each one of us: the need to be connected to others, to be involved, to feel safe and appreciated, to be part of something larger—a group, a value or belief system, an event—and the need to be separate, unique, identifiable individuals who can distance and assert themselves and strike out on their own. At different times in our lives, at different times in relationships with the same person or with endlessly varied groups, at different times in one and the same conversation, we calibrate the signals for involvement and detachment differently—and we expect our conversational partners not only to understand the language we use, but the metamessage we are conveying with regard to how we interpret those relationships.

For the most part and despite the odds, the total message, overt and covert, is communicated reasonably successfully. This is so, since, to use linguistic jargon, the multiple meanings of a communicative event are literally negotiated between and among the participants in the act of communication until the parties are either sufficiently satisfied, though not necessarily in complete agreement, or simply do not wish to or cannot negotiate that meaning further. Clearly, we have much flexibility, but equally obviously, we are not completely at liberty to tamper with the
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system of signals capriciously—there has to be some social consensus about what the signals mean, even if one then proceeds deliberately to violate and reverse that meaning in specific instances.

Indeed, what counts as signals at all is socially derived and agreed upon. The German short story by Peter Bichsel,5 *Ein Tisch ist ein Tisch*, part of his collection *Kindergeschichten*, illustrates this critical relationship between the individual and the group, manifested in language. The protagonist, an elderly man, determines one day to assign sounds/words to objects other than those that they customarily signify in the language group. Thus, transposing the action into English, the item bed is referred to by the sound “picture,” the table becomes “carpet,” the chair “alarm clock,” standing becomes “freezing,” freezing becomes “looking.” In this way he fashions himself an entirely different language, with the result, over time, that he could no longer understand others and, as Bichsel points out, much worse, that they could not understand him—whereupon he turned silent, only talking to himself.

With the analysis of discourse, talk, narratives, and social representations, we have a powerful model for the special interplay between the individual and the group. To use the words of the psycholinguist van Dijk,6 these “social representations are largely acquired, used and changed, through text and talk.” But there are individual components as well that van Dijk calls situation models. These models, as cognitive representations of personal experience and interpretations, including personal knowledge and opinions “are crucial since they form the interface between generalized social representations, on the one hand, and the individual uses of these social representations in social perception, interaction and discourse, on the other hand.”
Multicultural Awareness and Issues in American Education

In following this line of argumentation we acknowledge numerous things about the nature, role, and place of the individual, and the nature, role, and place of the social group. I would like to conclude my presentation by exploring some of these issues, an exploration that, at the same time, gives me the opportunity to tie my reflections to the larger theme of this lecture series, Jesuit education in American culture.

Let me begin with an example of how discourse powerfully creates realities and through them identity and place. As the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ voyage across the Atlantic is being celebrated, one phrase became a flashpoint for diverse opinions, the phrase “discovery of a new world.” You are probably familiar with the arguments behind the fierce rejection of that phrase by constituencies that questioned the hierarchy of power inherent in that phrase. There can be no doubt that through new discourse, new words and phrases we could construct the significance of this event in terms very different from those of the past. We could celebrate it in terms of “the meeting of two old worlds through which a new world was created.” In that way we could recognize the separate identity of native American groups independent of Western European hierarchies. We would empower them. But we would also contribute to a better understanding of the European settlers, since, in acknowledging native American groups, we could also acknowledge the tremendous enrichment, if not to say change, the European settlers underwent through the American experience.

To me, such enrichment, and such empowerment of self and others is not only a matter of crosscultural education, it is at the heart of education itself. Let me, then, conclude by relating what I take to be general tenets of Jesuit education in an American education toward multicultural awareness.
1. Though our reality is culturally constructed, some truths and norms of being transcend cultures. They are likely to be fewer than we might think, essentially referring to nothing less and nothing more than the dignity of men and women. Given the selectivity of our cultural experience, it would behoove us to be extremely cautious about what we do or do not accept as manifestations of that dignity, over time and place. An over-zealous missionary insistence on one or the other form might in itself be an insult of that dignity since it could totally destroy the identity that has been constructed within another cultural framework.

Indeed, rather than emphasizing our own familiar concept of dignity and expecting it to be generalized everywhere, it might be more important for us to find out what manifestations human dignity takes elsewhere, and, perhaps, strengthen them in their contexts. A high level of crosscultural awareness and sensitivity would be a prerequisite for such behavior. In its most thoughtful activities, Jesuit education has attempted to accomplish just that.

2. In striving to understand what human dignity means elsewhere, in becoming culturally sensitive, and in advocating choices we must give proper recognition to time and place. For example, neither the concept of cultural diversity nor that of a strong united nation are in themselves good or evil. Neither an emphasis on the individual nor an emphasis on the group have inherent and unchangeable values attached to them. It is their relationship at a given time and place, the level of recognition that the various constituencies need or deserve, that allow for value judgments and changes in interaction. Thus, in the current American context the issue is not whether we must have greater unity or greater diversity in and of itself. Rather, we must determine whether there is enough social cohesion to allow us to work with greater recognition for diverse groups or whether, perhaps, there is not enough of a unity of purpose for such heterogeneity to be encouraged. We need open and intelligent discourse on this matter,
a discourse that might, in fact, itself become the instrument for creating the very consensus that underlies a viable diversity. The head and the heart will have to be engaged in this kind of conversation, again something that, to me, characterizes a Jesuit education.

3. My third point is that communication, identity and diversity, involve others; they are relational terms. Since these relationships are not fixed, they need constant tending. By no means does this circumstance mean infinite relativism, unrestricted freedom for the individual, no responsibility because of that unrestricted freedom, equal value for everything, unlimited diversity—in other words the totalitarianism of the individual at the expense of the group. Nor, raising the issue to the larger expanse of nationhood, does this mean the totalitarianism of minority groupings that destroy the unified cohesion of the national whole, while deftly hiding behind terms such as pluralism or multiculturalism.

4. On some level, we seem, in the discussion of culture, to have entered the irrational, of undefined forces to which one is subjected without the possibility of escape. I hope I was able to provide the balance by stressing the importance of the rational human mind, though the discussion also spoke to its limitations. Scientific inquiry is just as important as is humanistic inquiry, with both subject to change. As the Nobel Prize Winner Herbert Simon has phrased our condition, ours is a “bounded rationality,” which recognizes the wholeness of the person, values, emotions, stupidities, ignorance, contradictions and all.

5. By its very nature crosscultural communication builds on community. As stated, community is created and maintained through communication. In academia, there is nothing more important than open dialogue. Jesuit education as Catholic education will, perhaps, encounter particular challenges as it wrestles with secular ideas that run counter to its teaching. The
task will be to value diversity here as well, while maintaining the Catholic character of institutions of higher learning. One may eventually realize that the dynamics of that dialogue may modify that very character without denying it.

6. Community is all too often built up through exclusion. Initially, that may be a necessity. Boundaries, rules, and walls make our perception of the world much easier. Germany is only the latest and perhaps the most prominent example. Now, after the fall of the Wall one realizes that the very identity creation that occurred on both sides was a convenience and a delusion. But, more importantly, it was also a tragedy since it perpetuated for decades an inhumane existence for millions of people. What are the walls in our heads that prevent us from discarding old convenient ways of creating realities? Only through a rigorous commitment to an open marketplace of ideas will the essential freedom of discourse be maintained.

7. For Jesuit education at Georgetown a commitment to cultural diversity is likely to result in a special commitment to the growing Hispanic population. The country's mission has traditionally been interpreted from the perspective of an Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition. Consequently, Catholic minorities have an even greater assimilative task to perform than do other groupings. Jesuit education, with its openness to diversity and its sympathy towards ethnicity, might provide an environment that would allow these groups to affirm their cultural, linguistic, and religious identity while they seek upward mobility in society at large through a liberal education.

8. Finally, the special qualities that we seek through crosscultural communication remind us of the unfinishedness business of working on ourselves. Education inherently looks toward the future. I do not wish, at this point, to roll out the whole thorny issue of political correctness. Even so, some of the qualities that I associate with crosscultural awareness might by some be
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classified as "politically correct." As a reply I would refer to an argument that Douglas Robinson, a professor of English, presented in a letter to the Chronicle of Higher Education regarding political correctness. He called multicultural values and other supposedly threatening "PC" positions "essential to American democracy" and provided the following historical precedent in defense of his position: what is currently called PC is really no different in its explosiveness and its thrust than what the framers of the Declaration of Independence took as self-evident, namely that all men are created equal. Clearly, from the social situation of the wealthy middle-class landowners and men of position, there was no such "self-evidence," and, indeed, much of the history of the United States of America since then is a coming to terms with these "self-evident" truths through major legislative efforts and public policy decisions, among them the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, the civil rights legislation, and much more.

I deliberately place my pleas for multicultural awareness, for recognition of the individual within a group, and for diversity between groups in the expanded context of political choices. I close by reminding us of the personal benefits of multicultural awareness, expressed so eloquently by the poet Robert Burns: "Oh wad some Power the giftie gie us/To see oursels as ithers see us!"

Notes


9 The lines are taken from Robert Burns, “To a Louse, on Seeing One in a Lady’s Bonnet at Church” in J. Logie Robertson, ed., The Poetical Works of Robert Burns (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1904), 139.
Mary Jo Bane

Poverty and American Families: Public and Private Response

Mary Jo Bane is Commissioner of the New York State Department of Social Services.
Lafayette and Pharaoh Rivers are the heroes of a quite wonderful book by Wall Street Journal reporter Alex Kotlowitz called There Are No Children Here. They are age nine and twelve and live in the Henry Horner homes in Chicago, a public housing project which Kotlowitz describes as being rife with crime and drugs. His book documents their mother’s struggle with the welfare department, their older brother’s imprisonment, a friend’s drug related murder, and their own small successes in staying in school. What comes out of his reporting and the stories of those two boys is the isolation of the Henry Horner homes from the metropolitan economy and the inability of social institutions—like the schools, law enforcement, and the welfare system—to do anything about it. Kotlowitz’s book and the images in it are very, very compelling, though they are not actually typical of poverty among families in America. Today I would like to paint a somewhat broader picture of poverty in America.

For the past thirty years, policy makers have defined the poverty line as the amount of income necessary to support a family of a given size at a minimal but adequate level of nutrition. In 1989 the poverty line for a family of four was about $13,000. Using that definition of poverty, the Census Bureau counted about nineteen million adults and about twelve million children as poor in 1989: thirteen percent of the total population and almost twenty percent of all children. Those numbers have been stable for the last few years. Families with children made up about two thirds of the poor in 1989. Families like the ghetto families of Lafayette and Pharaoh Rivers actually represent only a tiny fraction of the poor. To measure what we call “ghetto poverty,” the kind of poverty that comes to our mind when we read the description of places like the Henry Horner homes, we use a definition that looks at census tract poverty rates. Using that definition, we find that less than ten percent of poor children fit the stereotype of ghetto poverty. So it is important to ask who are the rest, to ask how we can describe the poor more generally.
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In fact, the majority of poor children are white. Most are not on welfare. Depending on the state of the economy, between forty and fifty percent of poor children live in two-parent homes, the remainder with one parent. The vast majority live in neighborhoods where most of their neighbors are not, in fact, poor. People are always surprised to learn about the breakdown of the geographical location of the poor. About a quarter of all poor children live in rural areas, about a third live in the suburbs, about ten percent live in ghettos, and the rest live in non ghetto areas of central cities. These statistics mean that the poor in the United States are not a separate alienated underclass. They are neighbors, colleagues, friends.

The poor in the United States are a very diverse group with different characteristics and they are poor for different reasons. But we can distinguish two broad groups: the working poor and single-parent poor. David Ellwood, a colleague at the Kennedy School of Government, and I have reported on the causes of poverty. Using data from the current population survey, we investigated the characteristics of the poor. When we looked at two-parent families whose income fell below the poverty line, we found that these families were not out of the economic mainstream. They were not families in which no one was working; on the contrary, work is very much the norm for them. Families in which neither parent worked made up only about eleven percent of healthy poor two-parent families in the late 1980s. By contrast, a little over half of poor two-parent families in the late 1980s had at least one parent working in a full-time, year round job. Another third of poor two-parent families had one or both parents working, but in jobs where the combined hours amounted to less than full-time work. In most of those families, though, even when the hours were the equivalent of a full time job, the family was still poor.

Why is it that some families working full time or nearly full time are unable to avoid poverty? Most working families, of
course, do; but a very large number do not. Why is that? The problem is that, for those at the lower end of the wage scale, having a job is no guarantee of avoiding poverty. The arithmetic, is simple. It takes full-time work at about $7.00 an hour to keep a family of four out of poverty. About 2,000 hours at $7.00 an hour is $14,000. Yet the current minimum wage in the United States is $4.25 an hour. A full-time minimum-wage job leaves a family of four about $5,000 below the poverty line. Even worse, one full-time worker and one part-time worker earning the minimum wage still leaves a family of four $1,500 below the poverty line. And that does not take into account child-care expenses, expenses of working, transportation and other expenses.

Unfortunately, low pay is not the only problem for working poor families. Low wage jobs generally come with no or very minimal medical benefits. Whereas middle class workers receive health insurance through their employers and many families on welfare qualify for Medicaid, the working poor get neither. This abandonment by the government of a group that is arguably the most worthy among the poor is one of the most painful ironies of the current health care system and provides strong incentives for people to choose welfare over work.

The working poor are almost completely excluded from other forms of government assistance as well. They do not qualify for public assistance; though they do qualify for food stamps, many do not in fact apply for them. When we looked at the data, we found that, after government transfers, poor two parent families with a full time worker were farther below the poverty line than a single-parent family on welfare. They are literally the poorest of the poor. The working poor, two-parent families with wages too low to support a family above the poverty line, account for about half of poor families with children in the United States today.

The other half are single-parent families, and in the case of single-parent families the economic causes of poverty are compli-
cated by family structure changes. Single parenthood is an increasingly common phenomenon in the United States today. About half of the children born in the United States today will spend at least part of their childhood in a single-parent family. The statistics you may have seen of twenty percent of children are a "snapshot" of children at a point in time; over time, nearly half will spend some time in a single-parent home. Being in a single parent family is practically a guarantee of being poor in the United States today. Half of single-parent families have incomes below the poverty line. The head of a single-parent household is almost always a woman who relies on her own earnings or on welfare, sometimes supplemented by support from the absent father. But court-ordered child support payments represent an inadequate and unreliable source of income for most.

Child support verges on a scandal in the United States. Children in single parent families, children who are on welfare, nearly all have another living parent. These are not the children of the coal miners who died in the mines that the Social Security Act had in mind when it created the AFDC program. These children have another living parent; but only one out of three single parents received any child support in 1987 (and it is not all that different now) with the average total payment just over $2,000. And all too often the problem is not that the father cannot pay, but that the current child support system is so fragmented and inefficient that fathers are let off the hook too easily. Awards are low and seldom updated, penalties for fathers who do not pay are sporadic and lenient, and many unmarried fathers are never mandated to pay child support in the first place.

Sometimes I ask people to think about what our tax system would look like if it operated in the following way: suppose the amount of taxes that you had to pay was determined by a judge before whom you came to describe your situation, and the judge had to set an order for you; and suppose the next year, when your
income went up, the government had to bring you back into court to get you to pay more taxes. It is unimaginable that we would operate our tax system that way—with unpredictability, with unfairness, with inequity and so on—but that is the way we operate our child support system. Single parents who rely solely on welfare are much better off.

We have been hearing a lot of rhetoric about welfare in the last couple of months, and we are going to hear more. Sometimes that rhetoric gives the impression that welfare is breaking the bank in the United States, that welfare benefits are get rich quick schemes that are out of control. Real welfare benefits, though, when you adjust them for inflation, have fallen almost forty percent in the last fifteen or twenty years. Measured in 1991 dollars, 1970 monthly welfare benefits for a family of three in a typical state were about $635. Today welfare benefits for a three person family in a typical state are $367 a month. Of the fifty states, only Alaska and Hawaii pay enough in welfare to keep the family out of poverty. And of course living on welfare has high human costs as well.

I am about to go and become Commissioner of Social Services for the state of New York, and I hope that while I am there we can do something about those human costs. But I know that the truth of the matter is that the welfare system harasses people, stigmatizes them, humiliates them; the procedures that are in place are designed to fight fraud and abuse, but that means that welfare recipients are treated in ways that we would not want to be treated, and we do not do nearly enough to help them escape poverty.

Single parents who do escape poverty do so through their own earnings. Think about the obstacles they have to overcome. First of all if you are a single parent choosing full time work, you immediately incur increased childcare costs. In fact, once taxes and childcare expenses are taken into account, a single mother of two children has to earn just about the same amount that a two-parent family with two children has to earn to keep the family out of
poverty: $7.00 an hour in a full time job. Furthermore, it is complicated for single parents to go to work because of the dual roles that single parents play of earner and caretaker for the children. Single parents who work are often forced to take less lucrative, less demanding jobs so that they can be free to cope with the inevitable daily routines of children—doctors’ visits, school holidays, sick children and so on. Although it is true that labor force participation among women in general and among mothers in particular has been rising in the past twenty years, even married mothers, whose spouses presumably can share family responsibilities, find that it is very difficult to hold full-time jobs. It is even more difficult for a single parent, who is typically not very well educated, who has had very little work experience, and who has been living on welfare. Finally, because welfare benefits are reduced almost dollar for dollar by earnings, the system actually penalizes people who try to work their way off of welfare. Little wonder that not very many women succeed. Those who do are usually the better educated and more experienced who can command a relatively high wage. Others try to leave only to find that some minor family crisis, perhaps a health crisis, perhaps a sick child, brings them back onto the welfare rolls. It is very common for women who have managed to get themselves off welfare to find themselves back on the system before very long.

Now I would like to consider briefly some economic factors that affect two-parent families, the working poor, and single-parent families. Two-parent families and single parents on welfare are the human representatives of the big change that has been taking place in the American economy during the last two decades. For much of the twentieth century, the success of U.S. business in the marketplace brought rising wages, improved standards of living—a rising tide that raised all boats. Especially during the decade of the 1960s and early 1970s, we saw increasing real wages and decreasing poverty. Today this pattern no longer
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applies. Economists have been reminding us quite routinely about the changes that have taken place in the income distribution and earnings distribution. We find that, after adjusting for inflation, wages have remained essentially stagnant for the last twenty years. In 1969, median real income for full-time male workers was about $27,000. In 1987 it was about $27,000. For the first time in many, many generations, we have an economy in which children are earning less than their parents. (Actually sons are earning less than their fathers. Daughters are still earning more than their mothers.) But we have also been seeing with these changes in the economy a widening income distribution, and I think the facts on that, though often exaggerated, are pretty clear at this point. Wages for younger and less educated workers have fallen. Wages for people at the bottom of the queue have fallen, and the income distribution has spread out. For example, the earnings of full-time male workers between the ages of 25 and 34 with a high school degree fell about sixteen percent over the decade of the 1970s. The wages of less well educated people have fallen even further.

The decline in the wages of men has to some extent been made up for within families by increasing work by women. Women still earn less than men, hour for hour, but the ratio of women's to men's wages has risen, and certainly women are working much more. When you look at the data, it seems very clear that for many two-parent families, the way the family stays out of poverty is for everyone to work. Part of the dilemma here, when we think about policy, is that the traditional mechanisms for making work pay, for bringing wages up—unionization or raising the minimum wage—no longer command a political consensus in today's economy. So it is important to think about ways of helping the working poor and making work pay that we might put in place as a society without dragging down the economy.

So let me discuss policy against poverty. For quite a long time, when people have talked about policy against poverty they
have tended to talk about welfare policy. The standard liberal remedies for poverty have tended to be measures like increasing welfare benefits. But using welfare as the means to fight poverty has never been popular, and it is even less popular now—with everybody. It is not only unpopular with policy makers and presidential candidates and voters; it is unpopular with welfare recipients themselves. People I work with have interviewed many welfare recipients in various cities. What is it like to be on welfare? What should we do? What is your family life like? How do you make it on welfare?

Everyone hates welfare. They see welfare as the last resort; those on welfare want to get off as quickly as possible. No one sees raising welfare benefits as anything more than a short term solution to the poverty problem. Indeed welfare reform by itself cannot provide a real solution to the problems of poverty. Even if we could increase welfare benefits (which is not exactly likely in these political times), we would not be addressing the problems of the working poor. We would be increasing the incentive to be on welfare and we would not be helping families to achieve what they really want, which is to be self-sufficient, independent and part of the mainstream.

Now I am not arguing for cutting back welfare benefits. The decision of many states to cut welfare benefits in part reflects the economic realities of a recession and the fiscal realities in states, but it is mean spirited and not likely to bring about any permanent solution to the problem. But we need to look beyond the welfare system for the policies we need to make a dent against poverty.

Some things we can do outside the welfare system could make a big difference. One way to help working families to avoid poverty is to make work pay, to make employment a viable alternative to public aid. When you talk to anybody—welfare recipients, the public, policy analysts—everybody agrees that you ought to have a system in which it is better financially to work than
to be on welfare. There are two ways to bring about such a development. One way is to make welfare worse. We have conducted a twenty-year experiment in lowering welfare benefits. It is time to try the other way, to make work pay better. The crucial strategy to combat poverty is to increase the economic value of work. We have got to send an unambiguous message as a polity that, if you work, your family will not be poor. Of course, the only real guarantee of making work pay is a healthy, competitive, productive economy that offers high wages for work and that adds high value. Clearly we need to invest in the work force, and we need to worry about productivity and competitiveness in the international economy.

In the short term, though, American society must deal with the fact that many workers are in relatively low paid jobs. Needed now are policy mechanisms that increase the value of work without being too much of a burden on the economy. One idea that receives bipartisan support from many groups including the National Commission on Children is a policy that is actually a part of federal law: the Earned Income Tax Credit. The Earned Income Tax Credit rewards people for working; through the tax system, the credit essentially helps subsidize the wages of low wage workers. The Earned Income Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit for low income working families; as earnings go up, the amount of tax credit that you get goes up until a ceiling at about $11,000. Then it starts going down and phases out by about $20,000. It is a credit for families that supplements wages in ways that are likely to be a big help to two-parent families. By 1995, under the expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit that were recently passed, families of four will be able to receive as much as $2,000 in benefits.

There are some problems with the Earned Income Tax credit; it is expensive (current estimates are about $8 billion). Any reasonably large scale income transfer program is expensive. The Earned Income Tax Credit has also been criticized because in most
cases the credit, the money that you get from the government, comes in lump sum in April rather than being spread out over the year. But these problems can be solved; at least the administrative problems can be solved. As a mechanism for fighting poverty among two-parent families, the Earned Income Tax Credit is very important and an important piece of a policy strategy.

The other important piece of a policy strategy against poverty focuses on the problems of single-parent families. To focus on the problems of single-parent families without relying exclusively on the welfare system takes some creativity. My colleagues and I believe that a system of child support enforcement and insurance is the best poverty fighting strategy for single-parent families. An effective and guaranteed child support system with supplements for work so that work pays would allow single-parent families as well as two-parent families to escape poverty. We estimate that a genuinely uniform and universal child support system could collect as much as an additional twenty-five to thirty billion dollars from absent fathers. The key to making such a system work is to collect child support automatically through automatic wage withholding just as the government collects taxes. It is the most reliable technique, the least vulnerable to fraud. We can do it if we want to. We do not have to have the crazy system we have now. Indeed the Family Support Act of 1988 mandated that, starting in 1994, new child support orders be collected through automatic wage withholding. Some employers are not enthusiastic about this measure, but I think they will come to realize that it is in their interest to have a well functioning child support system in the United States. The idea is to make the collection of child support as much like the collection of taxes as we can. Amounts would be determined by simple guidelines: X percent of earnings for so many children and so on. Employers would be expected to inform their employees of their obligations just as they inform them of tax liability. Collections would be made routinely.
Such a system of child support enforcement has enormous advantages. It would be simpler. It would be more reliable for single parents and more understandable for absent parents. It also opens the way for another important reform for the next decade. That reform is guaranteed child support. With this reform, a single parent would be guaranteed an amount of child support by the government. The government would be responsible for collecting child support, if possible, from the absent parent, and for supplementing that support when necessary with government revenues. Guaranteed child support could then be supplemented by the woman’s work so that the family could support itself above poverty without having to be on welfare. If a woman could count on just $2,000 per child in child support, then a combination of work and child support could keep her family above the poverty line; indeed half-time work at $6.00 an hour would be enough if supplemented by child support to keep a family of three out of poverty. That is a lot more realistic than full-time work at $7.00 an hour, which I described earlier.

What if the absent parent himself is earning little or is unemployed or simply between jobs? The idea of a child support insurance system would guarantee that the children would receive a minimum amount even if the absent father were unable to pay. It would be unemployment insurance for children in single-parent homes.

A comprehensive child support enforcement insurance system would probably not cost very much and might even save money in the long run. Most of the payments would come from absent fathers. For women who are still on welfare, the minimum benefits could offset welfare payments. So the only real added cost to the public would support the children of single parents who are not now on welfare and who are working hard for their own financial independence. These are people who are playing by the rules who I believe deserve our support. Such a system reinforces
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notions of work and family responsibility at the same time that it fights poverty among a large proportion of the population. With such policies in place, we could talk about a genuine reform of the welfare system.

If we had policies like a guaranteed child support system and a system of earnings supplements, we could genuinely expect that welfare would be a transitional program. I think we will always need welfare--income transfers--as a way to help people get over hard times. But welfare assistance should be transitional, a way for people to get through a period, not a permanent way of life. With policies like those I have described, we could see the welfare system as one which helps people to move toward independence, to invest in training, in education, in preparing themselves for work.

Of course, we must think about other supports for workers, like health insurance and child care, but I think these would all be more possible if our approach showed our interest in policies that support work and that support families. The changes that I have described really do; they reinforce work in family, they reinforce responsibility and independence and they get at what we believe to be the causes of poverty.

Notes

1 Alex Kotlowitz, There Are No Children Here (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

2 The following discussion is based on an article by Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, "Is American Business Working for the Poor?" Harvard Business Review, September-October 1991, 58-66.
Otto Hentz, S.J.

Minding the Future: Georgetown Time and Time Future

Otto Hentz, S.J. is Associate Professor of Theology at Georgetown University.
The theme of this lecture series, "Minding the Time," goes to the heart of human living. For time, in the deepest sense, is not a matter of clock and calendar, but of choosing. By our choices we shape our story as we move out of a past through a present and into a future. Minding the time means attending to our freedom, our choices, and our loves.

The topic assigned me in this series is more specific: "Minding the Future." Although the future does not yet exist, we do know a way to mind the future. We discern possibilities for the future in the present, and by our choices in the present we seed the future. So a way to mind the future is to mind the present which opens into a future.

More precisely still, I have been asked to address seniors. You seniors chose an undergraduate education at Georgetown. Your experience here should be not a more or less charming interlude in the drama of your lives, but deeply formative. My charge is to set forth my understanding of what we mean to be about presently in undergraduate education at Georgetown and what we hope your time here might mean for your future.

I begin with some preliminary reflections about the future and about hoping.1

The Future

The future is not yet established. Yet the future, though only a possibility, plays powerfully into our living. Without a future the past would not be a prologue. Without a future we would be stuck with the past just as it is. The past can only be taken up, developed, or redeemed by a future which reshapes the meaning of the past. Think, for example, of the forgiveness we hope for from a friend whom we have offended. If that forgiveness is not forthcoming we are stuck. And, if there is no future in our present, we are just spinning our wheels on a road to nowhere.

I remember sitting around with two parents, their children
and friends on an evening during senior week. They were a large, very happy Irish-Catholic family from Boston. Somehow the subject of heaven came up. Spontaneously the mother said, “Oh, I don’t want to go to heaven.” We all laughed out loud. Imagine: a devout, Irish-Catholic mother declaring that she does not want to go to heaven. Surely she was not looking forward to hell. No, she was having such a rich life now that she was afraid of being bored in heaven. Think on it: not just the boredom we sometimes experience now, whether with people or a project or a public lecture on a beautiful spring day, but boredom that is eternal. Will there be a future in her life there, or will she be stuck, eternally? If we have no future we are dying.

**Hoping**

Hoping moves us into a future. We look for, reach out, and embrace a vision and a set of goals. On the basis of the vision we have embraced, we imagine possibilities and we act. We stretch ourselves toward specific commitments and strategies. I first thought about the dynamics of hoping when I was preparing a sermon for the wedding of some friends. How did this wedding moment come about? Surely, there was some reach at the heart of these young people. They were searching and reached out to know each another. Hoping reaches out into the freedom of another to what is beyond one’s calculus and control into an unknown future.

Of course, no dimension of our experience is isolated. We might think it simple and satisfying to focus on one dimension of our experience, such as personal relationships; but, as Alfred North Whitehead taught so emphatically, to isolate one dimension of our experience is to commit the fallacy of misplaced concretion. Our efforts to be focused, specific, and concrete are misplaced when we truncate the reality of an experience by abstracting it from the totality of which it is part. Human relationships develop within a natural and humanly shaped environment and within a social
context that has many levels—local, national, global, cosmic. That multi-dimensional context, which is integral to any future, challenges us to hope, to reach in freedom and try to shape in a shared environment and history what certainly is beyond the tidy calculus and control of any of us. Many of us also affirm the summons to hoping which comes from the incalculable freedom and future of the mystery of God.

We know two classic alternatives to hoping that deaden our imagination, shut out a sense of possibilities and kill our future. The first is cynicism. For the cynic nothing is possible, dreams are only fantasies, and ideals are illusions. One can recognize a certain cynicism in ordinary talk: “That’s unreal; you are not being realistic.” Hmmm. What is real? Who defines what is realistic? By what philosophy, by what revelation? Those who want a future, who live in hope, do not accept cynics as their prophets. But cynicism, however debilitating, might be only a protective device.

The second alternative to hoping is much more deadly. It is apathy. Why even care about what might be possible?

Certainly to hope, to imagine real possibilities, we must have some basis, though that basis may not supply easy assurance. For we need courage, patience, and perseverance to reach our way into a future that is not yet established. But we need some basis, some resources—we need one another. Otherwise we have no resources beyond our individual selves and we get stuck.

Now, consider your experience at Georgetown, what we offer one another here, and what that might mean for your future.

Some years ago on the first day of class in early September, I went into the common room of the Jesuit community to have a cup of coffee before proceeding to my 10:15 class. Three other Jesuits were in the common room. We sat quietly around a table sipping our coffee. All of us felt a certain inquietude, a certain restlessness. At one level, the reason for our skittishness was clear. I always describe the first class meeting as a kind of blind date; we
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wonder: What will the group be like? Will we hit it off? Will the
course go well? Teaching is an act of hope. The professor cannot
calculate, predict, program, or control the process. No less, the
work of a student is an act of hope. The student must suspend
disbelief, let go, stretch into something new for a growth the
student cannot control.

Another more serious reason for our skittishness came to
light when we began to talk about it. One said, "I guess what’s on
our minds is this: do we really want to do this to our students?"
We all knew what he meant. If "this" works, if we succeed in what
we are about, our students will always be restless, questioning, self-
questioning. They will never be able to go home again and live in
the kind of comfort available only to an unquestioning person.

Do we want to do "this"? "This" is a liberal arts education
in the Jesuit tradition at Georgetown. If I can delineate the meaning of
that expression—liberal arts in the Jesuit tradition—I can sketch what we
hope you will take away with you, what we hope you will bring to
shaping the future. But first let me say a word about college time.

College Time

Although each of you has had a college experience that is
unique, three aspects of college life seem to me to be basic. The
three aspects are: complexity, integration, and friends.

1. Complexity

I can always get a laugh when I remark to students that
"school" comes from the Greek word schole, which means
leisure. Schole, leisure? College life is busy. Students ordinarily
take five courses, frequently engage in sports, work part time, and
participate in extracurricular activities. They must work out
housing and handle finances. They enjoy social life and personal
relationships. Furthermore, students inevitably think about their
own past and personal development. They keep an eye on their
future. They question their basic philosophy or religious beliefs and try to determine their basic values. They ponder the force of their convictions and, weighing their real hopes, decide whether and how their vision and values will take concrete shape in life. Doesn’t sound too leisurely to me.

All these activities take place when students are experiencing adult freedom for the first time; when they are inevitably comparing themselves to, if not competing with, those around them; when they are encountering a challenging pluralism (geographical, ethnic, religious, economic and political). We could get giddy specifying the complexity of college life. But it is not just complexity; it is process, complexity within process. Often I have asked seniors to reflect together on their college years; always they focus on change. The point is: complexity within process.

Moreover, development through college years happens to a young person. A young person in college is not already established, and certainly not secure in identity—as the young imagine us to be.

As is clear, I do not romanticize undergraduate years or imagine them as simply idyllic. But the complexity and process of these years summon the glorious human effort to achieve integrity. So, a word now on integration.

2. Integration

Many popular expressions refer to integration: “get a life”; “get your act together”; “get with it.” I think it safe to say that you have watched to see whether and how others “get their act together.” The challenge is as familiar to us as it is central. It has to do with our wanting to be true, to be fine. It has to do with our very being. None of us want to be, as Eliot puts it, “hollow men,” persons of whom it could be said, “there is nothing to her, nothing to him.” We want more than life at the management level. I think of a moment during a reunion when a former student pointed
to his classmates and remarked, “There are no poets there.” The remark I thought devastating. Knowing the people to whom he pointed, I also thought it inaccurate.

How do we put it all together? Mind and will and emotions; soul and body; self and others; the planned and the unpredictable; unique individuality and the community with which we share the environment and shape history; personal values and complicated social structures; history in the world and the mystery of God.

As deep as is the urge to integration, just as constant is the temptation to simplification. But the life of human persons is a complex process. Integrity, wholeness, and oneness require clarity of vision and rightness of action within complexity. We know the temptation to cheap clarity and simple strategy in the face of complexity; or, on the other hand, awash in complexity, we know the temptation to despair of clarity, conviction, and commitment. But clarity and commitment within complexity are congruent with the actualities of life. To cite one example, do we not get tempted at times because of the complexity-in-process to say: “The present, we must live in the present.” Hmm, a present not called into and shaping a future? Or to say: “Think future; don’t get stuck in the present.” Hmm, is there a future not seeded in the present? Life is complex, both-and. Integrity is unity in diversity: self, not despite, but with others; ordered society in history, not order without change; and so on.

I hope the process and complexity of your time here has focused the challenge of integration. The challenge to integrity will be a constant in your future. To know that now you need no crystal ball. That brings me to my third point about college time: friends.

3. Friends

When, in the days of their parting, seniors speak of their time at Georgetown they invariably stress their friends. In fact, so consistent and strong is the stress on friends that I have been
tempted selfishly to ask, "Did you, by the way, take any courses here?"

College students think a lot about their relationships. The friendships formed in college go deep because they are formed quite self-consciously. Of course, during these years of heightened self-consciousness students also come to appreciate in a new way the love they have known in other contexts.

From the self-conscious appreciation of friends and a maturing understanding of love you can learn two basic lessons for the future: first, what your freedom to make a future is all about; second: the dynamic by which to achieve integrity within complexity and process.

First, freedom. When you have experienced love, others for you, you for them, then you can understand what freedom is all about. "Why me? Why does this person choose me?" Love is free, incalculable, gratuitous. We cannot fully figure it out, much less program it. We cannot merit love. We cannot make someone choose us, or, for that matter, reject us. Love brings us fully to life, life at heart and center. Nothing else, however important or convenient or pleasant is at the center of life. For true life nothing else, absolutely speaking, is necessary. Certainly nothing else will satisfy.

The second lesson from an understanding of love has to do with the dynamic of integration. I can illustrate the point with another story. A senior stops by late of an evening for a beer and a chat. As he talks he begins to weep. Weak? A loser? Certainly not. Four wonderfully rich years: good courses, four years on crew, effective and much esteemed RA, looked up to by all who know him, strong, unassuming. But wonder about a direction for his life, sensitivity and concern for those in need, and the alert self-criticism that focuses personal limitations and makes for and exposes a certain inescapable kind of aloneness move him to weep. He asks, from heart and center, "Can I ever be happy?"
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How honest, how fine the question. Happiness is only possible for us within complexity. Life is a process: we are in moving traffic. We are free to make choices, forge a future, make a history. There is no escaping the constant which is change, no cruise control. Happiness is only possible for us in process.

If we live in moving traffic, we cannot much be happy on a pit-stop basis. To be sure, pit stops, getting out of the race are crucial. But happiness on a pit-stop basis would be only intermittent and fleeting. The past works on us, the future summons: how often pit-stop conversation turns on a review of the progress so far and then to what lies ahead.

How is one to be happy within complexity and process? The heart of the matter is love. The key to happiness, the key to integrity is love. In love we are fully alive. In love we have the deepest security. Secure in love, we have nothing to lose; with nothing to lose, we are free to hope, to dare the future. Complexity, change and challenges are constant. Love gives us a center, an identity, a direction. Love gives us a vitality that makes for integrity and happiness within the complexity and process of life. The point is not womb-like survival. The point is that, with the “insecure” security of love, we can hope and imagine possibilities and be free. I repeat, there is no future without freedom; there is no freedom without possibilities; there are no possibilities without hope. Love summons, sustains, and energizes hope. Rooted in the security of love, empowered by that love, we can hope, we can imagine our world afresh, we can be free to move into and give shape to a future.

In sum, the key to integration is love. A carefully composed “to-do” list and fine-tuned calendar will not satisfy. Love embraces, informs, and empowers so that the complexity in process is integrated. Love plays through the complex process of living and makes a symphony of what would otherwise be cacophony or, worse, dispassionate, canned muzak.
Having minded some the time in college—complexity, integrity, friends—let us look specifically to Georgetown and to what we mean to be about here: first, liberal arts; second, the Jesuit tradition.

Liberal Arts
A liberal arts education liberates. More than that, a liberal arts education fosters the personal freedom to live and shape the future with integrity. As the French theologian Henri de Lubac has it, "the truth frees, not sincerity." A quite specific notion of freedom is implied in De Lubac's counsel: freedom is not just choosing; freedom is choosing what is right, good, valuable, just. "The truth frees." So a liberating education enables one to search for the truth about the human in order to be authentically free.

Liberal education involves probing various dimensions of the human: religious, historical, psychic, artistically creative, biological, environmental, social, economic, political, and so on. Furthermore, in probing various dimensions of the truth we do more than appropriate information, important as that is. We mean to cultivate various dimensions of the human imagination and understanding. The point of studying history is not just to collect bits of information, but to develop an historical consciousness so that we will go on thinking historically. Only to learn some "stuff" would mean that education is only as weighty and timely as the limited bits we can carry away in a more or less strong memory bag from an intellectual market checked out at a certain QPI, though at considerable cost even on just a financial accounting. That is good enough for crossword puzzles and Jeopardy, but not for the game of life. The point is to cultivate various dimensions of human understanding. Then one is not mired in memory; one can continue to search the truth through the various dimensions of human understanding.

Here I return to the story with which I began. Liberal arts education means more than exploring various dimensions of the
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human and cultivating dimensions of imagination and understanding. Educators want to awaken the critical consciousness by which persons can reflect on, check, and question how they are knowing. To use an old metaphor: liberal education is not just looking at this or that and learning to look from this perspective or from that; it is learning to look at our looking, to check the lenses through which we look at anything, from any perspective. Critical consciousness means that part of us walks the mezzanine to look down and check our operative vision, values, strategies, and style of movement.

Wow. Awakening critical consciousness. Do we want to do that? If we succeed, our graduates will never be able to go home again. They will always be on the road, pilgrims. Can they be happy in moving traffic, checking direction, sometimes trying a new route, sometimes drawing a new map? On the other hand, critical consciousness is not merely an “extra” in a liberal education. How could we sustain openness to the truth and true freedom without a critical consciousness? Critical consciousness is essential; it sustains openness for change and development and makes possible a future.

Jesuit Tradition

I should note that, though I focus now on the Jesuit angle of vision, I do so sensu aiente, that is, affirmatively, not exclusively, not as though other traditions do not richly inform the Georgetown project. I should note also that my point is not to show that Jesuit education is unique to Georgetown. After all, Ignatius did not invent liberal arts education. In fact, he got his version of it from the University of Paris, where he did his studies. Nor did Ignatius invent the gospel. God did. My objective is to articulate what Jesuit education is about. If others are about the same sort of thing, I am glad.

My thesis is this: Ignatian spirituality enriches and deepens liberal education. To explain my thesis I will speak first of vision; second, of focus on choice; third, of the practice of faith.
I. Vision

At the University of Paris, Ignatius asked one of his first companions the elemental question Jesus asked his disciples: "What does it profit to gain the whole world and lose one's soul?" The question is: What are the values which summon me, energize me, give me direction for the future? What is my vision? For what future do I hope?

A few years ago a young Chilean Jesuit who was studying at Georgetown before departing for Africa joined a dinner-discussion group of students. At the last get-together before his departure he asked permission of his student friends to ask a personal question. He said: "When I was younger, your age, I had a dream. I still have my dream. We have become friends. Tell me, what is your dream?" Their response: silence. In the end no one answered the Jesuit's question. The conversation turned to other matters. It was not clear to me whether the question blind-sided the students because it was so elemental, or whether it was a question they had never put to themselves seriously, or whether they had in fact worked out an answer but were shy about offering a simple, heartfelt statement of their basic vision and goal. It is not a question which we might have; it is the question which we are.

Jesuits understand the mystery of God to be inexhaustible personal love who creates and embraces with eternal seriousness humankind and the history we shape. In that vision of things a controlling symbol for Jesuits is the Kingdom of God. Following Christ is hoping in a future of love, justice, and peace. Nothing less.

One does not have to study the liberal arts at a Jesuit university to put the question, What is my dream? What is success? What would true life, a real future, be? But it should be clear from what I have said about a liberal education how useful an instrument a liberal education is for raising and developing both the question and the skill to address it, and how important, given an answer, that one have the education to live effectively according to it. The
Jesuits did not originally envision work in schools as an apostolate, but they came to see education as an apposite instrument for sharing their spirituality. Schooling provides a process for suggesting a style of living in view of a controlling vision, a vision not by which to lose one’s soul, but by which to achieve historical “success.” That specific vision is not one on which a university faculty can insist as an answer to the question which we are. But the question of an ultimate, all-embracing vision must be raised at a university which undertakes a liberating education, whatever the answer of any individual. The question will certainly be raised in a liberal arts education in the Jesuit tradition.

Jesuits mean to use education. They pursue the truth for its own sake and for living into a future. But as my thesis put it, they also serve, enrich, and deepen that education as their spirituality informs it. Their preoccupation with the elemental question of basic vision and values and their disposition to be persons of hope urge a seriousness and realism moving through the curriculum of these years.

2. Focus

Action is a central focus of Jesuit spirituality. Ignatius wanted Jesuits to be, not contemplative monks, but “contemplatives in action.” Contemplation, whether appreciation of creative achievement or religious celebration of one’s relationship with the mystery of God, is but one dimension of human experience. Of course, Jesuits are interested in “truth for its own sake,” if one means by that discovery and appreciation through disinterested study. But to live is to shape a future through choices. Ignatian spirituality invites a style of living which is actively engaged in shaping history. More than just the pursuit of truth for its own sake, the point of education is choice, choice that is informed, self-critical, and discerning—caritas discreta. Given what I have said about Jesuit focus on action and on choice, I can repeat, but now
with a force raised to the second power, what I said after reviewing the controlling vision in Jesuit spirituality: Jesuit spirituality urges a seriousness and depth and realism in running the liberal arts track, the curriculum, of these years. There is no hope for a future without understanding, imagination, and vision. So, too, hoping into a future means choices, loves—caritas discreta, informed, discerning love.

3. Faith and Justice

Since the early nineteen sixties, the Jesuits have set as a goal "the service of faith and the promotion of justice." As Jesuits see it now, authentic faith requires the promotion of justice.

This preoccupation is quite in line with the thinking of the Church at large. A striking, unanticipated development within the story of the Second Vatican Council which defined the Church’s self-understanding for the late twentieth century and beyond was the production of a remarkable document, Gaudium et Spes, "The Church in the Modern World." That document elaborates the way in which the Church, to be authentic, must know our world, learn from it, appreciate and critique its movement, and serve its development.

Most startling is the methodology of Gaudium et Spes. Picking up on an expression attributed to Jesus, the Council calls for us to "read the signs of the times":

... the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgement, to serve and not to be served. ... To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.
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That call follows upon the exquisite lines with which the document opens:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ.

In the very first sentence of this remarkable, programmatic document we notice a special preoccupation: "those who are poor or in any way afflicted."

What is the story here? The story is a move from faith considered purely individual and interior to a faith that takes seriously the whole person: bodily, so in a world; free, so making a history; essentially social, so making a shared history in a shared world, shaping the social structures through which we give actual shape and substance to our lives. Question: What is the cash value of talk about new life, resurrection, a kingdom of love, justice and peace if one understands faith as a matter purely individual and interior? Answer: zilch.

Please do not misunderstand. The relationship between faith and social justice is complicated, especially in a pluralistic society such as ours. How does one’s moral vision play into the life of complicated social structures and systems? That is a difficult question. But some answer is always being given, at least operatively.

Whatever the complication, it will not do, for the sake of clarity, to institute a wrong-headed, dualistic separation of faith and society, faith and culture, faith and politics. Let me be more concrete. We study; we play sports and go to movies; we make war; we pray; we make love; we play poker; we design tax structures; we work day by day, if we have a job (we teach, some say, if we don’t want a job--but you students pay for it). Each of these activities has its proper structure and dynamics. But each
takes place within our relationship with the mystery of God or under the influence of a controlling vision.

Let me illustrate with an easy example—easy, not simplistic. When I play poker, precisely to share an evening of fun with friends, I set out to relieve my friends of their funds. I am in one way aggressive in intent; if fair, I ante up, I bet in turn, I play with only the fifty-two cards provided by the dealer. I may do a little praying on the side, but in the center I am counting cards, assessing the betting patterns of my friends, and figuring my odds; in the center I am not praying, and if I were my friends would probably invite me to repair to chapel, or proffer other suggestions about how I might better occupy myself. On the other hand, when I pray I try to talk to God (thoughts of a bad evening of poker will likely intrude). Neither of these activities is outside my relationship with God, whether poker or prayer. To situate everything in the context of my relationship with God is not to deny that that relationship should work itself through the structures and dynamics proper to specific activities. Prayerful or not, I do not beat four of a kind with a pair. Ignatius used to get annoyed when seminarians thought to cut short their study time in order to devote more time to prayer.

I say all this because of the tendency to cheap clarity and simplistic strategy. One hears people say, "Father, you are talking religion; I am talking economics and politics." I want to respond, "No, my child, I am talking politics, but not apart from my faith convictions and value commitments, which, because I take them as having to do with reality, I now work through, and with appropriate respect for, the dynamics proper to politics."

Education in the Jesuit tradition today means education with a concern for justice. To be sure, a university is not an indoctrination camp. Education for social justice will have to be in the manner appropriate to a university, through the instruments that are proper to a university. But a university in the Jesuit tradition labors to inform its life with a concern for social justice.
Minding the Future

I have tried to mind the time at Georgetown: college time, liberal education, Jesuit tradition. Now I turn to minding the future.

I have no tidy formula by which to program a specific future. We have to enact a hoping and a freedom for which there are no definitive scripts, and for our acting there will be no stand-ins. I offer now some reflections derived from what we are about presently in a liberal arts education in the Jesuit tradition.

1. Hoping

Hoping moves us into a future. A Georgetown graduate working in a rural Peruvian village wrote by candlelight:

I started a letter twice last night, but just was not up to it. This morning I am determined. I think I know the root of my difficulty. The old saw has it, the cup is either half full or half empty, depending on how you look at it. My problem is, I have a full cup thirst.

To be sure, hoping is a full cup thirst. But drinking is one taste at a time. Life is concrete, specific, and, in that sense, limited. We must work with a sense of limits. The boundless love of the human heart can be concrete, specific, actual, only in and through the bounded shape of human limitation. Does that mean unhappy resignation, hunkering down, cynicism or apathy? It all depends on how you understand what it means to be human, how you imagine success. When the boundless love of the human heart takes flesh in the bounded shape of human limitation, that love becomes real, actual. We have permission to be limited, human. God has given us that permission. A specific, limited incarnation is not the diminishment of love, but the historical success of love.

As I noted earlier, we must have some real basis for hope, to imagine real possibilities. We need one another. I note the point again not only because of the support to which we must look, but also because of the support we are called to provide for others. If
a sense of our own limits be misguided or self-centered, it may block what we can do with others or to support others.

For many of us, of course, the ultimate resource, first and last, is the mystery of God. The promise of God is a basis for hoping which cannot be shaken, however often we are tempted to a cynical calculus of what is realistic. Faith in the promise and future of God counters what is so casually but devastatingly affirmed when people say, “You are not being realistic.” In the grace-filled insecurity of faith, we can know the deepest security, and so we can move in hope into our future.

2. Ideals

We define ourselves by our ideals, mindlessly or minding them. Who would we be were we to lose sight of them? To be sure, ideals make for tension and exert a tug on us. The tension develops because of the seemingly intractable problems which confront us, and because of the inadequacy we know in ourselves in light of our ideals. But would you want anyone you respect and love to be free of tension, to enjoy peace at the cost of ideals? Would you invite them to be second-rate? Imagine: “I love you deeply. I want peace of soul for you. I want you rid of all tension. I therefore invite you to be second-rate.” Ludicrous. So I urge humility and self-humor. Otherwise the tension between practice and ideals will mean only pain, maybe even paralysis. I urge humility and self-humor not so that we may acquiesce in drawing limit lines across our commitments, not to rationalize, much less encourage lassitude. An important function of humility and self-humor is to allow us not to dim ideals for the sake of some kind of shallow serenity.

That said, what do we hope, and what do we hope you seniors will hope? What vision do we set before you? It is quite easy to say: “The Kingdom of God.” Or, to put it in terms not specifically religious: a story of love, justice, peace; a story of relationships that are right, of relationships embodied in and sustained by social structures that are right.
The tendency to individualism is natural and inevitable. We have minds given by God to know, investigate, sort out, calculate, plan. We have wills to take hold, shape, create, assert ourselves, assume personal control and power. We want, need, and, by our God-given constitution, have a right to power (or, to put it with more charm: we have a right to understanding and self-expression). The issue is authority, authorization of the use of power. Authority is truth, the true, what is right. I repeat DeLubac: "The truth frees, not sincerity." The predisposition to power gets meaningful direction only with an answer to some basic questions: Power for what? Power how? When we neglect the question of truth, the predisposition to power becomes a proclivity to egocentric calculation and willful manipulation. Misguided self-assertion engenders self-centeredness, which leads to greed and defensiveness, which lead to manipulation, which leads to injustice. That is why, in the phrase, "love, justice, and peace," the word order is so important. There will be no peace without justice, but there will be no justice without reverence for one another, compassionate love that transcends self-centered individualism. Individualism vitiates any movement to define properly and practice justice. In a world now built self-consciously through interdependence, reverence for one another demands solidarity, a term which names afresh, and I think more fully, the ideal classically called the common good.

Given all that I have said, I do not need to rehearse at length the dispositions which we hope you carry in you.

Good persons might disagree about specific analyses or strategies, might differ on concrete prudential judgments. But graduates who have enjoyed the transformative experience of a liberal education in the Jesuit tradition should not succumb to cheap clarities that fail the complexity in life. I am not denigrating coherent vision and actual commitment through specific strategies. Precisely with a view to such a life I am urging what a faith vision, realistic hope, and actual love require: caritas discreta.
Conclusion

I hope that your four years at Georgetown have helped shape you to be hopeful, instinctively resistant to cynicism or apathy. I hope you continue to develop a critical consciousness that allows honesty and freshness in hoping and imagining. I hope these years have helped shape you to be magnanimous, large souled, knowing instinctively that the only freeing and fulfilling future is a future for reverence and compassionate love. I hope you have a sense of limits that is, in fact, a sense of opportunities that are real because specific and concrete. I hope that you reach, in solidarity with others, for justice and peace. I hope that, secure in God's love, you proceed ever and again hopeful. I hope that you reach for integrity and find happiness in moving traffic.

Notes


3 Ibid., paragraph 1.

4 Ibid.
Minding the time, 1492–1992