

STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS



**The Languages We Use:
Talking about Religious Experience**

J. A. Appleyard, S.J. BOSTON COLLEGE

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THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, laity, men and/or women. Hence the *Studies*, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE SEMINAR

Philip C. Fischer, S.J. is secretary of the Seminar and an editor at the Institute of Jesuit Sources.

Donald L. Gelpi, S.J. teaches systematic theology at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley.

Roger D. Haight, S.J. teaches systematic theology at Regis College, the Jesuit school of theology in Toronto.

Arthur F. McGovern, S.J. teaches philosophy and is director of the Honors Program at the University of Detroit.

John J. Mueller, S.J. teaches systematic theology at Saint Louis University.

John W. Padberg, S.J. is chairman of the Seminar, editor of *Studies*, and director and editor at the Institute of Jesuit Sources.

G. John Renard, S.J. teaches the history of religion, with special emphasis on Islam, at Saint Louis University.

Paul A. Soukup, S.J. teaches communications at Santa Clara University and is director of studies for juniorate scholastics in the California Province.

Robert J. Starratt, S.J. directs the Center for Non-Public Education at Fordham University.

John M. Staudenmaier, S.J. teaches the history of technology at Detroit University.

L. John Topel, S.J. is Vice-President for Academic Affairs at Seattle University.

J. A. Appleyard, S.J.

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For your information . . .

In an earlier issue of *Studies* (November 1986) I described briefly the process of choosing members of the Seminar and promised to describe later what happens at a typical Seminar meeting. These next paragraphs will begin to fulfil that promise.

The Seminar members gather five times a year between September and May, from Friday evening until Sunday noon. This is a large commitment of time from men who already have a full week of work behind them and another to look forward to. With travel the commitment regularly adds up to more than fifteen days in nine months. Once or twice a year we meet in Saint Louis where the offices of the Seminar are located. The other meetings take place at the Jesuit community in one of the cities in which a member lives. This latter practice gives Seminar members and members of the Jesuit community in that city the opportunity to meet each other and to learn of common interests in Jesuit spirituality.

At the informal Friday evening session we simply let each other know of our activities since the last meeting, our concerns and hopes, our plans for the future. The whole of Saturday and Sunday morning are taken up with three regularly recurring activities. We work on the specific papers proposed for publication in *Studies*; we talk at some length on a more general topic in the spirituality of Jesuits which might eventually result in a paper; we discuss publication matters both short term, such as scheduling of papers, and long term, such as topics we think it important to deal with over the coming months or years. At two of the five meetings of the year we spend a considerable amount of time in preparing for the Jesuit Conference Board the list of men whom we recommend as replacements for the members who are completing their three-year term. On Saturday evening before dinner we celebrate the Eucharist together. Late on Sunday morning we reflect on how the sessions went, on what we accomplished, on what we might do better the next time, and after the meeting ends we often enough have to hurry to the airport.

Where papers for *Studies* come from, how we carry on the discussion of them, and how we decide on which ones we shall publish will be the subjects of these remarks in the next issue.

John W. Padberg, S.J.

Editor

Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits

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THE LANGUAGES WE USE: TALKING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

J. A. Appleyard, S.J.*

I. THE PROBLEM

Pedro Arrupe once urged us as Jesuits to live our faith "out of doors." Yet Robert Bellah and his associates (in their recent book *Habits of the Heart*) find a serious gap between the language Americans use to talk about our private lives and the languages we use to deal with public issues. Do American Jesuits experience the same gap when we try to talk about our religious experience with our colleagues in the institutions and public arenas where we work?

Anyone trying to talk about religion in a secular culture faces this problem. And since so much of our work as Jesuits is to be translators of faith language in marginal situations, we are likely to experience it acutely, whether in parishes or high schools or hospital rooms. It seems to show up in an especially vivid way, however, in the institutions where we insist on the religious character of work that others increasingly judge by secular and purely professional standards--in our colleges and universities. Would focusing on the languages we use and how we talk to one another help us to think about the Jesuit and Catholic identity of these institutions?

*Author's address: Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167.

Though what follows here concerns mainly religious language in the university, I think we face the wider problem wherever we try to talk about religion in our contemporary culture. By "we" I mean we Jesuits talking among ourselves and with our lay colleagues. And it does seem to be a fact of life that we talk much more about these matters than we used to ten or twenty years ago.

Perhaps this happens in universities and colleges at least, because so many of the circumstances which once gave a clear-cut identity to these institutions--the number of Jesuits working in them, their distinctive curriculums and student discipline, their unambiguous Jesuit administrative control, the conspicuous religious life of the campus--have so obviously changed in recent years. Perhaps it also happens because so many of the people who now work in Jesuit and Catholic universities are not Catholics themselves or, even if they are, they often have no experience of doing their own studies in a religious educational institution. Whatever the causes, things which used to be taken for granted now tend more and more to be questioned, rethought, perhaps even reaffirmed--in any case, *talked* about.

For all the talking that we do--and two more verbal groups than Jesuits and professional academics would be hard to find--we may take the languages we use for granted. I do not mean that we are careless about language. The opposite is very likely the case: Jesuits and academics in general probably honor precision and clarity as much as any users of language do. But we may take language for granted at some prior stage of the communication situation, in the assumptions we bring to the conversation about what questions need to be addressed; about what the words we are using mean to the different participants; about what tone is appropriate; about the places and circumstances in which we talk; and perhaps most profoundly about what kinds of topics can be dealt with effectively in the languages we habitually use.

To put the matter simply, much of the discussion about what is Catholic and Jesuit in the institutions where we work is bedeviled by the gap between the language we use to describe our personal experience of the meaning and value in our lives and the languages

available to us for dealing with public, institutional, and professional questions. The gap in language is caused by, and widens, a gap in experience, so that it becomes more and more difficult to connect our personal lives with our public lives. Attending to the languages we use, however, may suggest ways out of this impasse. That is the aim of this essay.

Some examples

Some examples may illustrate how language is at the center of many of the problems which seem so intractable when we think about our work as Jesuits. The four situations which follow are imaginary, but no one with any experience of Jesuit institutions these days will have much trouble thinking of parallel situations.

First example: Hiring

The Physics Department's appointments committee is discussing hiring a new faculty member. After the members agree that the candidate should be a new Ph.D., the best available specialist in particle physics, and qualified to direct the research of graduate students as well as to teach undergraduate majors, Professor B. wonders aloud whether they ought to consider "hiring a Catholic." There is an awkward silence. Someone asks what being a Catholic has to do with a candidate's qualifications as a physicist. There are nods of agreement from others.

Professor B., some of whose colleagues know that he belongs to a faculty prayer group, says that perhaps being a Catholic is not exactly what he means, but someone with "religious values--given the kind of university that we are." He adds apologetically that he knows this is not something they ordinarily talk about, but that it has been more and more on his mind. "How can we call ourselves a Catholic university and present a religious view of life to our students," he asks, "if we hire faculty members who are indifferent to religious questions?" "But surely," someone else says, "that's for the theology department to worry about, or the philosophy department, and anyway can we really say that this university is Catholic any-

more, in that sense?" Professor L., a veteran departmental diplomat, intervenes to say that the identity of the institution is of course an important matter, to parents and students for instance, and one that needs discussion, but this is not the place for it. He suggests that, if all other criteria are met, the department would be happy if the chosen candidate were a Catholic, but they can hardly spell this out in advance as a qualification. The discussion ends there.

Months later, after the candidates have been winnowed out, the finalists are brought to the campus and interviewed by the Jesuit dean. He asks one of them whether she would feel comfortable teaching in a Catholic university, and she says that, though she is a Lutheran, she would probably feel right at home in an institution which identified itself as Catholic because she went to St. Olaf's as an undergraduate and she has always thought that all study has a contemplative and religious aspect to it.

The other candidate says that, as a matter of fact, some of his friends in the graduate school where he has been studying have been warning him that he might not be free to teach what he wanted to in a Catholic university. When the dean assures him that he cannot imagine this happening, the candidate says that he has "no problem" with the university's Catholic identity, but adds that he cannot see any connection between physics and religion anyway because for him science ought to be "value free." The dean mentions that the chaplaincy has been organizing forums on nuclear disarmament and he alludes to the U. S. Catholic bishops' letter on the subject and wonders whether there might be more of a connection between these issues and the candidate's field than he sees. The discussion is inconclusive.

The second candidate communicates his misgivings about the interview to department members, and there is talk of an open letter protesting this "violation of academic freedom," but when the department votes to offer him the job because of his superior research qualifications, he accepts, the dean approves the appointment, and the controversy dies down.

Second example: Teaching

In a freshman English class Professor G., a Catholic layman who has been teaching for twenty years, is discussing Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* with his students, specifically Stephen Dedalus's attitude towards the Catholic Church, which a student has asked him to clarify. Professor G. feels uneasy. He knows that his students need a certain amount of sheer information about Ireland and the Catholic Church at the turn of the century before they will be able to grasp Stephen's state of mind. But he also suspects from previous questions that the students are interested at least as much in their own religious views as they are in those of Stephen Dedalus or Joyce.

Professor G. is not reluctant to use his students' interests as an avenue into the text, but he feels that his job is to lead them to an increased awareness of how to think about literature and how to write more clearly about it, not to help them clarify their religious beliefs. He is somewhat uncomfortable about this, because presumably the students have come to this Catholic university expecting to find a religiously oriented education here. He even wistfully recalls his own almost religious sense of a teaching "vocation," which did not seem to survive graduate school, with its heavy emphasis on textual analysis and literary history.

Oddly enough, he would like to tell his students about how his own religious experience, once much like Stephen's, has changed over the years, and suggest to them that perhaps this was part of the reason Joyce insisted on readers remembering that he called his book a portrait of the artist *as a young man*. But he decides that it is probably better not to get into anything like this, so he answers the student's question as factually as he can. Afterwards he has the nagging sense that the class was not one of his better ones.

Third example: Talking to one another

There is a meeting of the Jesuit community before dinner in the Jesuit residence. About forty people are present. A visiting theologian has delivered a conference on the relationship between prayer and social justice. In the brief discussion which follows a young, unordained Jesuit doing an M.A. program in religious education says

that from talking to his fellow students he has become increasingly conscious of the injustice many women experience in the Church and that he has been struggling in his prayer to understand what his own response should be--to an issue like the ordination of women, for example. An older priest, a retired theology professor, speaks next and says emphatically that it is very clear to him what the young man's response should be: He should acknowledge the teaching of the Church and of the Holy Father, and meditate on *that*, because obedience is what being a Jesuit is all about.

The rector recognizes someone else, whose remarks go in a different direction. The young scholastic, angry at being put down by the older man, carries on the argument in his head; later, having a drink with two close friends, he jokes about the older man's attitude. The older man too is silently angry, not so much at the scholastic personally, but at the whole direction the theology department has taken, the religious-education program especially, at the training of scholastics these days, and at the crazy ideas about prayer and obedience their spiritual directors let them get away with. He too finds his friends afterwards, for some headshaking about the younger men standing across the room. The rector, alone for a moment at the edge of the gathering, wonders what he should suggest after dinner, at the meeting of the committee which plans community meetings.

Fourth example: Symbolizing

The staff of the Office of Student Affairs is concerned about disciplining the dormitories. There is a judicial process on paper, but it tends to deal effectively only with the most serious infractions of regulations, and proving culpability is a time-consuming and often frustrating business. In trying to find a better way of getting hold of the problem, the staff inserts into the contract all resident students sign a preamble obliging students to "respect the Catholic and Jesuit tradition" of the university, whose goals are "to develop its students intellectually" and "to foster in them ethical and religious values and a sense of social responsibility." They take this language

directly from the mission statement of the university, newly approved by the board of trustees.

In the following academic year there is increased criticism of students' behavior in the dorms, especially on football weekends. The situation is a complex one, because the university is located in a city with several other colleges and universities, whose students come and go on each other's campuses, and because frequently the troublemakers are not even college students but youths from the surrounding neighborhoods. Nonetheless, the administration is under pressure from parents and faculty and neighbors to do something about the disturbances. After a weekend with a record number of incidents, the dean of students summarily dismisses from one particularly troublesome dorm some two dozen students who, he has reason to believe, are among the key disrupters. In the letter announcing their punishment, he refers to the contract they have signed and says that their behavior has been incompatible with "the Catholic and Jesuit tradition" of the university. The student newspaper, while acknowledging the overall problems of the "lifestyle" in the dorm, takes up the defense of the dismissed students. An editorial calls the dean's action a flagrant violation of the students' right to a fair hearing, and says that this kind of administrative injustice is all the more regrettable in an institution "which calls itself Catholic and Jesuit."

As all this is going on, the Admissions Office is reviewing proofs of the new edition of the brochure which will be sent to every high-school student who applies to the university. On the cover, printed in halftone, is a drawing of a gothic tower with a cross on it, along with a color photo of a smiling priest talking to two students who are sitting at computer terminals. The words across the bottom of the cover say: "A contemporary education in the Catholic and Jesuit tradition."

The central issue may be language

Language is not the only issue in these four situations. Indeed the participants might not perceive that language is an issue at all. In a sense, they may be right; misunderstandings, personality con-

flicts, private agendas, and other factors may be involved. But let us assume that all these people--the members of the appointments committee, the dean and the candidates, the professor and his students discussing Joyce, the younger and older Jesuits, the dean of students, the newspaper editor, and the admissions staff--are all honestly trying to express points of view and feelings which come out of their own authentic experience. What gets in their way? The difficulty, I think, arises from the fact that language is not simply a lucid medium through which we communicate messages to one another. It also constitutes us as communities; it expresses, validates, and modifies the relationships we have to one another. The roots of its power to communicate lie deep in our experience of who we are and in our willingness and ability to share this with each other. From this point of view, language may well be the central issue in these four troublesome situations.

Consider some of the ways language fails to mediate the experiences these people are trying to deal with. They may have *different expectations* about what should be part of the discussion. Thus, in the appointments committee Professor B. introduces a topic which his colleagues consider irrelevant; and the students in the freshman English class want to talk about their own religious problems, but the instructor is reluctant to get too far from the text. Or they may *lack a language* to connect their personal religious experience with their professional roles. Professor B., for instance, struggles unsuccessfully to articulate why a religious view of life should be germane to hiring a physicist; and when the English instructor does think of talking about his own faith to his students, he does not know of an appropriate language to use. Or they *are not really listening* to each other. In the Jesuit community meeting the younger and older men have different experiences and different languages for expressing them; they can talk with friends, but in public discussion neither hears the other very well. Or they make *problematic assumptions* about what each other means. For example, the dean's interview with the physicist from St. Olaf's goes well enough, but their assumptions about what each other means are untested; if probed, they might not really coincide. Conversely, in

the interview with the other candidate, disagreement arises out of quick assumptions about what each other means, whereas their positions might actually have been acceptable to each other in a minimal way if they could have been communicated successfully. Or the participants *use words for their symbolic force* but with little concrete meaning. In the housing-contract dispute all the parties use the words "Catholic" and "Jesuit" as labels, but these labels cover such a wide spectrum of meaning that in practice they can mean quite different things to different people. The admissions office is doing the same kind of labeling, but the rhetoric of advertising is so commonplace in institutional publicity that the staff would probably be surprised to have it questioned.

When language fails, the result is not communication but "noise." This can happen anytime people talk to one another, and I am not suggesting that it is a problem only for Jesuits who work in colleges and universities. But these four sample situations suggest that talking about religion in a university setting today creates peculiar emergencies of language, which weigh heavily in the debate about the identity of institutions which claim a religious character. If we cannot talk effectively about that identity, then perhaps it is not effectively real to us. If we could find ways of talking effectively about it, that would mean that we had made it real for ourselves. How can we work our way out of this impasse of language? One way to begin is by examining what seems to be an underlying and fundamental split between two different kinds of language we use.

II. THE GAP

A retreat preacher I heard years ago constructed a series of talks around the words of a trainman on the London Underground whose job it was to warn passengers as they stepped from the car onto the platform: "Mind the gap!" The gap which Bellah and his colleagues focus on is the gap between the psychological language of individual fulfillment, which most Americans today use to talk about

their private lives, and the various fragmentary languages, rooted in Puritan biblical religion or in the Jeffersonian ideal of citizenship, with which we talk to each other about public issues. A similar gap seems to exist in the discourse of Jesuits today, especially of American Jesuits in academic life, and it shows up vividly when we try to talk about religious matters in the university. Its characteristics need describing in slightly different terms from Bellah's, though.

The language of subjectivity

On one side of this gap is a language which more or less succeeds in expressing the affective and cognitive dimensions of significant personal experiences. Bellah calls it "therapeutic" language, and certainly the pervasiveness in our culture of the psychology of personal fulfillment has made it increasingly acceptable. But one form of it has had a long history and is particularly familiar to men and women trying to grow in their religious lives: the language in which interior experience is formulated and analyzed. With the revival of directed retreats in the past thirty years, the increasing frequency of regular spiritual direction, and the growth of small communities and prayer groups and faith-sharing situations, this kind of language has become more and more habitual as a way large numbers of Jesuits deal with a considerable part of their experience.

Here is one contemporary example, an excerpt from a conversation between a priest and his spiritual director, taken from Barry and Connolly's *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (pp. 76-77):

I had just come back from the funeral of the sister of a friend of mine, a woman in her early thirties who had died of cancer. . . . When I got back to the house I picked up the Bible because I wanted to. I wanted to pray--I hadn't had a chance to pray during the day. And I turned to Psalm 139. I've used 139 very frequently but this time as I read about God probing me and knowing me, knowing my journeys and my resting places and shaping my life, I found myself getting more depressed. I had a few distractions and then became a little curious about what was happening because the distractions didn't concern things that were really of interest to me. I realized that I might be avoiding saying to the Lord what I really felt, so I

addressed him. I found myself saying to him that he's taken this woman who is doing very valuable work, living a good and happy life. And I found myself saying that he had taken my own sister, Agnes, just eight or nine months ago. . . . I had forgotten how strong and fresh my feelings still were.

What are the characteristics of this kind of language? The vocabulary is the language of everyday speech. The details are organized narratively, as a story whose parts unfold chronologically. But they are also organized by the purpose of the narrative, to explore the speaker's feelings and ultimately to subject them to discernment. In this open-ended process the arrangement of details is not logical and subordinative; they are added as they occur to the speaker. It would be difficult to formulate a thesis for this speech. Focused on the attempt to articulate a feeling, it acquires its force from the accumulation of details which gradually clarify the feeling.

This might be called the language of subjectivity, in the obvious sense that the speaker describes his own interior experience, but also in the sense that in the struggle to express his feelings he achieves a greater sense of his own identity. The tone of this language is "agonistic," to use a term Walter Ong applied (in *Orality and Literacy*) to oral as distinguished from print language: The speaker faces up to his situation and wrestles with himself to identify and communicate the significant moments of the experience. He notices facts about it which come as surprising discoveries ("I picked up the Bible because I wanted to. . . . I found myself getting more depressed . . . and then became a little curious about what was happening. . . . I realized. . . I found myself. . . I had forgotten . . ."). The speech rhythms, the abrupt transitions, the frequent short sentences (even in this presumably edited version) mirror this struggle. This effort would be implausible were it not for certain assumptions on which this kind of language relies, about its user's candor and sincerity, the empathy and trustworthiness of the listener, and the shared faith in God's action in their lives which is the context of the conversation. Note also that, though it looks like an extreme version of subjective talk, this language, since it puts personal struggle and sympathetic assistance into the foreground, not only counts

on but actually builds up a sense of community between its users, a point Ong makes about oral language generally.

The language of scholarly discourse

On the other side of the gap lies the academic version of Bellah's public language, the language of scholarly discourse. Consider, for example, a paragraph of academic prose, taken almost at random from an article in *Theological Studies*. It occurs near the beginning of the essay, where it defines one of the important terms the author uses to discuss Catholic social teaching in the years after Vatican II.

Roman Catholic social teaching of the last twenty years may be characterized, then, as a *strong* sort of egalitarianism. Of course, such characterizations are only approximate. But, in general, strong forms of equality do two things. First, they tend to require economic and social institutions which attempt to approximate equal allocation of resources as a norm. By comparison, weak theories of equality tend to allow more room for competing principles of justice (e.g., inherited rights, contract, or utility), to permit more exceptions in the name of the general welfare or special interest, and require less in the way of institutional support and readjustment to realize the equality of persons in society, stressing equality of opportunity and formal procedural justice. Secondly, strong forms of equality tend to require more in the way of substantial redistribution of material goods, establishing guaranteed welfare floors, socio-economic rights and the like, than the weaker conceptions. In other words, strong forms of egalitarianism tend to hold that justice requires redistribution of wealth from rich to poor towards a mean.

The two most obvious characteristics of this kind of language are its abstract terminology and its logical organization. The words are far removed from any appeal to the sensory or the experiential as a basis for understanding them; they demand careful reflection and they assume a background of philosophical thinking. The argument is tightly structured; the relationship of the propositions could easily be diagrammed, since qualification and subordination are important

features of this kind of language. Thesis/evidence/conclusion is the structure of the whole essay.

An important feature of this kind of language is its tone: scientific, dispassionate, rational. It makes certain assumptions about the values it shares with its readers: that they too are searching for truth, are open to persuasion (though "persuading" is definitely not part of its tone), that they will be convinced by logical argument and esteem expertise. It might be called the language of objectivity; it assumes that its task is to disclose truths and evidence about an order of things which unbiased observers will acknowledge.

This is primarily a written language; its distinctive features show up most visibly in the scholarly book or article. But they appear too in oral forms of academic discourse--the lecture is the most obvious example. And I suggest that the assumptions which undergird this kind of language--about evidence, organization of argument, vocabulary, and tone--become normative for academic talk generally. The higher levels of anyone's education today consist largely of learning how to read and write this language; it cannot be surprising that its habits have worked their way into our thinking and talking as well. Jesuits are no exception, and Jesuits especially whose professional studies have been in secular universities have inevitably learned to be proficient practitioners of this kind of language, in both its written and oral forms.

Gaps even within scholarly discourse

There are limits, of course, to talking about this as one language. Different disciplines speak it in specialized forms. Indeed, since the early nineteenth century most of the academic disciplines we know today came into existence by detaching pieces of subject matter from their parental disciplines and developing languages suited to analyzing them. These languages deal with subject matters increasingly remote from one another, describe them in technical terminology, and are more and more untranslatable from one to another. Like the languages Bellah finds Americans using to discuss public issues, they no longer deal very effectively with common experiences in terms the whole community can understand. Paradoxically there-

fore, though the general features of scholarly language--its abstraction from particular experiences, its logical organization, its dispassionate objectivity, its evidentiary argumentation--embody ideals of clear thinking and exact communication, the actual languages academics use are more and more opaque to each other, less and less intelligible to anyone except experts, and therefore of limited usefulness in dealing with broad common issues, such as the educational philosophy and the identity and purposes of our institutions.

Another serious limitation of this language is that, in aspiring to be a scientific and objective mode of communication, it divorces itself from the experiential origins of the ideas it deals with. Experience is concrete, affectively toned, context-related, an aspect of our whole subjective identity, and we are apt to picture it to ourselves in images and symbols. The language of the academic disciplines abstracts from all this, and achieves clarity and order at the expense of experiential richness. Its broad categories (such as "strong" and "weak" forms of egalitarianism) help the reader conceptualize the issue, but nuances of actual social programs would disappear into the either/or form of the distinction. The first kind of language can render the highly concrete quality of personal experience but can't easily formulate a thesis about it; this kind of language achieves categorical clarity by ignoring the irregular shape of actual experience. It prescind, ideally, from the persons who use the language, the contexts in which they speak, the feelings they have about the subject or one another. It focuses mainly on the content of the message it wants to communicate. Unfortunately this leaves out much of what matters to the people who are communicating.

What are we to make of the gap between these two languages? In practice we probably struggle along inside it, as most of the speakers do in the four examples above. But they do not handle this intermediate kind of language very well. They slip to one side or the other; they fall back on the language which tries to articulate inner experience descriptively or symbolically, or on the language which attempts to deal with ideas analytically and categorically. Each of these languages seems indispensable for a part of our lives,

and if we were not trying to profess explicitly the religious dimension of academic work perhaps we could go on compartmentalizing our private experience and our professional lives in this way.

The modern university, however, does not allow us the luxury of private accommodation. Northrop Frye, in *The Critical Path*, points out the tension between the primary mythology (of "concern," he calls it) by which we organize our vision of a coherent world and of our place in it--primary because it is both older in our history as a people and more basic in our development as individuals--and the secondary mythology (of "freedom") which leads us to analyze and interpret our beliefs rationally and scientifically. The first creates the imagined world where belief reconciles desire and fear; the second leads us to criticize our mythological conditioning, to subject it to the scrutiny of reason and empirical verification. "Concern" expresses itself typically in religious belief and religious language; "freedom" expresses itself in philosophical and scientific language, and in modern times its natural home is the university.

Frye's point of view underscores the need for both a language which originates in belief about and experience of the ultimate meaning of one's life and a language which originates in the impulse to subject this experience and belief to rational criticism and study. But it calls into question whether these two languages can both be spoken in the university; indeed it implicitly challenges the whole idea of a university with an overt religious identity. If we accept the disparity between these two languages, then we must accept that in a university belief is relevant only to the personal lives of individuals, and that what is studied and taught can only be treated in the public language of critical inquiry. Or we must assign belief concerns only to certain parts of the university--to the theology department and the chaplaincy, for example--and absolve the rest of the university of any responsibility for them. The only alternative is to find ways of making clear what the connections are between religious experience and academic inquiry.

Frye, it is true, does not distinguish these two attitudes in order to force them apart; for him their mutual tension is what makes them fruitful. He insists that in the "existential gap" between

the mythical and logical languages a transforming act of choice is available to us precisely because we grasp the significance of the tension, an opportunity to construct imaginatively a society out of our criticized beliefs (104-105). "It is clearly one of the unavoidable responsibilities of educated people," he says, "to show by example that beliefs may be held and examined at the same time" (109). But how in practice is this to be done? It is easy to demonstrate why the critical evaluation of belief is central to the work of the university. It is much more difficult to demonstrate why the experience of believing should matter to the project of critical inquiry. Hardest of all is to devise a language which successfully holds both together. Yet if we don't we are fated to live with the polarizing and paralyzing consciousness of this gap in our claims for a university with a religious identity.

I would like to report about one attempt I am familiar with to find ways of talking about these matters. I think it instructive because it illustrates the difficulties we have been considering and because it suggests some useful lessons about what might work.

III. TRYING TO BRIDGE THE GAP

The Jesuit community at Boston College has a house on the ocean at Cohasset, some twenty miles south of Boston, a rambling old structure with a large stone fireplace which makes the main room cozy even on a winter evening. It has long served for summer vacations and retreats and, increasingly, for winter meetings of community, province, and national Jesuit groups and occasional student and staff groups from Boston College. Those who go there have to pitch in and make their own beds, do the cooking, and wash their own dishes; the atmosphere is exceedingly informal. In the fall of 1983 the Jesuit community invited some twenty-five faculty and administrative-staff members, lay and Jesuit, men and women, for a weekend discussion of their experience of "working in a university which identifies itself as Catholic and Jesuit." Over the following two academic years, eight more of these discussions were held, and

nearly 180 laypeople and Jesuits had taken part in them by the spring of 1986.

Faculty weekends at Cohasset

We began these meetings because of a sense that as Jesuits we did not know how to carry the discussion of our work at Boston College any further. In 1974 we had put together a statement about the Jesuit apostolate at B.C., but increasingly it seemed dated, abstract, self-conscious, a one-way statement by Jesuits to others in the university about the university's identity. A community self-study in the early 1980s got a fair number of Jesuits talking to each other about common problems, but the substantive outcomes had more to do with tangible needs such as finances and building repairs than with issues involved in working in a "Jesuit" university. Talk about our work was only satisfactory when it occurred between friends and in the small communities, especially when they met for weekends of reflection and faith-sharing. In larger Jesuit groups, in the community as a whole, it was almost nonexistent. And in public forums, such as university-wide planning groups, the language available to discuss the Catholic and Jesuit character of B.C. seemed particularly cumbersome, clichéd, and impoverished. One factor was that this discussion seldom brought Jesuits and non-Jesuits together for real conversation, except at either extreme among the possibilities: with close friends or in official university bodies

There had been efforts to widen the discussion. In the late 1970s the Jesuit Community organized a series of "Jesuit Evenings," when lay colleagues were invited to dinner and a talk about some aspect of Jesuit history or spirituality. At the same time the academic vice-president was sponsoring a series of weekend discussions on teaching, at a country inn at Andover near Boston. These were for faculty only and focused on structured agendas which had to do with curriculum and classroom matters, but it turned out that the style and the setting encouraged wide-ranging discussions, in which people often talked rather personally about their own experiences of teaching and invariably got on to the question of B.C.'s Catholic and Jesuit identity. This seemed a promising phenomenon to follow up, so

when we began the discussions at Cohasset we tried to find ways of allowing people to talk, not about the *idea* of a Catholic or Jesuit university, but about the good and bad *experiences* they had had working in one.

Telling their own stories

We hit on the device of beginning the discussion by asking several people, first a Jesuit and then three or four others, simply to tell their own stories about their work at Boston College. The conversation never seemed to need any more priming than this. People talked candidly and often movingly about experiences which symbolized for them the extent to which their work gave expression to, or sometimes frustrated, the values which meant the most in their lives.

For most of us this was a new experience. Few of us had had much practice in talking to colleagues about our work from the point of view of the beliefs which motivate us at the deepest level of our lives. And few of the Jesuits, I think, had had the experience of doing this with non-Jesuits. At first, in trying to understand what was going on, it was tempting to interpret this aspect of the discussion as a matter of personal style: Some people like talking this way and are good at it, others are more reticent and general in what they say. No doubt there is some truth to this. But as time went on, it became clearer, I think, that more is involved here than just a style of talking. This kind of discussion makes real the community that we share in theory. Talking about our deepest selves does more than communicate a message about an issue; it builds an intersubjective reality which changes the way we existed and the way we related to each other before we started to talk. Not everyone on these weekends talked this way, and not all who did called this shared experience religious, but many did so quite explicitly, and some of these people were from quite different faith backgrounds. It seems that when the discussion, however inchoate and halting, is about what matters experientially in our lives, it puts us into new relationships of empathy and understanding of what we have in common. And when the discussion is inclusive enough to admit the religious

dimension of people's experience, it becomes an aspect of the "identity" of the institution that we can talk this way. In fact, several people said that this kind of conversation may be what is most characteristic about a university like Boston College.

However, the shared identity we discovered when talking experientially about the personal wellsprings of our convictions and commitments was prone to fragmenting when we talked about the quality of dorm life, hiring procedures, and the content of the curriculum, and even more so when we talked about how we should deal educationally with the central societal issues of our day: nuclear armament, economic and justice issues, abortion, and the like. A more contentious and adversarial tone entered the discussion. People reverted to familiar positions, trotted out from them on well-known hobbyhorses, brandished their analyses of problems. Why? I suspect that we are used to dealing with these subjects in language much more like the language of scholarly discourse than the language which reveals inner experience. This is the language we normally use in faculty gatherings, committee meetings, in our academic writing, in the public world at large. We cannot resist dealing with some matters in this language, and it alters the tone of the discussion and shifts perceptibly the relationships among those involved in the discussion.

From diverse backgrounds

This should not have been unexpected. The faculty and administrative staff of even a relatively homogeneous institution such as Boston College come from quite diverse backgrounds, and our values have been formed by experiences of family and place and culture which often overlap but seldom coincide completely. Even among Catholics this is increasingly the case, as public debate about current issues makes clear. To these predictable differences education has added expertise in quite specialized areas, so that we all tend to be authorities about something and to speak languages which do not readily translate into the dialects of other disciplines. This would be true no matter what we were talking about, but it is likely to be all the more true when the two poles we are trying to connect are the personal experiences, religious or otherwise, with which we identify

our most deeply felt values, and the abstractly formulated philosophical issues of institutional and cultural life. The language of critical inquiry--with its precise and abstract terminology, its canons of empirical evidence and logical argument--translates poorly the existential experiences out of which faith and love grow.

IV. THE STRUCTURE OF COMMUNICATION

The highs and lows of the Cohasset discussions become more explicable if we look closely at what goes on in any act of communication, especially if we focus not so much on the content of what is said but on the structural elements of the situation which are apt to go unnoticed. Any one of these may in fact be more central to the success or failure of the communication than the message itself. Seen together they force us to attend to just how complex even simple acts of communication actually are. Roman Jakobson's well-known analysis of these pragmatic aspects of languages offers a useful schema for sorting out some of these factors.

ELEMENTS OF A COMMUNICATION ACT

context

addresser - message - addressee

contact

code

Consider first the two most obvious elements of the communication situation, the parties involved. If we focus on the ADDRESSER, we encounter the "emotive" aspect of any communication, how it expresses the speaker's feelings. This involves what writers often call "tone," the attitude toward the subject and toward the audience

which a communication conveys. In sensitive situations, with subject matter that carries heavy emotional weight, the tone of a communication can be crucial. The older Jesuit in the community discussion, or perhaps the appointments-committee member who questions what being a Catholic has to do with being a physicist, stops discussion before it can even start, with a tone which says that the speaker's feelings are strong and negative. On the other hand, the first people at the Cohasset meetings who spoke personally about experiences of significant meaning in their work or in their religious lives established a tone which invited sympathetic listening and had the effect of making it easier for others to follow them. At certain points in the discussion it is conceivable that the tone may be more important than what is said, when the expression of the speaker's feelings is the central fact of the communication.

Focusing on the ADDRESSEE emphasizes the "conative" function of a communication. Persuading, commanding, imploring, and so forth may all be the primary focus of the message. This is the starting point of traditional rhetoric, the strategy of using language designed to affect a hearer. No message, however innocent, is without a rhetorical character, but suspicion of an explicitly rhetorical intention often colors the way a message is received, so that the *relationship* of addressee to addresser often bypasses the message itself and becomes the central issue in the communication. This is especially likely to happen when a speaker does not spell out the content of the message in much detail but has a very clear rhetorical intention--as, for example, in the way the different parties in the dormitory-discipline controversy use the words "Catholic" and "Jesuit." One of the dangers in constantly using terms like these for their symbolic force, unsupported by discussion of their concrete meaning, is that addressees sensitive to the inadequacy of the terminology may focus cynically on the intention of the addresser, and that becomes the substance of the communication. What the speaker judges the listener's state of mind or feelings to be can have a determining effect on what is communicated. And the addressee's assumptions about the speaker's attitude toward the addressee can also govern the nature of the communication. Prejudices and stereo-

types are very obvious dangers in both directions. One way of describing the conditions which seemed to result in the most successful discussions at Cohasset would be to say that people were genuinely interested in what others had to say and wanted to give them the freedom to say it. At these best moments the "conative" aspects of communication were low; no one felt himself or herself the object of anyone else's rhetoric.

When we consider the structural elements which constitute the meaning of the communication itself, a crucial but often unnoticed one is what Jakobson calls a CODE, a particular system of meanings which the addresser and addressee refer to in order to formulate and interpret, to encode and decode, the message itself. A code rests on shared experiences and shared assumptions about the significance and value of these experiences. It is embodied in a vocabulary and key images learned by its users over time, and probably in a story they share about themselves. Church members are great code-users. Consider how much meaning certain phrases imply for those who wield them ("authentic magisterium," "the people of God," "theology of liberation," "being slain in the Spirit," "ecclesia semper reformanda") and how little significance they convey to listeners who do not share the code. Academics love codes too, in their own disciplines ("intertextuality," "countertransference," "negative entropy," and so forth) and in promoting the mystique of their business generally (try to assign a determinate meaning to "liberal education" the next time you see it in a mission statement).

Codes are helpful to their users in proportion to the amount they enable them to leave unsaid. They are dangerous for precisely the same reason. Code failures may not even be noticed, and speakers may incorrectly assume that they are using words in the same way. The dean and the candidates, the physics department's hiring committee, the English professor, and the parties to the dormitory dispute all seem to have their own versions of what a "Catholic" and "Jesuit" university is. What the younger Jesuit means by "prayer" is probably as unintelligible to the older Jesuit as what he means by "obedience" is to the younger man. A particularly troublesome version of a code problem in a rapidly changing institutional setting is to take for

granted a code once widespread, as someone who has been around a Catholic college for a long time might do in talking to a newcomer.

These examples suggest how pervasive codes can be in the area of belief. Our religious sensibilities are deeply rooted, formed out of childhood lessons, ceremonies, hymns, customs, and perhaps years of schooling. The language code which accompanies this sensibility is often so ingrained that it eludes our conscious attention, and it can influence more of our discussion than we suppose or desire. Jesuit training is a particularly vivid instance of an education in a code, and we can fall into instances of code-language so commonplace that we scarcely notice them. We often talk to our colleagues about things like our "apostolate" or our "ministry," which seem to distinguish what we do from their mere jobs. We "share" (intransitively) where other people just talk to one another. And we face problems they presumably do not, such as "inculturation" and "collaboration." "Faith-and-justice" is now an all-purpose noun and adjective, and could probably become a verb if needed; it is much handier than the now sexist "men for others" and the vestigial "whole man." These terms flourish because they are handy shorthand formulas for larger ideas, but they depend on a shared agreement about their meanings; if that agreement cannot be counted on, the language becomes an obstacle to genuine communication. It may succeed only in giving the impression of a mandarin whose messages are for the initiated.

When code difficulties are recognized, messages often become metalingual, focusing explicitly on the language of the code itself (for example, "What does this word mean?"). The more problematic the code, the more metalingual the communication is likely to be. This suggests one thing we learned over and over at Cohasset about discussing topics whose codes come laden with heavy historical and experiential baggage: A lot of time is going to have to be spent finding out how we all understand the terminology we are using.

Another aspect of any communication situation Jakobson calls CONTACT, the devices by which we establish, prolong, or discontinue the act of communication. Some of these are strategies ("Can you hear me well enough?"), some are ritualized formulas ("Hello? How

are you?"), some are ways of sustaining or confirming attention ("Do you see what I mean?" "Uh-huh.").

In a wider sense, contact might be said to involve such matters as the setting and atmosphere in which communication occurs, since these clearly have a bearing on the psychological relationship of addresser and addressee. Does the discussion about the Jesuit identity of the institution occur during a committee meeting about new appointments? Over lunch in the faculty dining room? After dinner in the Jesuit community's recreation room? The quality of the contact between the participants, and the perceptions each has of the other's involvement and interest, will often turn on circumstances like these.

This is one of the central lessons of the history of discussing the Catholic and Jesuit identity of Boston College over the past few years. The document issued by the Jesuit community in 1974 achieved a certain level of contact. The dinners of the late 1970s, with their talks on different aspects of Jesuit history, put this contact on a face-to-face basis. The weekends at Andover, though they were not sponsored by the Jesuit community, provided the atmosphere and some of the leisure necessary to get a little deeper into substantive matters. But a distinctively different step was taken at the Cohasset meetings. When you invite people into your home, cook dinner for them, and begin the discussion by talking frankly about your own work, what has cheered and distressed you about it, how you hope it will turn out, and demonstrate that you are willing to listen to others talk about their own experience, then you talk at a substantially different level of contact than when you argue in a committee meeting or exchange polite conversation over drinks.

Another of the constitutive factors in an act of communication is the CONTEXT, a term Jakobson uses for the "referent" in a message, the thing (idea, word, and so forth) which the message is about. Numerous messages in daily life are oriented unproblematically to their subjects, and then the element of reference does not need much attention. Talk about religion in the university, though, can be problematic in this respect. In two of the cases above, what seems to be at issue is what kind of subject matter can be appropriately talked about in a university which calls itself Catholic and Jesuit.

Professor G. does not know how far he ought to go in letting his students' religious beliefs and his own religious experience be the subject matter of class discussion. And the physics-department hiring committee, indeed the dean and the prospective candidates, in a sense find themselves similarly at odds over the kinds of subject matter that can be admitted to their conversations. Clearly, whatever agreement may have been operative as to what could and should be talked about in this kind of setting in this kind of university has broken down. Such a breakdown may be an important factor on a number of levels of academic life, formal and informal, where what is talked about (when some of the parties think it should not be) and what is not talked about (when some think it should be) may be silent factors affecting a good many issues and relationships. The best of the discussions at Cohasset seemed unconstrained by any assumptions about allowable subject matter; indeed the expectation was established that the talk could be, even ought to be, about the most personal religious experience and the most public issues of professional life.

What can be learned from the discussions at Cohasset and from this analysis of the problems of talking about religious experience in the university? Perhaps the following propositions can serve both as a temporary conclusion of this inquiry and as a set of recommendations which anyone who wants to continue this kind of discussion might test against his own experience.

V. SOME CONCLUSIONS

1. *We cannot avoid facing the problem of language when we try to talk about religious experience in our work.* It forces itself on us too insistently. The Jesuit version of Bellah's gap is that the professional languages we speak in our work often do not communicate the religious meaning of our lives, while the language we use to describe our personal experience of meaning does not function well in the professional worlds we move in. In the university the problem exists more acutely because the specialized languages of each dis-

cipline are increasingly opaque to one another, because the standards of institutional success are more and more defined in terms dictated by professional and economic considerations, and especially because the traditional code in which the religious identity of the institution was formulated no longer convincingly communicates a reality to the large numbers of colleagues who do not share our religious beliefs or who have no personal experience of educational institutions which claim a religious character. Jesuits might plausibly feel that they represent a vanishing reality. If the language to talk about something does not exist, perhaps the thing itself does not exist anymore. The crisis, though, may be a healthy one to work through. In any case it is not peculiar to us. The characteristic feature of using any language today--in our culture at large, in politics, in church communities, in universities--is that terms have to be questioned, presuppositions analyzed, propositions agreed on, conclusions tested against experience. It is not necessarily a reason for discouragement that an easily available public language for talking about religion does not exist anywhere, even inside the Catholic community. As Frye suggests, the linguistic gap also creates an opportunity, to find for the university a language which does justice to both belief and critical inquiry. A group of people convinced that something is important, who keep trying to find ways of talking about it, are likely to succeed in making it a reality. A corollary of this first conclusion might be: If we work at inventing the language we need to talk about the religious identity of the institutions we work in, we are likely to discover that this identity really exists.

2. *There are realities hidden in the languages we already speak, which we may still recover.* At Cohasset one of the participants said to the Jesuits, "The *Spiritual Exercises* are the source of your spirituality, but they are a hidden treasure. We would like to hear more about them from you." When I think about my own education in the Society in the 1950s and 60s, it seems to me that we absorbed the Society's spirituality more by living the highly structured life of the novitiate and the scholasticate than by getting very deeply into the *Spiritual Exercises*. The way we talked, dressed, acted, and the way we were taught to pray may have been the externalization of the

fundamental principles of the *Exercises*--I daresay anyone who thought about it would have said so, and probably many in authority did--but the actual annual retreats were often formalities to be gotten through rather than occasions of dramatic personal spiritual growth. The changes, indeed the disappearance of this collective, structured exterior religious life in the late 60s and early 70s paralleled, however, the revival in the practice of giving the Exercises one on one, the spread of interest in spiritual direction, and the study and teaching of spirituality and particularly of the Ignatian tradition. It is as though, without the richly structured externals which supported religious life in the 50s and earlier, a compensating clarity of principle was needed--perhaps so that we could find new structures for our lives and work. The present moment offers a similar situation in the religiously identified university. The rule seems to be: When institutional life is highly structured and stable, people can happily live it without having to scrutinize and verify the principles very deeply in their own experience, but when institutional life changes dramatically, individuals need to be clear-sighted about their intentional commitments. But we have diverse commitments because we have been formed by diverse experiences and we talk about them in languages which make different claims on us. Furthermore, we have to make the working assumption that the languages we have learned to use in our professional lives have their own authenticity as ways of formulating realities in human experience. And certainly we would insist that the language of the Spiritual Exercises also has its own authenticity as a way of formulating our experience. There is a profound vision there of what true human freedom is, and of what worthwhile purposes that freedom can be put to. It was not meant to be a private treasure, though. Our present situation challenges us to uncover the realities concealed in all these languages which have formed our experience, to translate our religious vision into terms intelligible in the secular academic culture in which we work.

3. *The men and women we work with face the same problem we do of clarifying the spiritual dimensions of their professional lives.* Jesuits may be a little more nervous about articulating a

public rationale for our work, but the need for a spiritual vision of one's life would seem to be a universal. After all, our colleagues have also experienced the collapse of the traditional codes which once undergirded the values of so many institutions, universities among them. And many of them clearly chose to work with us because an educational institution with a religious identity was congenial to their own ideals. In any case, all of them, whether explicitly interested in the religious dimensions of education or not, are affected by changes in the institutional life of a university which does claim to have a religious orientation. In this kind of situation, and with the very small number of Jesuits who now work in any single college or university, it ought to be clear that Jesuits are no longer in sole control of the terms of the discussion that is going on about the identity of these institutions. It is a conversation with many voices, speaking out of diverse experiences, and there is no point in downplaying the possibility of real disagreements. Nevertheless, it seems to be a lesson of our discussion at Boston College and especially at Cohasset that we communicate best when we assume that we are going to find areas of agreement. Jesuits should recognize this as a version of Ignatius's "presupposition" at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises*, that everyone should be "more ready to save his neighbor's proposition than to condemn it." Faith communities have often emphasized what separates them from each other, but this attitude is not very effective in pluralist cultures or in pluralist institutions like the contemporary university. Those especially who study any subject ought to be interested in what they can learn from others' experience of it. This tolerance is not the same as relativism or indifference, though. Nor is simply reporting personal experience a substitute for the hard work of clarifying the languages we use to talk about it. But the assumption that we can learn from one another is a mark of a certain religious maturity. James Fowler's description of spiritual development, in *The Stages of Faith*, makes clear that there is a kind of adolescent relativism which in effect says, "I won't criticize you, if you don't criticize me." Quite different is the tolerance of someone who knows how hard won his own beliefs are and assumes that the same is true of others and

therefore is interested in what part of the truth he can learn from them (186-187). "Collaboration" can mean many things. The most challenging kind may be to accept our colleagues' spiritual experience as the genuine complement of our own.

4. *The best starting point for the discussion is personal experience.* Concrete experiences have an irreducible quality, a validity that cannot easily be argued away. When someone tells me about happy or painful experiences in his work, I cannot say that he should not have had them or felt that way about them. They are facts. They evade easy categorizing, and are often illuminating and persuasive where abstract analysis is not. This was one of the most striking facts about the Cohasset discussions. Academics are far too skilled at talking glibly and analytically about every issue within reach; what none of us does enough of is talk about what we really believe about our lives, at least not often in a tone which invites the other participants in the conversation to do the same. Jesuits do not do this much even among themselves; we do it even less with lay colleagues. Still, at some point the discussion will languish if we cannot connect personal experience with the public issues, institutional or cultural, that we live with and are used to dealing with in our specialized languages. Which leads to the following conclusion.

5. *We cannot avoid the work of deliberately scrutinizing the codes and languages we habitually use.* Languages which work very well in one group may not work at all in another. The codes may not be understood at all, or may be misunderstood, by those who hear them. This is true of both the language which develops out of religious experience and the language academics use to talk about their disciplines. If we want to untangle the puzzle of talking about religion in the university, we cannot be afraid of calling these privileged languages into question. Indeed, few things characterize contemporary culture more clearly than the debate about the conditions and even the possibility of communicating; if religious men and women do not join this discussion, it will be shaped by other interests. This study and criticism of language and the experiences they deal with belongs properly in the university, because we need to know a lot more about the histories of the particular religious and

disciplinary languages we use, where they originated, how they diverged from one another, what connections they still have among themselves, how they shaped the experiences which gave rise to them, how they modify our understanding of our own experience now, what they enable us to say and what they prevent us from saying. And these kinds of questions cannot be dealt with only by language specialists; they need the attention of scholars in every discipline. But study and research are not a substitute for the discussion itself, just as the discussion is finally not a substitute for testing in the lives of men and women who are committed to working them out, patiently and with whatever effort it takes.

6. *The identity of a religious university is precisely to have this kind of discussion.* From one point of view, nothing should be more characteristic of an *universitas* than the presence of people of widely different backgrounds and quite specialized expertises and ways of talking about them. Nor should it be surprising that their modes of analysis will not do complete justice to the lived experiences at the center of their lives. So perhaps what is most distinctive of a university with a religious identity today is not that it represents the doctrine of a particular religious group, but that it sponsors and values precisely the kind of discussion where all religious experience is brought into dialogue with "secular" knowledge, faith with critical inquiry, not as one of the many things that might go on in a university, but as the central activity which the university community thinks of as its characteristic interest. Rather than be a matter of private concern, or the business of a few specialists, the dialogue of religion and culture should stand in the foreground of our attention. Clearly this does not mean that everyone needs to be preoccupied with it. A university is not a church. All sorts of inquiry go on there which do not need authenticating from a religious point of view. But perhaps it is not a bad shorthand formula to say that in a pluralist and overtly secular culture a religious university is one which keeps open the lines of communication about the meaning of faith, keeps finding better languages in which to carry on the discussion. If an authentically Catholic or Jesuit voice is prominent in the discussion, then it is plausible to identify the university as Catholic

and Jesuit. Some would say that the special charism of Jesuit education historically has been to respect secular learning while devising ways of encouraging students to lead virtuous lives as they studied Greek and Latin literature, science and mathematics. The challenge for Jesuits today may be to go further than this division of interests, and to bring the perspective of our distinctive spirituality to the task of inventing a new language in which authentic religious experience can be brought into real dialogue with the forms of experience and knowledge which the secular world offers and the university studies.

7. The role of the Jesuit community is to sponsor the discussion about the identity of the university. On every one of the Cohasset weekends, one interesting pattern repeated itself around the topic of Jesuit responsibility for solving the distinctive problems of the university. The stages of the discussion went something like this: 1. Such and such (X) is a problem (X was variously identified as: doing something about the quality of student life in the dorms, providing high-powered liturgies and retreats for students and faculty, offering more values-oriented courses especially in the professional schools, doing distinguished research in religious aspects of the sciences and humanities, making the university an effective voice in the national debate about societal issues, and so forth). 2. If only more Jesuits were involved in X, there would be no problem. 3. But the number of available Jesuits to do X is already small, and it is certainly going to decrease even further in the next few years. 4. Then we cannot depend on the Jesuits alone to do X. 5. Therefore we are all going to have to take responsibility for X.

This may look like a modest and obvious conclusion, but in fact it implies a dramatically different perception about the relationship of Jesuits and non-Jesuits in the university than most of us held prior to these discussions. The 1974 statement of the Jesuit community said in effect that Jesuits welcomed other men and women to collaborate with them in *our* work. No one doubted that we had given up ultimate legal and financial control of the university, but the idea persisted somehow that the real identity of the university, its special character, its soul perhaps, was still in some sense the

property of the Jesuits. We would formulate the vision; others would join us. And even now it is not uncommon to hear some people wonder when the Jesuits will finally get their act together and say clearly what we need to do as a Catholic and Jesuit university. But if the pattern of this discussion validly reproduces the actual situation, then there is no Jesuit ownership of these problems separate from the responsibility shared by all the members of the university.

Is the role of the Jesuits, then, simply to be a bloc of votes in whatever representative bodies make decisions, and otherwise a group of individuals scattered across departments and offices? Our experience seems to contradict this idea. The very fact of these meetings discloses a role that Jesuits are already playing: sponsoring the discussion about the identity of the university. In retrospect this seems an obvious function. No other group so visibly embodies the tradition of the university. No other group so clearly has the pastoral motive of caring for and building up the sense of community in the university. And no group is (or *ought* to be) as detached about protecting its own version of what the university should be. This is not to say that Jesuits do not bring to the discussion a distinctive voice and language. They do, one formed in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, in their history as educators, and by their continuing reflection about their work in the Church. But they can no longer formulate and guarantee the identity of the university by themselves. So if there really is a discussion, then other voices and languages have to be heard. Someone said at one point that what was important was not that the voices agreed, but that the voices were "authentic," true to the speakers' experiences. So we have to envision a dialogue in which all the parties--Jew and Protestant and Catholic, Jesuit, agnostic--speak in their authentic voices and listen carefully to each other.

8. *The goal of the discussion is to build a community with a shared purpose.* The tension between the language of personal experience and the language of critical inquiry, between belief and reason, probably cannot finally be resolved to anyone's satisfaction theoretically. There can only be a *lived* solution. When we began the meetings at Cohasset, we imagined that clearer ideas about our work

at Boston College would result, some sort of a plan, concrete strategies for securing the Jesuit and Catholic identity of the institution. What we discovered instead was that we were building a community, or discovering the remnants of an older lost community of scholars who had not yet divided up the common vision they once shared, protecting their part of it behind departmental walls and disciplinary languages. Forty years ago, when Jesuits ran these institutions out of the rector's and minister's offices, and the language which articulated their values was firmly in place, the people in them could take "community" for granted. Now our colleagues are men and women of diverse backgrounds and beliefs, few of whom have any experience of studying or working in universities with a religious identity, and we all live in a culture which insistently assigns religion to the realm of private experience. We have to find a new basis on which to build a sense that we share ideals and hopes for our work together. Sociability and daily collaboration go some way toward this goal. Much more effective is dialogue about the things which are at the center of our lives. That kind of discussion is more than an exchange of ideas. It is "agonistic" in the best sense of the word; it struggles to articulate primary experience, and in doing so it creates an intersubjective reality, sets relationships of cordiality and professionalism on a new basis of experienced faith. One participant in the discussions called this "religious friendship," and suggested that it is what the talk creates and what really keeps the talk going. Community, though, cannot be an end in itself. The conversation will not really be finished until we can spell out with some confidence what a university which is also a community of faith is for. Ignatius makes interior freedom the goal of the first part of the *Exercises*, but then asks us to consider what purpose is noble enough to deserve the service of this freedom. We live in a culture, Bellah suggests, where commitments are seen as valuable because they enhance our sense of individual well-being, not because they are moral imperatives. These two observations indicate, as well as anything can, what we need to develop with our colleagues and offer to our students--a vision of how study and teaching serve not our own needs alone but the spiritual well-being of the world we live in as well.

9. *The setting and the style of the discussion count.* Academics and religious people are apt to live in their heads a lot, and assume that words count, not the circumstances in which they are spoken. But the setting often makes possible what is said. The view of the harbor, the fire on the hearth, the dinner on the table, the air of relaxed friendliness--how can the effect of these be measured on people who, though colleagues, see perhaps little of one another outside the committee meeting or the faculty dining room? Is the result more than bonhomie? One of the participants in the Cohasset meetings pointed out that, when you finally get to the end of *The Idea of a University*, Newman's model for how it works is the Oriel College common room. Having insisted so clearly on the separate tasks of faith and rational inquiry, he can unite them only in the people who embody both attitudes, who share and enquire and disagree together and above all keep talking to one another about their concerns. A purist may object that the Oriel common room is only the people in it, but I would suggest that the port and the cheese and the fact that the day's work is done and that they have thrown in their lot with one another in this community have something to do with it too.

10. *The discussion will take a long time.* It is a scholarly commonplace now to interpret the early development of Christianity in terms of the search for a language that did justice to the radically new experience of the followers of Jesus. In his curious book *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, Roland Barthes has studied the Marquis de Sade, utopian socialist Charles Fourier, and Ignatius of Loyola as inventors of new languages; in the *Exercises* he finds a solution to the sixteenth century's newly experienced need to talk in the vernacular about personal religious experience. To claim that we are in the midst of a comparable shift in consciousness may sound inflated, yet the particular demands of our culture are peculiarly insistent and sometimes seem as intractable as those of earlier ages of upheaval in world views. Pluralism is not a new phenomenon, but our attitude towards it may be. We know so much about the beliefs and values of people different from us and about the conditions under which we and they hold our beliefs and values, and we have such a developed

political sense of what the consequences of values can be and of how they can clash, that we cannot imagine a point of view that will reconcile so many divergent ways of living. Language affords little help; intense self-consciousness about meaning is a trademark of our times. In these circumstances, developing satisfactory ways of talking about religious experience in the university is not going to be the work of an ad hoc committee. Success is likely to be counted in years, if not decades. But to become aware of the problems of our language is a start towards a solution. And to be willing to try to talk to each other about these matters is to create at least one of the conditions for success. To actually begin the conversation about our hopes and fears for our lives and our work, and to listen carefully to others talk about the same things, may be to experience ourselves and them in new and different ways. We are supposed to believe, after all, in the possibility of all things being "made new."

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THE AUTHOR

As a young Jesuit priest, Cándido de Dalmases became a member of the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome in 1938, where he is still active. His chief work soon became the editing of critical editions of primary sources about St. Ignatius—notably the four volumes of *Fontes narrativi de Sancto Ignatio* (1943-1965), *Exercitia Spiritualia: Textus* (1969), and *Fontes Documentales* (1977). He has also published many other books and articles.

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