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STUDIES

IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

In Ten Thousand Places, in Every Blade of Grass

*Uneventful but True Confessions about Finding God
in India, and Here Too*

FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S.J.

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28/3 · MAY 1996

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 that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and 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.

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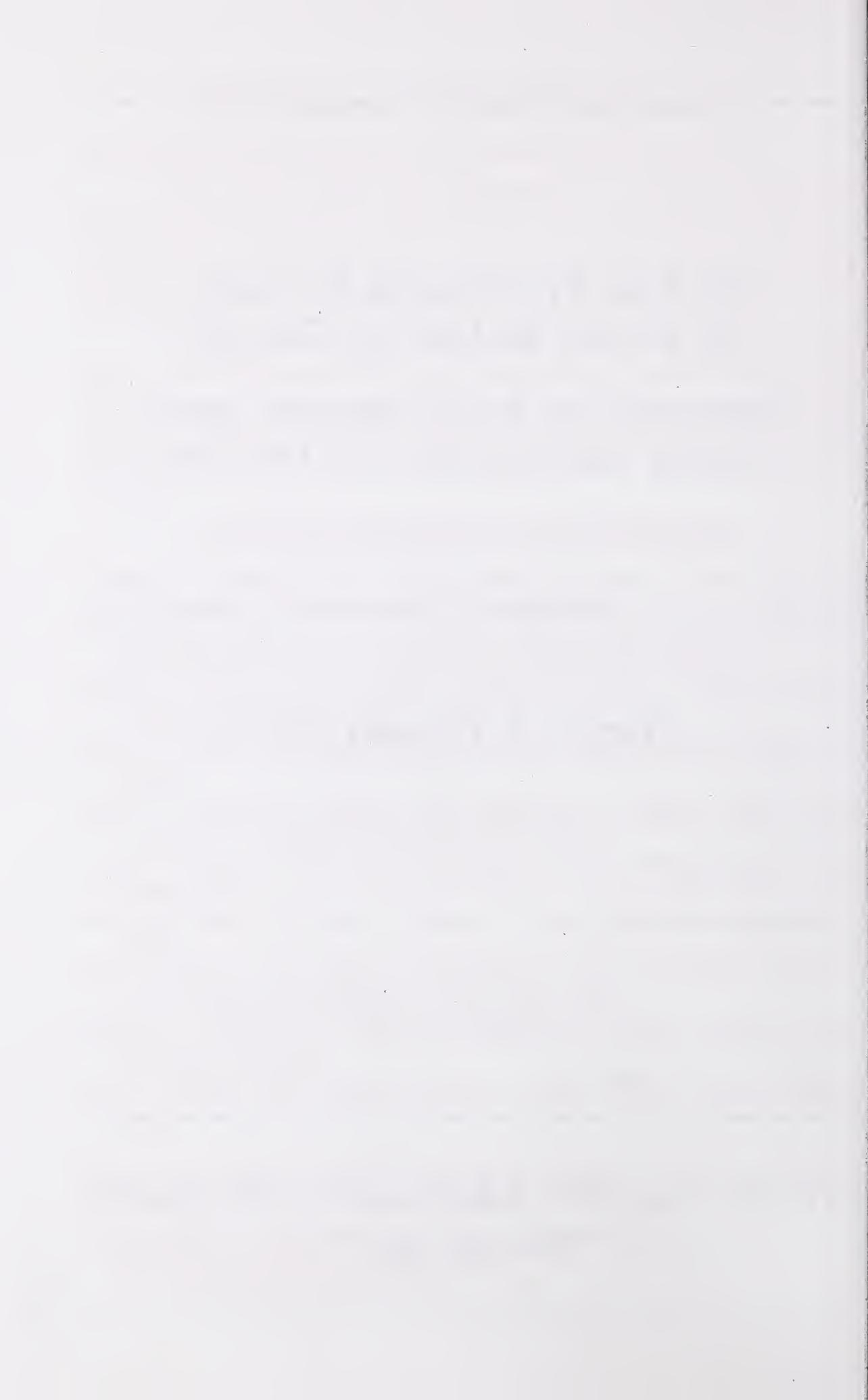
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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

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For your information . . .

The essay by Frank Clooney in this issue of *STUDIES* ranges from New York to Kathmandu to Cambridge to Chicago to Madras to Boston. And in all the personal experiences and ministries that the author chronicles, several major themes of Jesuit life stand out, such as finding God in all things, the internationality of our members and our works, scholarly endeavor, community life, and reflecting on experience—in this case, on very diverse and deeply moving experiences. The essay also vividly illustrates from personal experience the relevance of more than one of the documents of our recent general congregation, such as those on inculturation, interreligious dialogue, Jesuits and university life, and the intellectual dimension of all our ministries. I think you will find these pages both very thoughtful and very moving. They may be all the more so thanks in part to the design and editorial work by John McCarthy of the IJS staff here, who worked mightily and imaginatively to get into parallel columns on the same page the selections of religious poetry, stories, and personal witness from quite different traditions, which nonetheless are clearly seen here in their complementarity.

Speaking of themes from Jesuit life, the definitive text of the Complementary Norms to the Constitutions and the text of the Constitutions themselves as annotated by the general congregation recently arrived from Rome in their official Latin versions. Now it is up to us at the IJS to get them out to you as expeditiously as possible in an English translation. “Expeditiously” takes on a new meaning when one confronts exactly 697 pages, including an alphabetical index of 136 pages that ranges from *abdicatio* to *zelus animarum*. I doubt that you will think of a subject in the worldwide web of Jesuit law or life that is not noted there. Expect more news of the publication of that English translation in the months to come.

Those norms together with the congregation’s decrees called up personal memories for me too. As the commission of which I was a participant worked away at fashioning a text that could respond realistically to the concerns of Jesuits who were engaged in higher education and scholarly research, one of its members presented us with what he both humorously and seriously maintained was a list of what people seemed to expect of those thus engaged. After several revisions, here it is, with thanks for its first version to Father Péter Nemeshegyi, S.J., a congregation delegate from Hungary, himself a distinguished scholar and teacher for many years in Japan before returning a few years ago to his native Hungary to take up the same kind of responsibilities after that country had regained its freedom.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS—AND BEYOND—
OF THE JESUIT SCHOLAR AND PROFESSOR

He shall

1. Contribute to the spiritual and personal formation of colleagues, students, faculty, staff, and associates
2. Teach with the attractiveness of a television star and the profundity of Thomas Aquinas
3. Understand psychology, economics, cultural anthropology, political science, sociology, literary deconstruction, and all of postmodern thought in order to be relevant
4. Study Jesuit primary-source material and read and assimilate all new Jesuit documents
5. Take part in direct, personal work with and for the poor and disadvantaged
6. Share actively in all the functions of the Jesuit community and give time willingly to community services
7. Engage regularly in personal and common prayer and in the celebration of the Eucharist, be interested in and well versed in the liturgy, and gladly participate in it within and outside the Jesuit community
8. Know the teachings and practices of other Christian churches and of non-Christian religions and engage in dialogue with their members
9. Do pastoral work, such as administering the sacraments, preaching homilies, and giving retreats and days of recollection
10. Accept administrative responsibilities in the Society or in the educational institution or in both simultaneously, and willingly attend all the committee meetings attached thereunto.

Oh, yes, there is also an eleventh commandment:

He shall

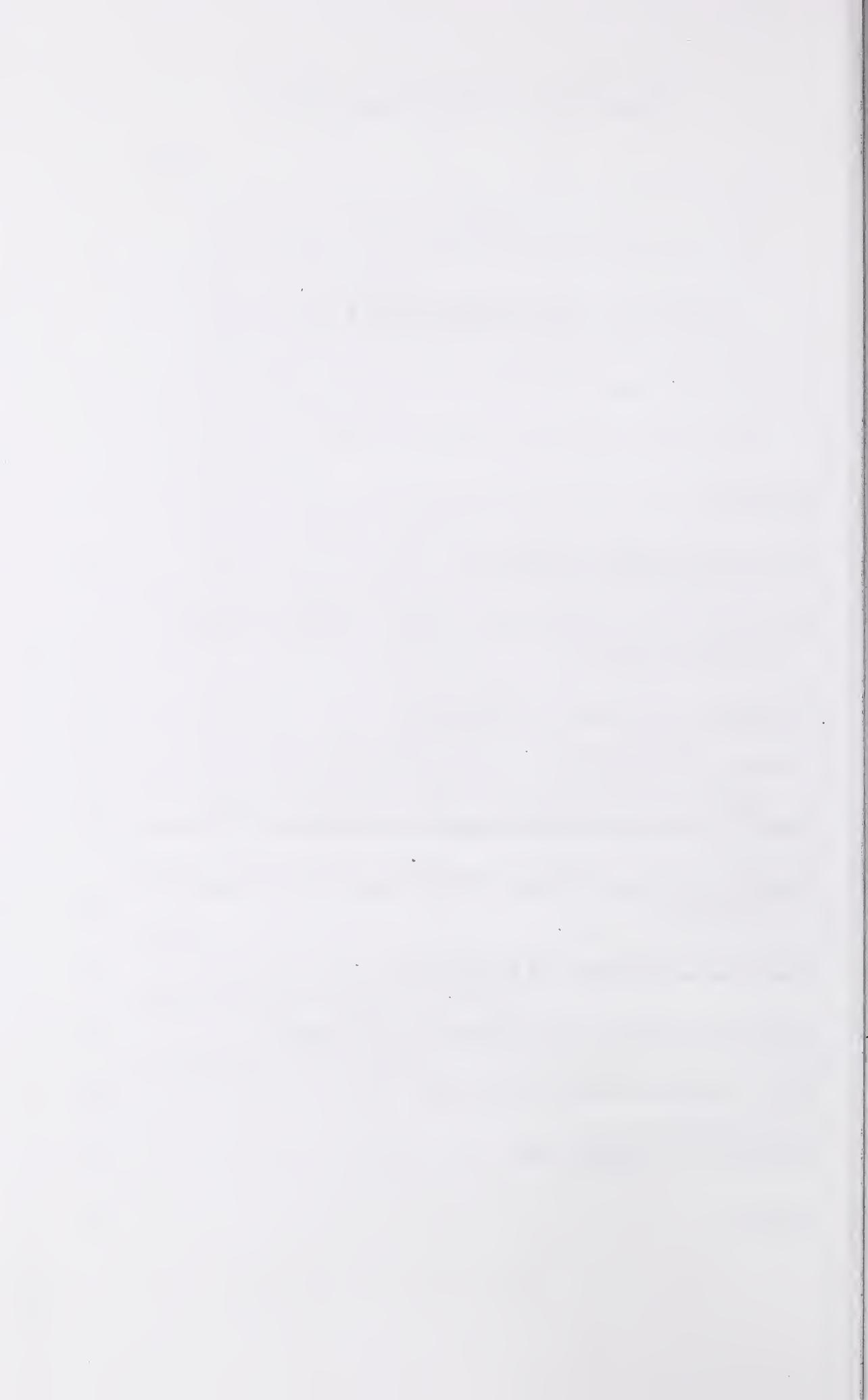
11. With all of the vast amount of time that remains, do research and publishing in his own field of scholarship

Comments are always welcome on any subject that STUDIES presents. You may have some on this little list of tasks.

John W. Padberg, S.J.
Editor

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IN TEN THOUSAND PLACES, IN EVERY BLADE OF GRASS

*Uneventful but True Confessions
about Finding God in India, and Here Too*

Beginning

In 1992 I was living in Madras, deep in semitropical south India, studying the eighth-century Tamil-language classic *Tiruvaymoli*, the hundred beautiful songs of the Hindu mystic Shatakopan. I was enjoying India as I had on previous trips, while writing a book on the songs and their role in the Hindu community even today. In October of that year, I was interviewed by a freelance journalist who had recently met me at a conference on Hinduism in the Twenty-First Century. He was writing a piece about me for *Kumutam*, the most popular Tamil-language weekly magazine, with a circulation in the millions. His angle was general: "Foreigner Learns Tamil," "Catholic Priest Studies Hinduism." That I was doing these things at all was interesting, not whether I did them well. His little essay was a success; it provided me with interesting conversations all over south India, on buses, in temples, and in the bazaar, with friends and strangers who had read the piece and seen the pictures. For myself, I most appreciated the opportunity my interviewer provided when he asked me to identify my favorite Tamil verses from *Tiruvaymoli*. I chose these:

In that time when I did not know you,
you made me love your service:
in the midst of my unknowing confusion,
you made me your servant;
disguised as a dwarf, you asked,

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“Three steps of earth, great king Bali,”
 you tricked him unawares,
 and now you’ve mingled inside my self.

In return for the great gift of your mingling inside
 myself,
 I ended up giving you my self
 —so now what other return can I make?
 you are the self of my self,
 my father who ate seven worlds;
 who is my self? who am I?
 it’s what you’ve made it, you who gave it.¹

I chose these two verses because they were beautiful in the original and in translation, and because in a simple way they capture the heart of the theology behind traditional Hindu devotion. I suppose they captured me too, because they seemed so very Christian. Memory works in such situations; echoing things I already knew and loved, the verses sent me back into my own tradition:

And you have deigned to dwell in my memory, whence I have learned of you. Why then do I seek in what place you dwell therein, as if forsooth there were places there? Truly, you dwell in my memory, since I have remembered you from the time I learned of you, and I find you there when I call you to mind.

Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold, you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you. . . .

You have called to me, and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and you have put my blindness to flight. You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst after you. You have touched me, and I have burned for your peace.²

Tiruvaymoli resonates with the *Confessions*, Shatakopan’s realization with Augustine’s. As I read back and forth in these spiritual confessions, each keeps showing me a way to the other, and I end up with a doubled insight, a spiritual sense that goes beyond either text by itself. Sometimes I find it

¹ *Tiruvaymoli* II.3.-4; translations from this work are my own.

² Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. John K. Ryan, X.25, 27.

fruitful to mark this interaction by putting such texts next to each other on a single page:

In that time when I did not
know you,
you made me love your service,
in the midst of my unknowing
confusion,
you made me your servant; dis-
guised as
a dwarf, you asked, "Three
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†*Tiruvaymoli* II.3.3-4.

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ger and thirst after you. You have
touched me, and I have burned
for your peace.‡

‡*Confessions* X.25, 27.

Pairing texts such as these creates a visual tension and emphasizes the enhancement of meaning occurring when we take our own tradition and another seriously and reverently, at the same time, together. Taken together, such texts help communicate vividly the rich, unwieldy possibilities I have

discovered in trying to understand my experience integrally. Perhaps readers will find something of the same as they read back and forth.

This entire essay is best taken as a series of such experimental combinations, for I want to place together things that often stray apart: being a Christian, a Jesuit scholar and college teacher; encountering Hinduism and other great religious traditions of the world; listening to how the recent general congregation envisions the life and work of the Jesuit at the end of the twentieth century.

One way to get into these matters would be rather straightforward, to take up a properly theological topic, such as the meaning of world religions for Roman Catholics today, or the work of the scholar as a Jesuit vocation. One might begin with Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* and Karl Rahner's anonymous Christianity, and develop their insights in light of our growing knowledge of other religions and the Church's current efforts at interreligious dialogue, and then draw conclusions intended to guide our encounter with religions today.³ One might survey the congregation's documents, in order to establish new warrants for taking the intellectual life seriously. But I decided that however good such theories are as they are written and read, they always arrive after a time in the lives of Jesuits whose experience and reflection already have prepared them for thinking about what it means to be a Jesuit, today, in a world of religious pluralism: we already ask ourselves about our identities, and we already have implicit answers to such questions, in the way we choose to live our lives and make something of our experience. So let us begin with me, as an example, and see where this leads us.

The Great Tradition, at Fordham

This is not an autobiography, so I'll begin when I was in Jesuit philosophy studies at Murray-Weigel Hall, Fordham University, in the early 1970s. I did some fairly traditional study (insofar as the early seventies could be traditional!) in a program that sought to instill in us the timeless, ever enduring value of the great philosophical tradition rooted in Augustine, Aquinas, and other important Christian thinkers. This reverence for tradition was deepened in the encounter with some modern thinkers, such as Hegel and Heidegger, and also through attention to Bernard Lonergan, S.J., whose system seemed to ambition a sense of everything, from how we know to who God is.

³ For a guide to recent writing in the fields of comparative theology and the theology of religions, see Francis X. Clooney, S.J., "The Emerging Field of Comparative Theology: A Bibliographical Review (1989-95)," *Theological Studies* (Fall, 1995).

On some days, the message at Murray-Weigel seemed to be, "Beware the modern world"; on other days, we were encouraged to think without fear, delighting in new questions and possibilities. On all days, my Jesuit professors successfully impressed upon me the value of the questions raised in the great texts: What ought one to do with one's life? How far can the mind reach, and can it reach God? How ought one to act in the face of death? Is truth really beautiful and good? We were invited to a great confidence in the integral value and power of knowledge; though the 1970s witnessed many more sensational plans about changing the world, we were told over and over that a few true and good ideas could go farther, be more effective, with more lasting result. I took this confidence to heart, and still do. Perhaps this was a basic reason why I would continue to pursue the scholarly life when many more active paths lay open before me. I continued to heed my teachers' recommendation: Pay attention to the world, don't be afraid of thinking it through, and both you and the world will change, for the better. Appropriate to that decade, it was an activist motivation for being a contemplative.

As I look back, I think what my professors meant was, Know our tradition—that is, immerse yourself in the Bible, in the Greeks, in the Germans. But I drew my own further conclusion from their insistence that we were dealing with basic questions of universal value: surely the same issues had been raised by people in other parts of the world who responded to them in their own ways, drawing on their own experiences, in their own languages. It was a kind of inverse insight: it made no sense to read only Europeans if I wanted to understand the human quest to articulate human meaning, even the meaning of God reaching out to us. I had to let my mind reach very far afield, unrestrained by the boundaries of geography and tradition. Even at Fordham, when I knew very little about the world, I wanted to know what the Indians and the Chinese and the Africans thought on the great issues, and my mind began to venture outward.

In 1972, though, the idea that my mind might carry me to new places was only a metaphor for being the good student, the armchair explorer. That *I*—a quiet, studious classicist who actually enjoyed philosophy—might actually go to a foreign country became a real possibility only through another insight, a spark that ignited me. At a conference on the international apostolate at Le Moyne College in August 1972, I heard Fr. Horatio de la Costa, S.J., from the Philippines speak about the international character of our apostolates. Somewhere in the course of his reflections—I can't recall now what else he said—he cited Fr. Nadal's assertion that it is part of the Jesuit vocation to have a heart as large as the world. For some reason, this simple observation was a turning point for me. It opened a new

pathway affectively: it gave a body and heart to the opening of my mind, it made it possible for this young Jesuit to imagine life more boldly. It made me think that it was possible for me to go far away, beyond even Buffalo or Jersey City, for regency.

I recall how the new direction of my energy surprised people who knew me. One father praised my “missionary impulse,” but reminded me that with good intentions I could do just as much good at Regis High School as in Asia. Another senior father warned me that I would surely lose my faith if I went to the East; or if I didn’t, awful things would still happen to me. The example he gave was a classic Hollywood scenario: I would end up at dinner with some debauched maharaja, who would serve me the most prized delicacy of the evening, the eyeball of a sheep, and set before me an idol to worship. But I was stubborn enough to know what I had to do, so I started checking out the possibilities anyway. I corresponded with Jesuits in Quito, Ecuador, the Philippines, and the Caroline Islands. But I was most fascinated by the idea of going to India; I was baptized Francis Xavier, after all. I didn’t know much about Hinduism or Buddhism at that point, but I knew who my heroes were: here, Dorothy Day, and there, Mohandas Gandhi and Mother Teresa. Gandhi and Teresa—who now seem so different from one another—drew my attention to India as a place where (it seemed to me) one could work selflessly for the poor and live among them, in an intensely spiritual environment. When, as it turned out, visa problems prevented me from going to India, I took some good advice and wrote to the American Jesuits in Kathmandu; subsequently, I agreed to go and teach in St. Xavier’s School, founded in the early 1950s at the request of the King of Nepal.

Finding My Way in Kathmandu: Facing Two Great Religions in the Classroom

Kathmandu, Nepal, high in the Himalayas, is a place of spectacular beauty; the temples are so ancient you might take them as museums, except that they are still visited daily. You can see Mount Everest from the roof of our school if you stand in the right place. Not a bad setting for lofty religious expectations, my quest for a way of life in which heart and mind would pace one another to the limit.

After the usual initial adjustments, things quickly became ordinary, and for the most part I was immersed in the everyday life of a boarding school, learning such diverse skills as how to teach Nepali boys to pronounce English words properly (that is to say, like a New Yorker), how to read *Julius Caesar* and *A Tale of Two Cities* (though without pushing the theme of assassination of monarchs too far, in the Kingdom of Nepal), how

to referee a soccer match (though I was as inept at this sport as at most others), how to run a film projector, how to sleep under a mosquito net in the corner of a large dormitory. I was with Hindu and Buddhist boys from 6 AM, when I rang the bell to wake them up, to 9:30 PM, when I hoped they would go to sleep. I learned to speak a bit of Nepali and to read it in its nagari script, the basics of local etiquette, the hows and whys of being a vegetarian (because of life, because the poor do not eat meat), the festivals of the Hindu and Buddhist calendar. I remember vividly leading a group of students at 4 AM one February morning to the great Shiva temple at Pashupati, so they could celebrate Shivaratri, Shiva's Night. I saw villages and towns nestled in the Himalayas, great temples, Buddhist stupas, and Tibetan monasteries; at times I felt a million miles from anywhere I had ever been before, at other times I felt entirely at home. I became enamored of their daily devotions and pieties, most memorably the weekly animal sacrifices to the goddess Durga (Kali) at a famous temple at Dakshin Kali, just south of the Kathmandu Valley. In this village setting, sacrifice was a routine part of life, among people who ate meat only on special occasions, religious ones included. To offer an animal to the goddess was indeed the occasion for a feast, a blessing, a protection against evil. To be there in the early morning was unforgettable, to be with the crowds in the presence of a powerful goddess and, just up the hill behind her, a shrine to her mother, too. When I got lost looking for the latter (it was smaller than I thought), I was guided by some engineering students with whom I spent a pleasant hour. Years later, I paid several visits to the great Kali temple at Dakshineswar just outside Calcutta, where the nineteenth-century holy man Ramakrishna discovered for himself the meaning of all religious experience in his divine Mother. In Madras I would often cycle past a neighborhood goddess's temple, and sometimes stop to chat with the priestess there. On these occasions I often had Dakshin Kali in the back of my mind. How strangely different and attractive I found all of this. I wonder whether this is the kind of religion theologians envision when they talk of God's hidden presence and work in the world, whether they would see God present in the vivid flesh and blood, bells, stones, and scents of early morning there in the ancient shrines, God dwelling in goddesses' temples.

Because I had to teach "moral science" to ninth graders—for whom the rational proofs for the existence of God were not particularly compelling or exciting, for whom convincing arguments on the principles underlying the Ten Commandments were not captivating—in some desperation I turned to what I instinctively thought would make more sense, the stories of those gods and heroes of the Hindu tradition who had plumbed the depths of being born into a world not of one's making, of dying and being born again, of mysteries far beyond our minds, yet as near as each blade of grass. I

retold the stories of the Buddha's many former lives and recounted his simple acts of compassion and love that echoed what Fr. de la Costa had said about opening one's heart, now and without limit:

As a mother with her life
 Will guard her child, her only child,
 Let my follower extend unboundedly
 His heart to every living being.
 With love for all the world
 Let him extend unboundedly
 His heart, above, below, around,
 Unchecked, with no ill will or hate,
 Whether he stands, or sits, or walks, or rests.
 May my follower always pursue this mindfulness.⁴

As I read my way into India's traditions, the first text I loved was a song by Rabindranath Tagore:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.⁵

The words reached into my life, so I could never read the Magnificat in the same way again:

Thou hast made me endless,
 such is thy pleasure. This frail
 vessel thou emptiest again and

My soul magnifies the Lord,
 and my spirit rejoices in God my
 Savior,

⁴ From the *Sutta Nipata* I.8, as quoted in *The Life of the Buddha according to the Pali Canon*, comp. and trans. Bhikku Nanamoli (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1978), 181.

⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1957), 1.

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Thy infinite gifts come to me
only on these very small hands
of mine. Ages pass, and still
thou pourest, and still there is
room to fill.†

† *Gitanjali*, 1.

for he has looked on his servant
in her lowliness.

Henceforth all generations will
call me blessed,

for the Almighty has done great
things for me,
and holy is his name. . . .

he has filled the hungry with
good things,
he has sent the rich away empty.‡

‡ Luke 1. Biblical translations are
from the Revised Standard Version.

Perhaps because of these openings, what I read and heard and saw and felt, or more likely just because I was a young regent, my students and I connected very well. Our communication was complicated, but kept getting deeper. My own sense of the birth, dying, and rising of Jesus still guided my understanding of what was truly spiritual, while the boys had their foundations too in the realities of Krishna, Rama, the Buddha. I was learning how to teach and listen too, and together we were learning what was important and true for all of us, despite our different backgrounds. We made a place where things came together and where we could meet and pray together. We went on retreats together; we read local religious stories along with the New Testament and (indeed, it was the seventies) recordings of *A Bridge over Troubled Waters*, *the Sounds of Silence*, a bit of Cat Stevens. I set up a prayer room in the school, which the boys adorned with images of Krishna and Rama, Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom, and the Buddha; a space they filled with prayers and songs they had learned from their mothers and grandmothers, with the fragrance of fine, bright powders and incense and so many fresh flowers. They helped me to pray, to find God right there, then, with them, and never thereafter in the way I had before. We were having interreligious encounters in our own quiet way, unplanned, and no one was taking notes.

Perhaps I would have progressed more quickly toward this kind of recognition if before going to Nepal I had been more familiar with the theology of religions and with the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. Perhaps it was better, though, this first time, that I was an unprepared visitor, all eyes and ears, believing I would find before me here the God who had sent me to Nepal.

Far from home and from everyone I had ever known, living in a poor country, I saw death around me. I met lepers and cripples and amputees, children with all kinds of diseases. I remember vividly meeting a boy dying of tuberculosis, and going to his cremation by the river on one very cold and lonely morning, just myself and Fr. Tom Gafney, S.J., his sole friend and protector. I visited Buddhist shrines and wanted very much to be part of the Buddha's letting go, nothing held back in the face of death. Opening the heart and thinking across religious boundaries became living possibilities for me as I learned to reflect on how we respond to death, wherever we are, however it comes. Though I have always been primarily the scholar, it was good to have started my work in Kathmandu and not at a university, among the poor and exposed and not in the seminar room. After seeing how the mind and heart bridge life and death, with time I have learned how to use ideas and books to strip away the protections by which I might conceal from myself the small and great sadnesses of life: scholarship as an intense way of openness, vulnerability.

In preparation for a student retreat, I read about how the Buddha responded to the plight of a mother whose only son had died, and the story has ever after given me words and images with which to ponder my experience and speak of it to others. Even though the story is so different, when I read it for the first time I immediately thought of the widow of Naim in Luke's Gospel, a story I had always loved because it speaks so simply of Jesus' compassion for the lost and lonely, of hope even at the most desolate moment. I suppose every Jesuit meditates on the Lucan account; in Kathmandu, I learned to meditate on it along with the Buddhist story:

Gotami was her family name, but because she was frail, they called her Kisa (Frail) Gotami. She had been reborn at Savatthi into a poverty-stricken house. When she grew up, she married and went to her husband's house. But it was only after she gave birth to a son that they treated her with respect.

Soon afterwards Jesus went to a city called Naim, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.

But just when the boy was old enough to play, he died. Sorrow sprang up within her, and she went from house to house looking for some medicine that would bring him back. But people laughed, saying, "Where can you find medicine for the dead?"

Finally, a wise man told her, "Woman, if you wish medicine for your son, go to the possessor of the ten forces, the foremost individual in the world of humans and the world of the gods. He is the Buddha, and he dwells nearby. He alone will know the medicine."

So she went to where the Buddha was staying. She stood before him and asked him for medicine. Seeing that she was ripe for conversion, he said to her, "Go, enter the city, make the rounds of the entire city, and in whatever house no one has ever died, from that house fetch tiny grains of mustard-seed."

"Very well, sir," she replied, and she went off delighted in heart to look for that seed.

But in each house she entered, she found that someone had died: in one, a son; in another, a mother in childbirth; in a third, a man killed in war.

When she had finished going through the city, she had found no house where death had not entered. She exclaimed, "In the entire city this alone is the way of things! This the Buddha, filled with compassion for the human race, must have seen!" Overcome with emotion,

As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her.

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still.

she went outside the city and carried her son to the burning ground. She said to him, "Dear little son, I thought that you alone had been overtaken by this thing which people call death. But you are not the only one death has overtaken. This is the universal law for all human beings."

Then she returned to where the Buddha was.

He asked her, "Gotami, did you get the mustard seed?"

She replied, "Forget the mustard seed! I understand now what is life and what is death; only give me a place of refuge!" And he taught her; and even as she stood there she became established in the fruit of conversion, and requested admission to the Order. He granted her permission, and she took refuge in the Order.†

† From *A Commentary on the Anguttara Nikaya*. I have used this translation for years, but have been unable to locate its published source. For another, comparable translation of the same passage (though drawn instead from a commentary on the *Dhammapada*), see *Buddhist Legends*, trans. Eugene W. Burlingame (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921) II:258-60.

Jesus said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

The dead man sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus gave him to his mother.

Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" This report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.‡

‡ Luke 7

Both stories, already so large and complete, seem to grow in their encounter and the overflow is practical. When I meet the grieving, the disconsolate, I still hope to be like Jesus who heals, like one who announces his good news, yet I also wonder about becoming someone who can open

up the larger, inescapable patterns of life and death in this modern world where miracles are so rare and mustard seeds so common.

Studying and Writing about Hinduism

For some American Jesuits before and after my time, and now Indian Jesuits too, regency in Kathmandu has led to a commitment to go back and stay there for a lifetime. I might have gone back to stay, in the school or one of the growing number of other apostolates being created by the Jesuits there. I might have chosen to develop a ministry in the area of spirituality, perhaps establishing a meditation and social-service center, a kind of ashram, or a kind of Hindu-Christian Catholic Worker farm. Like several Jesuits there, I might have studied the local forms of Hinduism or Buddhism. But I did none of that. I felt I had to return here and speak and do whatever it was that I would say and do here, in America. Being there made it all the more urgent to figure out how to be integral, intellectual, and spiritual here, still connected with what I had seen and heard and felt during those years in Kathmandu.

The return was more difficult than going there. Nothing prepared me for coming back in 1975 to study theology at Weston: it was a kind of death. I had changed, I had seen and shared lives very different from my own; and living here, in America, could never be the same. Encounters across cultural and religious boundaries must respect and nurture our original identities and commitments; but I do not believe those who say that the journey to other places is simply a matter of enhancement: each encounter invites us to change, irreversibly. Although my study of theology took the same path as that of every other Jesuit, it seems now that it all took place as if in a mirror, distanced, reversed, reflected through my memories of Kathmandu.

The questions raised and insights received in my regency made me review what I had learned in philosophy, and they made me think seriously about what I was supposed to learn in theology. If my studies at Fordham had pushed me to explore the greater and wider world, in theology my experience was pushing me back into studies in order to connect what I had learned with the Christian tradition in all its Greek and Latin and German splendor. Like my peers, I was concerned about the integration of life and study, of theology and the nature of the Christian community: if the things we believe are true, they should change the way we live. After my first year at Weston, I moved to the Third World house down near Central Square in Cambridge, a community made up for the most part of Jesuits who had done their regency in other countries. Many of them were quite consciously and urgently intent upon rooting their study in the life of our blue-collar

and ethnically diverse neighborhood. But I was not an activist; I spent most of my time studying. By this time, though, I understood something of the interconnections among the spiritual and physical and theological. It was a necessary and bold act to think within the Christian tradition, without setting boundaries, learning to be unafraid to follow questions wherever they might go; and it was a matter of living a communal Jesuit life along with everyone else, all the while letting what I knew change the shape of things. How could I affirm the enterprise of theology and the life of the theologate, while at the same time unsettling them both because I saw them from a different vantage point?

In my own way, I suppose, I knew too much. I didn't want to forget and learn to know less, allowing us to be silent about the billions of people who lived in the Third World, about all those Hindus and Buddhists who had also explored the great issues of life and death, truth and commitment. Even if the Indians and the Chinese and the Africans had not sat at the feet of Plato and Aristotle, even if it was not true that somehow the religions of India were influenced by the Bible or saying the same thing, it was true that Hindus and Buddhists had striven toward the divine and found the divine striving toward them; they too fashioned highly sophisticated philosophical systems. If we were to be intelligent Jesuit priests, we needed to hear from them too, whatever theological topic we were considering. And I wanted to ask: What would these comparative and interreligious questions mean for how we live our lives? I wanted to think about how we pray, where we find Jesus Christ, with whom we build community, how we live openly, attentive, aware—without cutting off our questions abruptly, at safe and comfortable points where we would get credit for being bold without actually having to change anything.

By the end of my time at Weston, I saw how rich our Christian theological tradition is, how it left many things still unanswered—and how annoying it was that this tradition is sometimes used as an excuse for closing our American minds. I wanted to continue my education, but in a way that would help me to find out how things fit together—philosophy studies and regency and theology, the Christian and Hindu and Buddhist traditions. So after ordination I decided to pursue a doctorate at the University of Chicago, in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations. Some Jesuits suggested to me that I should go to Germany and do a doctorate in theology, while fostering an interest in the theology of religions; but I felt that if I followed that plan I would not be able to learn the Hindu tradition well enough—its languages, its cultures, its fine points of theology and philosophy—to be irreversibly affected by it in the way I think, and so to do research that would be theologically respectable and at the same time

theologically useful too. I went to Chicago to do Indian studies, to focus and extend my theology study for five more years.

In the rather intense environment of Hyde Park, Chicago, the issues of mind and heart and lifestyle were made formally more emphatic as I complemented my immediate experiences in Nepal with the study of Indian languages and culture and history and politics. I learned about the very sophisticated intellectual traditions of India, in relation to discourses of knowledge practiced in modern academe; I learned Michel Foucault and classical Hindu ritual theory at the same time. It became obvious to me that the "East," however it might differ from the "West," was highly developed in theology, philosophy, logic, grammar, and classical science. When I looked to Indian intellectual history, I could not help but see that there were so many theologians and philosophers who could think deeply and rationally and logically; their language and concepts are difficult, but with sufficient effort one can begin to understand what they are saying, to do theology with them. Cross-cultural judgments and comparisons are useful, but increasingly it seemed better to do this only in detail, with a nuanced knowledge of the traditions under discussion. Vague ideas about world religions would not help; they could only do harm. It became apparent that earning a doctorate could only be the beginning of a much longer and larger project of understanding the Hindu and Christian theological traditions together: five years in Chicago turned out to place a lifetime's work in front of me.

The Way of the Scholar

But a lifetime's work requires a sense of one's life, how to live, daily and altogether. I realized that if my scholarly career was to last longer than my time in graduate school, I would have to fashion a way of life which fostered intellectual commitments. What I personally liked to do I also had to cherish and protect. Particularly because I wanted to be a theologian in a way that would cross so many intellectual, cultural, and spiritual boundaries, I needed to fashion a life in which I could continue to bring together and reflect for a long time on religions, my own experiences and study of Hinduism, within this specific American religious context, here, today.

Scholarship may justly be thought of as the life of the mind, quintessential detachment, and thus as distinct from spirituality and experience and even ethics; but still scholarship doesn't really work unless it is integrated and complete and patient on many levels: the commitment to close textual study, the appreciation of philological and conceptual fine points, the often tedious study of commentaries in search of what they mean and what they seem to imply or take for granted, the ceaseless writing and

rewriting of scholarly pieces for very limited scholarly audiences, the ordering of time and style of life—all of these features need to be thought about and then connected with a wider range of issues of spirituality and community that help define the whole of a Jesuit's life.

How odd it is: we send Jesuits to graduate school, give them money, wish them luck, ask them when they will finish, hope they get jobs, assume they know how to become scholars, if that's what they want. Though respect for scholarship is real in the Society, we all know that a Jesuit who gets a doctorate is not at all the same as a Jesuit who becomes or remains a scholar. There are numerous good and bad reasons for bidding farewell to scholarly work soon after graduate school.

Sometimes it seems that one can become and remain a Jesuit scholar only by going against the grain, the general expectations we have for one another, what we approve of as a way of life. For me, trying to remain a scholar has a lot to do with simply paying attention. It is the details that matter in the research I do; it is the puzzling words or phrases or apparent tangents I do not understand that promise me new ideas. Wrestling with such details, without overlooking them or explaining them away or making too much of them, is the way to learn and find something to say. Once a scholar gives up on detail, it is safe to say, or extrapolates too far beyond what he or she really knows, the foundations of the scholarly life crumble. There is something very wise in the observation that the more one really knows, the less one can easily say.

Attentiveness, therefore, requires perseverance, day by day and in the long term. To be a scholar is to be disciplined: to gain a discipline, a certain way of researching and writing, according to one's scholarly sub-community; but also to submit to a disciplined way of life, where long-term commitments matter most and the short-term fruits are often minimal. There is much in our busy lives that militates against perseverance in scholarly work, and this makes it all the more important not to live by the rhythms and needs of others. Some of the problems are real and clear: we Jesuits are often overextended, very busy, too busy, and rightly responding to the needs of people we meet day after day. It is often impossible to say no. But saying yes too often can diminish a scholar's work; even if a doctorate was not meant to be a mere credential, it may become a memento of the past, a license for doing everything but scholarship. When we seek to be scholars and our time gets consumed with painstaking and solitary research, we have to be able to disappear from the ordinary flow of things—the weekend football games, the concerts and receptions, the alumni gatherings, even the range of important and much needed chaplaincy activities. In effect, this means that we leave the public face of the Jesuit community to those

who have made other important commitments, but who have not chosen to commit themselves to serious scholarship; and we must accept the consequences of this surrender, as a different logic rules the Jesuit presence on campus. To decline invitations just because I am writing about the fine points of medieval Hindu theology is a stubborn, difficult thing to do. Yet it does matter, it is worthwhile. If one is open to how learned religious people, far away and long ago, rethought the very idea of the divine, this research can provide us with new vantage points from which to see our own tradition in a new way. It is a kind of contemplation, it gradually frees the mind for Christian theology, for knowing God.

Studying Ritual in South India, and Learning from My Teachers

What I have been saying about being a scholar comes from my own experience and choices, but someone who had never gone to India could just as well have said the same thing. I was fortunate to meet committed scholars at Fordham, Weston, and Chicago, and their lives have been models for me. But for me, my encounter with learned scholars—pandits—in India was a most precious resource for learning what it means to be a scholar.

During my studies in Chicago, I lived in India for about fourteen months in the years 1982–83, doing research in Madras. My life was once again a mix of many things, a flood of new images and sounds and smells, a change in diet, a whole new set of friends Hindu and Christian, a fresh glimpse of the Society of Jesus at work in a different culture. This time I was on a kind of business trip, and it was very necessary to remain focused. I had a dissertation to write and a generous Fulbright fellowship (for once I was rich) to help me do my work as efficiently as possible. I was fortunate to be able to live at the Jesuit research center and ashram known as Aikiya Alayam (“abode of unity”), a setting very conducive to my studies. The founder, Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J., was himself something of an icon in south India, a Catholic priest deeply immersed in Hindu thought and religious culture—his own Tamil culture, he reminded us—who had integrated those virtues of intellectual inquiry, prayer, and simplicity of life that make interreligious scholarship a truly spiritual venture.

Once again, I veered along the inner edges of several worlds at once, in this big city where ancient traditions and new wealth flourished alongside ordinary, mundane, twentieth-century poverty. Though I could not bring myself to give everything away, I tried to use my passing wealth responsibly. I bought many books and built up my library; I traveled to famous temple sites in the north and the south; for one family I bought a cow (and the

grass to feed it), for another a house; I paid for a young girl's tuberculosis medicine, another's surgery; I started a scholarship fund.

Most of my days were spent reading Sanskrit commentaries, taking voluminous notes, plotting my dissertation. But I also had ample time to wander, to walk the beaches, visit the temples, shop in the bazaar. I cycled all over Madras during that never ending summer of 1982-83, learning many things old and new, all fascinating, just by paying attention. By this time I was familiar with some of the technicalities of the many Hindu systems of theology, across the whole range from non-dualism to simple devotional piety before fearsome village gods and goddesses, so now I had access to indigenous as well as the Western ways of thinking about life. I saw everything more acutely. As a priest, I found that the study of Hindu ritual and the observation of rituals ancient and modern, popular and orthodox, held a mirror to my own celebration of the Eucharist, my own prayer. My encounter with Hinduism continued to deepen my sense of what priests do, how Jesuits pray.

But most significant of all was meeting with my teachers, with whom I read the more difficult texts. Every day I went to visit Sri Ramamurti Shastri, retired principal of the Sanskrit College in Madras; and several times a week I had class with Agnihotram Ramanuja Tathachariar, a practicing Vedic priest learned in the texts as well as in ritual practice. My teachers educated me not merely by answering my questions and taking up the various points I thought were important, but more importantly by showing me an entirely different way to approach the texts. At first I had set the rules, bringing the texts I wanted to read and raising the questions I thought were important. As the months went by, though, my teachers began to lead the way, getting me to see things in the way they saw them, from within the Hindu intellectual tradition; my ideas of time, history, author, originality could now be reexamined.

Ramamurti Shastri told me that ideally I should stay with him for twelve years or so, to start from the beginning, to do my studies properly and not in haste; I was not properly prepared, these things take time. Since, unfortunately, I had to finish a dissertation that could be accepted back in Chicago, I did not regard this proposal as feasible; but at least I had a sense of why that would be worth doing. When I sat with Ramamurti Shastri—retired professor, old Brahmin, Tamil-speaking Sanskrit scholar, head shaven, simply dressed, strict vegetarian—I was facing a world of learning that I had only begun to imagine. Learning was an entire way of life, which could be lived in different ways. One could be a scholar in the American way—or one could do it in a very different way, from within the Hindu tradition. Within certain limits, I had a choice not simply about what to learn but also about

how to learn it, and what kind of person to become in the course of learning. As might be expected, I did a little of this and a little of that. Hence the tone of this essay, with its ambiguities and possibilities and unresolved questions, as I say less and more than the reader might expect on the topic of studying other people's religions.

Thinking, Teaching, Talking, in What Might Be a Community of Scholars

Six months after returning to Chicago (in the never ending winter of 1983) and completing my dissertation, I moved to Boston and joined the Theology Department at Boston College. This is my home now, where I write and teach and puzzle out the meaning of life at Boston College.

I write. I have done a good bit of writing, and I should say something about that first. My first book, *Thinking Ritually: Retrieving the Purva Mimamsa of Jaimini*, grew out of my study of Hindu ritual material in the early 1980s while preparing my dissertation. I chose ritual theory because I thought liturgy was important, because in its Mimamsa form this ritual thinking was so unlike anything else I knew, because Hindu ritual theory is the background to so much later Hindu thinking. Of course, it was arduous for me to sort out a classic text from its commentarial tradition, and to construct the context for both. It may be just as arduous for the reader, and I confess that my book requires great devotion from dedicated, stubbornly curious readers.

After I began teaching in Boston, and particularly during a year when I was a visiting professor back at the University of Chicago, I studied Vedanta, a post-Mimamsa theology that draws on the famous, ancient mystical texts known as the Upanishads in order to develop theories about the nature of the world, our true selves, ultimate reality, and the way to liberation. On that basis, I wrote a book called *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*. In this book I wanted to communicate how it was to read texts as a highly trained Hindu scholar would do, so I highlighted the questions of how to read new texts and how to enter into their way of interpreting reality—and what it then means to reread one's own tradition along with the new tradition one has studied. In Vedanta, knowledge matters more than practice; but knowledge is a subtle skill and discernment by which one differentiates reality into its finest elements, knowing how and where things fit together, in time and space. To know is to know oneself as one acts and learns: Who am I, such that I can read Hindu texts and then reread the texts of my own biblical and Christian traditions, and how does this change things?

When I returned to Madras in 1992–93 (more on this below), I returned to the study of south Indian Hindu devotional songs that I had begun in graduate school, because the songs were intensely beautiful and because I wanted to know what happened when Mimamsa ritual theory and Vedanta theology encountered the passionate, earthy, and sophisticated traditions of the south Indian Tamil culture; I wanted to see how the Sanskrit tradition was opened to these new emotions and desires, and how the Tamil tradition gained a new meaning according to the norms of Sanskrit thinking. This led to *Seeing through Texts: Doing Theology among the Srivaisnavas of South India*.

If my first book was about ritual and the second about knowledge, this third book is about love. Though this book too was engaged in the study of primary texts and their commentaries and the reflective process of retrieving one's own tradition, it had more to do with matters of the heart: How does one understand, get involved, see the world and God through someone else's tradition, while yet recollecting one's own identity? If one studies love songs, one may conceivably begin to understand love, and perhaps one falls in love; even for a scholar that is not a bad thing. To bring my work in a full circle, in its last chapter I return to my own tradition, rereading works as diverse as the Song of Songs, St. Bonaventure's *Journey of the Mind to God*, and Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, placing them alongside the Hindu songs.

At the time of this essay, I am starting another long-term project, a study of the development of systematic theology in traditional Hinduism and, by extension, of the possibility of an interreligious Christian systematic theology. I am thinking of calling it something like *Comparing Theology: Understanding God across Religious Boundaries*. As in my earlier projects, I will probably balance my study of traditions, rereading Christian systematic theology in the light of Hindu systematic theology; and again, I hope to awaken my mind in the contemporary context, drawing on literary theory and postmodern philosophy. At present this new project is delightfully obscure, philological, even dull; it is a gamble that may pay off over time, if I learn things I could not have anticipated in advance, things interesting and relevant in wider theological conversations.

I also teach. When I arrived at Boston College, I had to find ways to share what I had been learning, this time with undergraduate students just fulfilling their theology requirements, and with graduate students pursuing advanced studies at the master's and doctoral levels. Teaching is not a threat to scholarship, something we do despite the fact that we want to be scholars; as we research and write, we also teach and learn; and in all such situations we create spaces and times in which integral thinking can occur. If the

scholar's life and work is integral, fruitful only after some time and not all at once, surely there is something similar at work in the life of the teacher; from his or her integral understanding, the teacher opens for students this comparable world of understanding, draws them into it, lets them think there.

I have learned a great deal from my students, especially from the random mix of undergraduate students who stumble into my classes to fulfill their core requirements in theology. They usually take my courses, not because they are on fire with dreams of becoming theologians, but because they must; they represent the great mix of American culture, at least that part of it that can afford to come to Boston College. In teaching these undergraduates I have found it possible and urgent to provide coherent learning situations, without presuming a coherent religious or theological background. Again I have had to learn from and with my students, and only then was I able to teach them.

Many of these undergraduates have been led to believe, as they have grown up, that the point of theology class—or CCD, first—is to believe, relate, be happy, and, optionally, to think. But of course they actually do think a lot, about many things; and their beliefs are not just confused, they are often quite complex, original, and worthy of our attention. Too young even to be called “the post-Vatican II generation,” even the Catholic students have ideas about being Christian that are as unpredictable—because eclectic or syncretistic, because pious, because conservative—as are their opinions about other people's religions: sometimes, being Catholic can seem as odd as being Buddhist. In teaching them I have been learning to find my way into the world of their diverse experiences, and by the catalyst of the course materials to lead them to reflect more integrally, with greater religious memory, on what they have been experiencing all their lives.

As for what I do in the classroom, just one example. Since 1993 I have been teaching a new year-long sequence known as the Religious Quest, a comparative course which is one way to fulfill the core requirement. I was concerned to build into the year both a body of material and an intellectual and religious attitude for dealing with it, so I patterned it entirely as a back-and-forth between primary sources from the biblical-Christian and the Hindu traditions (with a bit of Buddhism). The goal is not comprehensiveness, but completeness of approach. Here is a general outline of the course as I have been teaching it:

Semester I		
Creation:	Hindu Creation Myths	Genesis 1-3
Stories of God:	Famous Hindu Myths	Genesis 4-11, Exodus 1-23
Religious Heroes:	The Buddha; the Hero Rama, His Spouse Sita	King David
Sacred Theology:	<i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>	Second Isaiah
The Birth of God:	The Birth of Krishna	Luke 1-2
Semester II		
The Life of Salvation:	Krishna; the Buddhist saint Vimalakirti	Luke 3-24
Mary and the Goddesses:	The Goddesses Kali and Laksmi	Meditations on Mary by St. Bonaventure
Medieval Saints Who Marry God:	Antal of South India	Catherine of Siena
Getting Married:	The Hindu Ceremony	The Catholic Ceremony
Crossing Boundaries:	Ramakrishna	Thomas Merton
Autobiography:	Mohandas Gandhi	Dorothy Day
Religious Fiction:	"The Wet Nurse" by Mahasweta Devi	"Revelation" by Flannery O'Connor

Though some professors and scholars avoid this kind of curriculum completely—better to stick to one's own tradition; comparisons are messy, unfair, out of context—a course like this can work very well. Each topic is a complex one that, if taken up properly, can open up a wide variety of questions in a wonderfully fruitful way. For a few students nothing much

happens, while just a few are motivated to further study in theology and religions. For most, though, the year adds up to an extended exercise in having to think about religious matters, in a context where the answers are not already clear; for most, this becomes the opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs in a new light and to decide where to go with them from here. We learn the other, we come home again.

With the necessary adjustments, I have been learning how to address the same issues and challenges in teaching graduate students. Courses like Introduction to Comparative Ethics, Scripture and Revelation in India, and Mary and the Goddesses are all reasonable theological ventures, all in need of improvement over time. Here the commitments and complexities are greater, thematic and methodological components made clearer, and issues of faith are (possibly) faced more directly. Everything is more urgent, in a different way. Particularly when we seek to train future theologians, lay and religious, we have to search out ways to balance competence in the tradition with a responsible openness to what is new, yet the more we know and the firmer our faith, the more complex a project it becomes to maintain simple openness, and the more urgent as well. It is not easy to get a doctorate in theology, to keep one's faith, and still remain open to new religious and theological possibilities.

We write, we teach; and we keep tinkering with the identity of our colleges and universities. As faculty members we serve on committees, we do workshops, we write reports and negotiate with the administrative staff, we deal with colleagues in any number of settings. We all hope that these activities help bring about a spiritual and intellectual community on campus. How do we build a community that makes the university as integral and whole, as we hope our scholarship and teaching are? How do we make religion meaningful on a diverse campus without shortchanging either religion or the college community as it is today? A university is surely a fine place for interreligious exploration; but if this inquiry is to be truly academic and truly religious, it must be all the more integral and solid, really interconnected, and not just a kind of compromise by which one merely tolerates others' ways of being intellectual and religious.

Once More in Madras—and Near to God?

In 1992 I had a chance to think about the Catholic and Jesuit university from a favorite distant vantage point, in Hindu India. For my sabbatical, I returned to Madras, and lived again at Aikiya Alayam, where I was able to share the contemplative and simple life of the ashram. My goal this time was to study *Tiruvaymoli*, the beautiful Tamil-language vernacular

songs dedicated to the popular Hindu god Visnu/Krishna. This research would lead to *Seeing through Texts*, my labor of love mentioned earlier.

In the course of my study, I wanted to read all eleven hundred verses of the songs as closely as possible, and also learn the important medieval commentaries which even today inspire devotees and scholars in the community of Srivaisnavas (Hindus devoted to Visnu, with his consort the goddess Sri). This time too, as in 1982–83, I spent much of my time with learned teachers who took great care to introduce me to the intricacies of the songs and the commentaries.

Though I knew a great deal about India by this time, this fresh visit enabled me to appreciate anew the wholeness of this culture, how religious ideas and theological doctrines are intertwined in integral ways of life, and how all of this is today being transformed by swift modernization and deep changes. In keeping with my research, I embarked on a prolonged effort to become deeply involved in the world of the saints and teachers I was studying, to find the meaning of the texts in the living practice of the community that had grown up with the songs. By an effective but (for me) unusual route—by meeting devotees and asking around at temples—I came in contact with several learned teachers who were to be of inestimable help to me during my time in Madras.

I also undertook a series of related practices for the year. I acquired tapes of the songs and began listening to several songs each day, a practice I continued back in the United States until the completion of *Seeing through Texts*. I visited a Hindu temple every day for a year, traveling the city at dawn and dusk, searching out places where I could find the boundary between being a Christian and being a Hindu. I wanted to replicate in writing the liminal and possibly dangerous experience that the serious theologian undergoes who reads and thinks and prays, vulnerably. These visits gave me a feel for the daily worship of Hindus, and of Vaisnavas in particular, and also introduced me to a number of friendly Vaisnavas who were only too ready to help me in my project. Almost no one was unfriendly, and some of the temple priests were very friendly indeed, going out of their way to talk and give advice, always concerned that I know the temple schedule and feel welcome at the various worship services and festivals.

Sometimes, though, there were simple and direct obstacles at the threshold of temples. I would encounter “Hindu only” signs. Though sometimes serving only to exclude casual tourists, they often intended to exclude even devout foreigners as well—such as members of the Hare Krishna movement—who lived as believing Hindus, often at great personal sacrifice. I remember vividly the debate that occurred among the staff at one

temple in Madras regarding the kind of statement I would have to sign in order to be allowed to enter. After much heated debate (in a mixture of English and rapid Tamil that I could only partially follow), it turned out that I would have to testify that I was actually a Hindu, "fully believing everything in the Hindu religion." I had to decline the offer.

But there were always many more opportunities than I had time for. Train and bus trips outside Madras enabled me to visit a number of the ancient temples connected with the songs. At several I was able to stay for only a few hours, at others for longer periods during which I could begin to appreciate the rhythms of Hindu piety in daily life. I remember fondly the month from mid-December to mid-January, when I was able to experience a series of diverse celebrations of cultural and religious identity. I joined a Hanukkah celebration hosted by two students from Israel. Later I celebrated a parish Christmas midnight Mass and presided at an Anglo-Indian wedding. I went with the family of a student of mine from Boston College when they worshipped at a Hare Krishna temple in Bombay, and I joined their Hindu grandmother on several visits to the famous and very crowded Laksmi temple on the beach there. I visited the quiet tomb of a Muslim saint. Waking in the middle of the night on a train ride through the hills of western India, I became a close-up witness at devotees' worship of a deceased guru. For several nights I watched the performance of *Tiruvaymoli* at a small neighborhood temple in Madras. I stood with a long line of pilgrims at a seashore temple dedicated to the south-Indian deity Murukan, a temple so orthodox that male devotees had to be not only barefoot but bare-chested. At the Jesuit Institute for Philosophy and Culture in Madras, I gave a paper at an academic and ecumenical conference on the task of the philosopher in a global perspective. Each day there seemed to be some new vantage point on religious pluralism, some new threshold to cross, ever so briefly.

In all these situations, in study and in travel, I remained an exotic, marginal figure. Half-jokingly, people suggested to me that I had been a Hindu in seven previous births; still, I neither looked nor sounded the part, and someone said that "I lacked an Indian body to house my Indian soul." I certainly did not blend in: my spoken Tamil has remained earnest but "in need of practice," I was too tall, too pale. And I always stated quite openly that, although I came with a determination to be more than a mere spectator and was seeking earnestly to step back from cultural presuppositions about what I was hearing and seeing, I nevertheless remained always the Jesuit, a Roman Catholic priest who was also helping out on Sunday mornings in a large urban parish, and performing other Christian ministries. I was interested in entering a new conversation while keeping old commitments, meeting in new ways the God who had already become known to me.

Most of all, I remember my trips to Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, the state just to the north of Madras, where I visited the holy temple dedicated to the god Visnu as Srivenkatesvara, lord of the holy Venkatam hill high above the dusty plains. I visited this temple twice, in 1983 and 1992; in retrospect the two visits blend together. Tirupati is one of the largest temples in India, the wealthiest, and perhaps the most famous. The temple is very old and had been already praised with great fervor well over a thousand years ago in *Tiruvaymoli*. The temple seems always filled with visitors; the line to enter it is ordinarily ten or more hours long, unless one pays for a "VIP entrance," whereupon the wait is cut to just one or two hours. After reaching the temple compound, one snakes one's way through the line, from corridor to corridor, waiting room to waiting room, finally entering the actual temple itself. When I first visited the temple, I had the good fortune to be accompanied by a professor who was the friend of a temple priest. We were able to stay with the priest and his family and visit the temple several times without having to wait in line; and we were there at 3 AM for the morning waking service, where only a few devotees gather as the doors of the inner sanctum are opened.

After passing through the temple's outer precincts, one moves closer and closer to its center, and finally into a small, narrow, dark corridor about five yards long, barely high enough for me to stand erect. Illumined only by small oil lamps, it smelled richly of a thousand years of incense and fresh flowers. At the end of this passageway, nestled against the wall, the dark stone image of Visnu, stands the lord of the mountain. For the devotee, this is the point of the visit, to have *darshan*, to see here the cosmic lord who has taken physical form, and to be seen by him, an exchange of glances that is received as pure gift, God reaching the devotee, not the other way around. One stands there for a moment or two just by the image, but then must move along, out again into the wider courtyard, ceding the space to others standing in the line of devotees. Just outside, though, one can linger for as long as one wishes, though few seemed to stay for long. I myself stayed several hours, rereading some of the ancient songs in honor of the temple, in a kind of extended composition of place:

In all times present, past and future you are my mother,
 er, father, life;
 I have reached you, so can I let you go,
 lord of the three worlds filled with your ancient praise,
 highest one, dweller in cool Venkatam,
 bearer of the cool fragrant tulasi garland?

.....

It is our desire to abide for time without end and offer
perfect service to our father, our fathers' father,
the beautiful light at Venkatam of the roaring cascades.

He is the ancestor of our father's father's father's fa-
ther, that great dark one, beautiful, endlessly
praised, by the heaven dwellers and their lord,
at Venkatam where red flowers delight.

.....
They sing the many names of our father in northern
holy Venkatam
with its lovely cool cascades and babbling pools;
they enter the many towns, and sometimes they don't,
and people call them crazy;
they keep dancing, and the world laughs at them,
and still they worship with great devotion:
even the gods worship them.

(*Tiruvaymoli* II.6.10; III.3.1-3; 5.8)

Even before reading the sacred songs about the temple, it seemed to me a very holy place, where one could simply rest content for a very long time; the songs deepened this sense and gave it intellectual weight. Matters of mind and heart came alive, together, as I waited and watched. I could pray there, near to God in that very Hindu setting. I, a Jesuit priest, college professor from Boston College, stood at the threshold of an unforeseen worship; I saw, had my *darshan*, and pondered it:

Your color is the color of a love-
ly cloud, so dark,
lord of miracles, ambrosia that
seeps sweetness into my
mind, commander of the
gods,
lord of holy Venkatam where
clear waterfalls crash spill-
ing gems, gold and pearls:
great one, just say, "Ah,
there he is!" and
bring this servant to your feet.
You don't come as you came, as
you didn't come, you come;

O God, thou art my God, I seek
thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my
flesh faints for thee, as in a dry
and weary land where no water is.

So I have looked on thee in thy
sanctuary, beholding thy power
and glory. Because thy steadfast
love is better than life, my lips
will praise thee.

eyes like red lotuses, lips like
red fruit, four-shouldered
one, ambrosia, my life,

lord of holy Venkatam where
glowing gems make night
into day:

alas, this servant cannot be
away from your feet even
for a moment.

"I cannot be away even for a
moment," says the maiden
on the flower who dwells on
your chest;

you are unmatched in fame,
owner of the three worlds,
my ruler,

lord of holy Venkatam where
peerless immortals and
crowds of sages delight:

with no place to enter, this ser-
vant has entered right be-
neath your feet.†

†*Tiruvaymoli* VI.10.3,9,10.

So I will please thee as long as I
live; I will lift up my hands and
call on thy name.

My soul is feasted as with mar-
row and fat, and my mouth prais-
es thee with joyful lips, when I
think of thee upon my bed, and
meditate on thee in the watches
of the night; for thou hast been
my help, and in the shadow of
thy wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to thee; thy right
hand upholds me.‡

‡Psalm 63:1-8.

Now this was indeed a moment of interreligious encounter. Nothing dramatic or outstanding—no visions, voices, ecstasies, nothing of that sort—it was just that I met God there, I was found by God there. Although I did not then, nor now, know exactly what I saw, or how I was seen, there was a kind of holy *darshan* that I cannot forget. Nor do I have anything in particular to say on the theological meaning of my experience, the invitation and openness I felt. I do not wish to draw important conclusions; but I simply ask, When does looking become holy *darshan*, when does proximity to a holy place become nearness to God, and when does nearness become dangerous, even idolatrous?

Tirupati is traditionally a place of surrender to God, so other remembrances of my Christian tradition echo through my mind, inviting still other responses. I frequently recall "Take and receive" from the end of the *Exercises*, when Ignatius asks us to search out in prayer the many ways God has come to us and how we might best respond; and I think then of verses from *Tiruvaymoli* that likewise ask, What response can one make to God who gives us all? What kind of divine action must precede this kind of response?

Can I ever forget my father?
become me, he himself
faultlessly sings himself in
these songs,
he uplifts me, keeps on purify-
ing this doer of unequaled
evil:
I have seen his excellence.

If I should drink
for all times past and future
the excellence of the holy lord
who excels in all ways,
would it be enough of him who
made me himself so that
now I cannot forget
the one who helped me sing
many sweet songs of his
excellence?

I thought I would give him my
life in return for his help
but then I reconsidered
for my life too is totally his,
and by me this father sings
himself in sweet songs:
there is nothing at all that I can
do for him, neither here nor
there.

.....
"I cannot be away even for a
moment," says the maiden
on the flower who dwells on
your chest;
you are unmatched in fame,
owner of the three worlds,
my ruler,
lord of holy Venkatam where
peerless immortals and
crowds of sages delight:
with no place to enter, this ser-
vant has entered right be-
neath your feet.†

† *Tiruvaymoli* VII.9.4,9-10;
VI.10.10)

I will call back into my mem-
ory the gifts I have received—my
creation, redemption, and other
gifts particular to myself. I will
ponder with deep affection how
much God our Lord has done for
me, and how much he has given
me of what he possesses, and con-
sequently how he, the same Lord,
desires to give me even his very
self, in accordance with his divine
design.

Then I will reflect on myself,
and consider what I on my part
ought in all reason and justice to
offer and give to the Divine Maj-
esty, namely, all my possessions,
and myself along with them. I
will speak as one making an offer-
ing in deep affection, and say:

"Take, Lord, and receive, all
my liberty, my understanding,
and all my will—all that I have
and possess. You, Lord, have
given all that to me. . . . All of it
is yours. Dispose of it according
to your will. Give me love of
yourself along with your grace,
for that is enough for me."‡

‡ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual
Exercises*, trans. George E. Ganss, S.J.
(St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources,
1992), §234.

Like every other Jesuit, I too have found these words from the *Exercises* to sum up an entire attitude toward life, where all is received and given, over and over, so that by having nothing one is unlimited. Perhaps that is why Ignatius's prayer has stayed with me even in unexpected places, when I remember the holy hill of Tiruvenkatam, for that too is now part of my life with God, how I remember what God has done for me. The texts are quite different—see for yourself—but still, how could I enter a holy place and expect to leave outside the God who brought *me* there? How could I leave outside my own religious life this Hindu mystic who knows so much of God, of what God has done for him?

Cultivating an Intellectual Community, in Practice

When I returned to Boston to finish *Seeing through Texts* and resume teaching, I bore within me this experience of being on the edge. Again, what I might say, back home, had to be both academic and spiritual, and practical as well, if it was to mean anything at Boston College. Thinking, praying, teaching, being a professor at a Catholic university were now to be all the more interreligious possibilities, yet I had to make sense locally, find words that made sense, here.

Given my studies, their concreteness and directness, I am still not entirely clear how best to think of a university as Catholic or of myself as a Jesuit professor and scholar on a Jesuit campus, engaged in comparative theology and interreligious reflection. How are we to be religious in a world of many religions that are so very near to us, how are we to be scholars and Jesuits, truly open religiously, in mind and heart both, and still have time to pay attention to the practical matter of running a large university?

The issues are important, but it is not clear with whom one is to carry on a conversation about these things. If one is a Jesuit professor at a Jesuit university, with whom does one have a conversation that is spiritual and intellectual, personal and communal, in which one can discuss, among other things, how religious and theological issues are today increasingly interreligious possibilities? The things we find easiest to discuss are unfortunately not very interesting or relevant, and the conditions of our lives together do not allow much time for the extended discussions that are needed. Sometimes we don't talk at all, and silence seems a better alternative to chatter. It is not that we are not serious: we spend a great deal of time and effort learning how to be scholars and teachers and Jesuits around campus. Yet our lives are meant to be communal too, we need to be able to think together, spiritually too. We need to foster an open, living, creative conversation on the religious reality in which we live. Although the conversation cannot flourish simply as a Jesuit one, we should be able to have a

conversation among ourselves, as integral to our speaking with others. Where is the community that lives near enough to the edge, intellectually and spiritually?⁶

Though too much private work by too many individual scholars might seem an obstacle—Jesuits alone, working and writing in solitude—this solitary work can become a shared enterprise if questions are followed without fear and responses spoken and heard across disciplinary boundaries, mingling our lives and leading from one specialization and commitment to another. Thinking can be a good starting point for connections. I suppose we are always trying to foster such conversations, and surely there are efforts now under way on the many Jesuit campuses where we do our work. In Boston we have been attempting an ongoing Jesuit conversation loosely called Jesuit Scholars in a Postmodern Age. Over the past six years or so, a group of Jesuits at Boston College, along with Jesuits from the Weston Jesuit community and the College of the Holy Cross, have met regularly. Our meetings have drawn as many as twenty-five and as few as ten. The Postmodern Group—as we have called it, though it is the age that is postmodern, not necessarily ourselves—arose out of a felt need among some of us in the Boston College Jesuit community to foster a deeper and more extended conversation among those of us who are seeking to be and remain scholars, and so, in part, to define a sense of community and apostolate not coterminous with the particular institutions where we work. We keep improvising, but the vital core to which we return is that quiet dynamism that makes us continue to work away at our projects, to write and publish; we have been seeking to share the particular areas of research and writing to which we devote ourselves—not the generalities, but the particularities of our work, be it ancient Sanskrit or the Gospels or modern physics or Homer or the works of postmodern philosophers. In this way we are making for ourselves a new kind of Jesuit conversation that is strictly intellectual and not defined in terms of the institutions at which we find ourselves working. Whether in the long run we shall prosper in our conversations with one another remains to be seen.

⁶ On the general issues related to the intellectual life, one can still profitably turn to A. D. Sertillanges, O.P., *The Intellectual Life*, trans. Mary Ryan (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1978). On the intellectual life of Jesuits, see John Coleman, "A Company of Critics: Jesuits and the Intellectual Life," *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* 22/5 (November 1990).

The Congregation Speaks to the Issue

The Thirty-fourth General Congregation was a serious, prolonged effort of Jesuits from around the world to listen to one another and talk together, and much said there pertains to what I have been saying on the intellectual life, interreligious encounter, and the interconnectedness of our lives. Indeed, I had originally intended to begin this essay with reflections on the congregation, but the more I wrote, the less probable that sequence seemed. By the time I came to the documents of the congregation in the spring of 1995, much of my thinking was already in place, and this is the way it should be. The documents come after us: they are the fruit of our experience as Jesuits; we write and read them in the context of everything we have done and are doing now. They help us when we listen to them seriously, but that is because they have been written by fellow Jesuits who have been listening to us.

Naturally, when I read the documents I was encouraged by their emphasis on attentiveness to religious pluralism. The congregation vigorously emphasized interreligious dialogue and insistently called for the integration of this dialogue with the concerns for faith, justice, inculturation: the value of the encounter with religious people and their traditions comes to infuse the whole of what we do and who we are. The gathered representative Jesuits proposed a positive, constructive encounter of religious traditions as integral to our work today, because of who God is for us:

As companions of Jesus sent into today's world, a world characterized by religious pluralism, we have a special responsibility to promote interreligious dialogue. The Ignatian vision of reality provides the spiritual inspiration and ministerial grounding for this urgent task. It opens our eyes to the incomprehensible mystery of God (*Deus semper maior*) in the world.⁷

Deus semper maior, God greater than anything we can understand and imagine, God at work deep within ourselves and our Christian community, yet God dwelling beyond the boundaries of our tradition and commitments and imagination, and God to be sought there too.

The integral nature of all the congregation's major affirmations is striking, as exemplified in this interlocking pattern:

*No service of faith without
promotion of justice*

⁷ "Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue," *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), §154. Citations from the Thirty-fourth General Congregation are taken from this volume.

entry into cultures
openness to other religious experiences

No promotion of justice without
communicating faith
transforming cultures
collaboration with other traditions

No inculturation without
communicating faith with others
dialogue with other traditions
commitment to justice

No dialogue without
sharing faith with others
evaluating cultures
concern for justice⁸

In "Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue," we hear more about where the emphasis on interreligious encounter and dialogue leads us. In a world of great diversity, we must ask, "What meaning and what opportunity does this rich ethnic, cultural, and religious pluralism that characterizes God's world today have for our lives and for our mission of evangelization?" (§128), and we must "cooperate wholeheartedly with all men and women of goodwill in promoting peace, justice, harmony, human rights, and respect for all of God's creation" (§129). It is in dialogue that the Church

seeks to develop the unifying and liberating potential of all religions, thus showing the relevance of religion for human well-being, justice, and world peace. Above all we need to relate positively to believers of other religions because they are our neighbors; the common elements of our religious heritages and our human concerns force us to establish ever closer ties based on universally accepted ethical values. . . . [Indeed, t]o be religious today is to be interreligious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement of a world of religious pluralism. (§130)

This document elaborates by highlighting four signal aspects of the Church's and Society's work today that can be shared with people from other religious traditions:

the dialogue of life
the dialogue of action
the dialogue of religious experience
the dialogue of theological exchange (See §131.)

⁸ GC 34, "Servants of Christ's Mission," §47 (emphases added).

At each level we contribute to the fundamental work of the Church, for we are committed to both the proclamation of the Gospel and interreligious dialogue:

Dialogue reaches out to the mystery of God active in others. Proclamation witnesses to and makes known God's mystery as it has been manifested to us in Christ. Our spiritual encounter with believers of other religions helps us to discover deeper dimensions of our Christian faith and wider horizons of God's salvific presence in the world. (§135)

Each level of dialogue is to be taken up by the Society, as various Jesuits are committed more deeply to one or another of them, depending on their individual work. No apostolate or expertise and training serves to excuse any of us from interreligious encounter and dialogue—any more than they might excuse us from concerning ourselves with the issues of faith and justice.

That we all encounter and can profitably interact with members of other religious traditions needs to be specified and tested locally, and this has been one of my central motives as I prepared this essay: How does the congregation stimulate one particular Jesuit to reread his life and work from this perspective, as a venture that is apostolic, scholarly, interreligious, Jesuit? Then, does my experience match that of my readers? It is easy for me to appreciate the centrality given to dialogue by the congregation; but even if I had not made certain professional choices, religious pluralism would still have touched my life—in the Hindu student who walks into my office, the Muslim who teaches in the business school, the Zen Buddhist working at the local bank, the Rastafarian cashier in the supermarket, in all the discussions of religious identity that occur in today's pluralistic university. Because I am a Jesuit, I would have been called anyway, in my praying and thinking, to meet God in the persons and customs and beliefs of persons from other religious traditions; and the congregation would still be urging me to take these encounters to heart as integral to my Jesuit life. So too my readers. What then do we do with the documents of the congregation? The best thing is to keep retelling our own stories as Jesuits, now with the documents as part of our personal and shared stories.

Throughout this essay I have tried to resist the temptation to draw conclusions, determine meanings, give advice; but here I add just a few words to those issued by the congregation, my own thesis regarding the interconnection among the intellectual, spiritual, and interreligious relationships that we Jesuits need to understand as necessary and properly characteristic of our work:

*No intellectual endeavor
without spiritual foundations*

No spiritual quest
without engagement in interreligious encounter

No interreligious learning
without intellectual rigor

To be intellectual raises spiritual questions, to be spiritual raises interreligious questions, and to be open to interreligious encounters raises intellectual questions. None of these points can be described separately, nor can any of them on an entirely personal or entirely academic basis. I am thinking of this in a way that defines my personal goals—to be a Jesuit scholar is to think as far as my mind can reach, and to seek after God (who finds me first) and to keep crossing the boundaries between my own and some other religious tradition, so as to see—but the pattern applies to us all. If we draw back and seek to protect ourselves and our traditions, as individuals or whole communities, if we miss the connections, we lose everything. We need to keep returning again and again to how God works in the things we think and do, in particular, now, and thus become able to find God in hitherto unexpected ways.

Listening, Confessing, Seeing

The challenge is to see God more clearly, because we have learned to be more attentive and to listen better. If we seek wholeheartedly, at some point we come together, because we see some of the same things, together: God in the details, God everywhere, even here. Long before I studied Hinduism, I read Gerard Manley Hopkins, and like most Jesuits found myself responding immediately to the beauty and truth of his famous lines that put Christ everywhere before us:

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
 Praise Him.⁹

I say more: the just man justices;
 Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
 Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,

⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., "Pied Beauty," *Poems*. 4th ed. rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 70. Quotations from Hopkins are taken from this volume.

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.¹⁰

Many Hindu thinkers have made similar observations on how God is everywhere, can be seen everywhere. Once enlightened, they say, the sage sees the absolute divine reality in everything that exists or happens, large and small, near and far; every act is a participation in the divine energy that undergirds the universe; every face, every living thing, even the smallest, mysteriously reveals the hidden God one seeks. I think, for instance, of Ramakrishna, who found the divine not only in every thing and person but even in every religious practice and tradition. But here it suffices to quote the words of the Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti, from a speech in 1927 in which he sets forth his own life's work:

My purpose is . . . to give the waters that shall wash away your sorrows, your petty tyrannies, your limitations, so that you will be free, so that you will eventually join that ocean where there is no limitation, where there is the Beloved. . . .

Does it really matter out of what glass you drink the water, so long as that water is able to quench your thirst. . . . I have been united with my Beloved, and my Beloved and I will wander together the face of the earth. . . .

It is no good asking me who is the Beloved. Of what use is explanation? For you will not understand the Beloved until you are able to see Him in every animal, every blade of grass, in every person that is suffering, in every individual.[†]

[†] Cited in *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, (New York: Avon Books, 1983), 268f.

All things counter, original, spare,
strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled
(who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet,
sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is
past change:
Praise Him.

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his
goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's
eye he is—
Christ—for Christ plays in
ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in
eyes not his
To the Father through the
features of men's faces.

¹⁰ Hopkins, "As kingfishers catch fire," 90.

It is quite unlikely that Krishnamurti means precisely the same thing as Hopkins, and it may or may not be true that the Thirty-fourth General Congregation is tapping into the same spiritual insight as either of them when it speaks of interreligious encounter. But there is no need to claim that they all make the same point, since the point has more to do with us; it reminds us that listening to those who have gone before us helps us learn to see more clearly what has happened in our own experience, right before our own eyes.

If we listen, we can see. Even as we think through the questions related to interreligious dialogue, we do well to pay attention to the dynamic of listening in that most well known of documents from the congregation, "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society." When we admit that men have abused and dominated women in many ways over many centuries, and still do, and when we confess our complicity in this evil, we promise to cultivate a new attitude that begins in listening:

[W]e invite all Jesuits to *listen* carefully and courageously to the experience of women. Many women feel that men simply do not listen to them. There is no substitute for such listening. More than anything else it will bring about change. Unless we listen, any action we may take in this area, no matter how well intentioned, is likely to bypass the real concerns of women and to confirm male condescension and reinforce male dominance. Listening, in a spirit of partnership and equality, is the most practical response we can make and is the foundation of our mutual partnership to reform unjust structures.¹¹

Such listening opens into solidarity, and solidarity can give rise to cooperative action. Of course, how we, who are men, clerics, and Jesuits, are to make right our relationships with women is not at all the same question as how we are to make right our relationship with believers in other religious traditions. Still, each relationship teaches us something about the other. In both cases we have to listen before proposing theories; we Jesuits very much need to learn from women, we very much need to learn from Hindus and Buddhists. We have to walk with those who are different from us and, if invited, become guests in their homes and lives, before we plan out what we are going to do about them, for them.

If we listen, then we learn to speak. It's proverbial in India to observe that every ending is just a beginning; when we have finally told our life stories, we can begin to live them again, this time more richly. Listening opens into confession, confession draws us into a deeper and richer experi-

¹¹ GC 34, "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society," §372 (emphasis added).

ence of being alive. At the end of this essay, in which I have sought to think through and describe my own experiences as a Jesuit and scholar for whom other religions have made a difference, I should perhaps simply emphasize that we need above all to keep finding ways to tell truly where we are and have been, and hence what we are ready for, now. STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS is perhaps a way to draw us together in a common conversation, for a more abundant Jesuit life.

I conclude, then, by introducing just two more texts, which are all about confessing and speaking confessionally, as a way to becoming totally alive. I return to the two authors who already were my favorites in 1972, Mohandas Gandhi and Dorothy Day. Early in *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi speaks about a childhood incident that affected his whole life. As a child, he had stolen a small amount of money, occasioning some evasions and false accusations. In the end he found that he could make amends only by making a full confession. I have found it helpful to reread his account along with another famous confessional narrative, the opening of Day's *Long Loneliness*, where she begins to tell her story with reflections on confession:¹²

I also made up my mind to confess (my theft) to my father. But I did not dare to speak. Not that I was afraid of my father beating me. No. I do not recall his ever having beaten any of us. I was afraid of the pain that I should cause him. But I felt that the risk should be taken, that there could not be a cleansing without a clean confession.

I decided at last to write out the confession, to submit it to my father, and ask his forgiveness. I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to him myself. In this note not only did I confess my guilt, but I asked adequate punishment for it, and closed with a request to him not to punish himself for

When you go to confession on a Saturday night, you go into a warm, dimly lit vastness, with the smell of wax and incense in the air, the smell of burning candles, and if it is a hot summer night there is the sound of a great electric fan, and the noise of the streets coming in to emphasize the stillness. There is another sound too, besides that of the quiet movements of the people from the pew to confession to altar rail; there is the sliding of the shutters of the little window between you and the priest in his "box." . . .

¹² I have added a brief passage from the end of Gandhi's book, to indicate how he made the writing connection too.

my offense. I also pledged myself never to steal in the future.

I was trembling as I handed the confession to my father. He was then suffering from a fistula and was confined to bed. His bed was a plain wooden plank. I handed him the note and sat opposite the plank.

He read it through, and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. He had sat up to read it. He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father's agony. If I were a painter I could draw a picture of the whole scene today. It is still so vivid in my mind.

Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart, and washed my sin away. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is. As the hymn says, "Only he Who is smitten with the arrows of love, Knows its power."

This was, for me, an object-lesson in Ahimsa (nonviolence). Then I could read in it nothing more than a father's love, but today I know that it was pure Ahimsa. When such Ahimsa becomes all-embracing, it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power.

Going to confession is hard—hard when you have sins to confess, hard when you haven't, and you rack your brain for even the beginning of sins against charity, chastity, sins of detraction, sloth or gluttony. You do not want to make too much of your constant imperfections and venial sins, but you want to drag them out to the light of day as the first step in getting rid of them. The just man falls seven times daily.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned," is the way you begin. "I made my last confession a week ago, and since then . . ."

Properly, one should say the Confiteor, but the priest has no time for that, what with the long lines of penitents on a Saturday night, so you are supposed to say it outside the confessional as you kneel in a pew, or as you stand in line with the others.

"I have sinned. These are my sins." That is all you are supposed to tell; not the sins of others, or your virtues, but only your ugly, gray, drab, monotonous sins.

When one writes the story of his life and the work he has been engaged in, it is a confession too, in a way. When I wrote the story of my conversion twelve years ago, I left out all my sins but told

This sort of sublime forgiveness was not natural to my father. I had thought that he would be angry, say hard things, and strike his forehead. But he was so wonderfully peaceful, and I believe this was due to my clean confession. A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance. I know that my confession made my father feel absolutely safe about me, and increased his affection for me beyond measure. . . .

. . . My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth.

And if every page of these chapters does not proclaim to the reader that the only means for the realization of Truth is Ahimsa, I shall deem all my labour in writing these chapters to have been in vain. And, even though my efforts in this behalf may prove fruitless, let the readers know that the vehicle, not the great principle, is at fault. After all, however sincere my strivings after Ahimsa may have been, they have still been imperfect and inadequate.

The little fleeting glimpses, therefore, that I have been able to have of Truth can hardly convey an idea of the indescribable lustre of Truth, a million times more intense than that of the sun we daily see with our eyes. In fact what I have caught is only the faintest glimmer of that mighty effulgence. But this

of all the things which had brought me to God, all the beautiful things, all the remembrances of God that had haunted me, pursued me over the years so that when my daughter was born, in grateful joy I turned to God and became a Catholic. I could worship, adore, praise, and thank Him in the company of others. It is difficult to do that without a ritual, without a body with which to love and move, love and praise. I found faith. I became a member of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Going to confession is hard. Writing a book is hard, because you are giving yourself away. . . .

. . . I can write only of myself, what I know of myself, and I pray with St. Augustine, "Lord, that I may know myself, in order to know Thee. . . ."

. . . I am a journalist, not a biographer, not a book writer. The sustained effort of writing, of putting pen to paper so many hours a day when there are human beings around who need me, when there is sickness, and hunger, and sorrow, is a harrowingly painful job. I feel that I have done

much I can say with assurance, as a result of all my experiments, that a perfect vision of Truth can only follow a complete realization of Ahimsa.[†]

[†] *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, 1983), 23f., 453f.

nothing well. But I have done what I could.[‡]

[‡] *The Long Loneliness* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 9-11.

How striking it is that these two great activists, who wanted to change the world, who mingled with the low and the high of society, who ask us to think of what we actually do and for whom we do it, should also invest so much importance in confession, in finding words for what is inside themselves, so as to be forgiven and set free. How striking it is that this confessional impulse should inform their writing, and then create the possibility of seemingly endless energy and activity. Neither of them is writing as a systematic thinker or theologian officially representing his or her religions; neither of them is just pouring out the inner secrets of his or her soul. In their confessional writing, the stories become stylized, public tales in which a life story becomes an example of how to find God, how to live openly and justly.

We very much need such confessional writing in this time of interreligious encounter, if our Societal promise to take religions seriously is to become a spiritual exercise that opens us to God. The goal of confession—how have I found God outside my tradition, beyond my expectations?—is not to uncover some pure inner experience, but rather to speak of oneself in a way that also speaks of Christ and religions, of one Jesuit and then others too, all of us who are disciples in this world where many religions flourish. If we listen to Gandhi and Day, we have to find ways to retell our own stories, and find life in the telling and the listening. Habits of true listening and true confession will make a difference, in the Society, religiously, interreligiously.

As I conclude this essay, I am teaching the *Religious Quest*, and beginning a course in comparative ethics. I share the Eucharist, preach now and then, take students to the local Hindu temple, do some spiritual direction, and I try to be attentive in all these situations. I am still at the beginning of my book on God and the gods, still puttering around in medieval Hindu texts. I am engaged in an ongoing conversation in our theology department about the nature of theological education today; in the college, we are still asking about the place of Jesuits on campus, why we remain

here. A group of us, lay and Jesuit together, have started gathering to seek together after the "inner edge" of our university community, where our disparate energies and deepest concerns intersect in sorting out the way things are, how they can be. Such is the stuff of my life and work, in early 1996.

What comes next remains to be seen. How will I know God in ten years, and how shall I speak and write and teach about God? How will my book on God turn out, and what will the book after that be about? How is the Society going to adapt and change, retell and relive its story in light of what it has just said at the congregation? Will this moment of interreligious encounter make it possible for us to be more spiritual, more alive, more at home with God in today's world? Let's see. If God is inexhaustibly present, and if God is present around us in ways that we cannot predict and control, then it would be a great shame if I do not live and pray differently in ten years, if the Society does not find itself a different Society because of the promises made at the congregation, the hopes expressed.

Our companionship with Jesus always keeps giving us new neighbors, even in many religions; he sends us to meet our brothers and sisters, to dwell among them, to share their bread and wine, to be healed and brought back to life by them. In the end, we just keep trying to know God more deeply, within our tradition and memory, even as God keeps coming to us from beyond everything we have imagined until now. We keep trying to cross the boundaries we necessarily set for ourselves, and then to see, love and serve God in ten thousand places, in every blade of grass: *Deus semper maior*, God over there, just ahead of us, right now.



SOURCES

Robert de Nobili Defends His Practices in India

*Matters were not always peaceful on the Indian scene in the seventeenth century, when Robert de Nobili was at work there, and when even high-ranking prelates disagreed vigorously and publicly with one another. In February 1619, by order of Pope Paul V, a conference was held at Goa, at which the archbishop of Cranganore (who supported de Nobili and his practices) and the archbishop of Goa (who was bitterly opposed to him and to them) and the Inquisitors were to discuss the whole situation and afterwards to send their opinions to the Holy See. The "Thread in question" referred to here by both de Nobili and the archbishop of Goa was worn by Hindu Brahman sanyâsis or teachers around their neck. A thread usually consisted of three strands. De Nobili's had five strands, three gold to symbolize the Holy Trinity and two white to symbolize the soul and body of Christ. The thread was only one of the distinctive features that de Nobili adopted as a samyâsi, but for his opponents it stood for all the elements of what they fiercely (and mistakenly) denounced as a denial of Christianity. The following excerpt, describing the second of three sessions held during the conference, is from a lengthy letter of February 15, 1619, that de Nobili wrote to Pope Paul V at the conclusion of the meetings. The excerpt is taken from *Star in the East* by A. Saulière, S.J., revised by S. Rajamanickam, S.J. (Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1995), 294-97. This excerpt has been reedited for publication here.*

When all had assembled at the appointed time, the archbishop of Cranganore read a scholarly dissertation in which he proved that my method was neither new nor absurd, but borrowed from apostolic times, that the Church in her love for all had permitted not only social emblems but even heathen rites and ceremonies, after stripping them of their perverse and impious significance and substituting another in keeping with our sacred mysteries.

"There was," he added, "no scandal to be feared in the Archdiocese of Goa, especially as the Sovereign Pontiff, after seeing many texts taken from Hindu books, has declared by an authentic rescript, duly certified by a notary public, that the Thread in question was not a religious but a caste emblem, and has covered it with his own authority. On

the other hand, we acknowledge that we are bound to explain to the people of Goa our way of acting. If they are satisfied, as they surely will be, all scandal is removed; if they are not satisfied, the scandal will be passive and pharisaical. Now to avoid giving such a scandal, one may refrain from doing certain good works; but one is not bound to expose himself to such calamities as exile, social ostracism, loss of honor and worldly goods, as well as injury to the soul."

Finally, taking the Holy Gospel in his hand, he took an oath that those emblems were in no way superstitious and that, therefore, if the rites and ceremonies which the pagans are wont to connect not only with those emblems but also with all their actions were eliminated, they not only could but should be permitted, and the sacred rites and

ceremonies of our holy religion should be substituted for those of paganism.

The assembled fathers were now asked if they had anything to add to the explanations given by the archbishop of Cranganore. Reverend Father Alberto spoke as follows:

“The thesis that sees in those emblems only signs of caste is proved by the arguments of many competent persons and many texts, specially confirmed by the authority of the archbishop of Cranganore and by a pontifical rescript duly authenticated by a notary public. For me, therefore, this thesis is certain and evident, but no one can deny that this opinion is at least probable. Now, as long as it remains within the limits of probability, it is allowed, and according to the pontifical rescript, it must be allowed. It is therefore unjust to forbid the use of those emblems to the Madurai neophytes, since they are favored by a probable opinion.”

Now the opponents were invited to speak, and a torrent of confused words was let loose. The debate was not carried on with arguments, but rather with mockery and sarcasm. I was, according to them, a disgrace to evangelical preaching; I was doing away with the simplicity of Christian truth, I distorted the method bequeathed to us by the Apostles by mixing with it pagan rites and ceremonies; I was destroying the ancient traditions of the Diocese of Goa, I was polluting the Gospel with specious emblems of castes, with frauds and deceits; I made them conceal their faith in the depth of their hearts. Instead of giving them salutary and profitable advice, I led with my superstitious inventions the credulous minds of the Hindus into error and deception. I mixed together things holy and profane, earthly and

heavenly, vile and excellent. It remained only to invest Jesus Crucified with the Thread! I was, moreover, throwing the door open to ambition and undiscipline among the neophytes. “A father of the Society of Jesus,” they shouted, “has passed to paganism, and he asks us to connive at his apostasy.” These words were first uttered by the archbishop of Goa himself, and he praised those who gave a particularly smart turn to their raillery. As for me, while being assailed by so many insults and reproaches, I called to their attention that I did not fight for my own personal honor, but for that of the Society which was being attacked.

“It is superfluous, Most Reverend Prelate,” said I, “to overwhelm me with insults. It will suffice if my arguments are examined and the contrary opinion exposed, so that by a comparison of ideas and a friendly discussion, we may throw some light on the whole affair. I left Rome for Madurai only to preach Jesus Christ. I have not lost all religious sense; my only wish is to be useful to souls.

“Without any fault on my part and without any shadow of proof, you accuse me of inventing a false and absurd method of evangelization. This is unjust; for I preach Christ openly, without fraud or disguise. If this assembly refuses to listen to me and despises me to that extent, I shall perhaps find elsewhere more friendly and attentive ears and defenders of my cause. If my reasons and arguments are not lacking in weight and solidity, I have no doubt that the Holy Father, the vicar of Christ our Lord, will see to it that truth triumphs. When working for the triumph of this cause, it is not the honor of my name or personal advantages that I am after. By the grace of God, the thirst for honors does

not torment me and I feel no ambition for the vain applause of men. I toil in the service of my master Jesus Christ; it is for him alone that I lead a life full of hardships. Let others crave for and seek the temporal advantages I have given up, and may they enjoy them. As for me, I have decided to spend my days unknown in some obscure corner to sacrifice my wretched life for the salvation of souls."

On hearing these words the archbishop of Goa flared up and complained more bitterly than before that I had treated him with discourtesy and even insulted him in the most disgraceful manner. Now, Most Holy Father, the thought of offending him was very far from my mind. My sole object was to defend the justice of my cause, secure the triumph of truth, and vindicate the honor of the Society.

[And now by a skillful use of the rhetorical figure of preterition (or omission), Father Robert manages to give the

Pope a rough character sketch of the primate, while protesting that he does nothing of the kind.]

I was utterly ignorant of the means which the archbishop of Goa had employed to secure his promotion to ecclesiastical dignities, how from his monastic cell he had gradually raised himself to the primatial throne. On the other hand, I shall not mention in detail, even to improve my cause, the violence of his character, the constant change in his opinions (for after supporting an opinion to the utmost, he frequently changes his mind and takes pleasure in so doing). I shall not dwell on the noisy scenes in which he indulges without any reason, his hostility towards the archbishop of Cranganore, his lack of zeal for the conversion of the pagans, his ostentation and pride; for I think I ought to show the justice of my cause, not by enumerating the defects of my adversaries, but by giving proofs and arguments.

Philip Caraman, S.J.
**A Study in Friendship:
St. Robert Southwell and Henry Garnet**

This character study attempts to enter into the mind and heart of a brilliant, attractive, and astonishingly brave young Elizabethan Jesuit, Robert Southwell, who was also a poet, a master of prose, and a martyr. He had a remarkable capacity for friendship, a subject on which he dwelt in his verse, his prose works, his meditations, and his letters. Among his dearest friends was Henry Garnet, a fellow Jesuit. Together they shared mortal dangers and a common ideal of religious commitment, both often described and expressed in their letters. Southwell's poems form a considerable part of this book, and they are often set in the framework of Garnet's letters, many of which were written to Claudio Aquaviva, superior general of the Jesuits and also a friend of them both. Robert Southwell's mother had been a playmate of Queen Elizabeth I; Sir Robert Cecil was his cousin. Yet as an English Jesuit priest he suffered torture for three years and in 1595, four hundred years ago, he was hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn. A few years later, in 1606, in St. Paul's Churchyard in London, Garnet suffered the same fate for the same commitment.

The book will be of interest to anyone who appreciates the joys of friendship and especially to historians (particularly those of Elizabethan England), students of English literature, religious sociologists, and historians and theoreticians of the religious life.

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FAITH BEYOND JUSTICE

WIDENING THE PERSPECTIVE

by

Martin R. Tripole, S.J.

This book examines – in a way both sympathetic and critical – the “faith and justice” motif that has dominated talk of apostolate and spirituality in many contemporary circles. The author concludes that, while noble and inspiring, the notion of “justice” is inadequate to handle the burden that many of its advocates would have it carry. He then suggests an alternative criterion for apostolic choices in the twentieth century and beyond.

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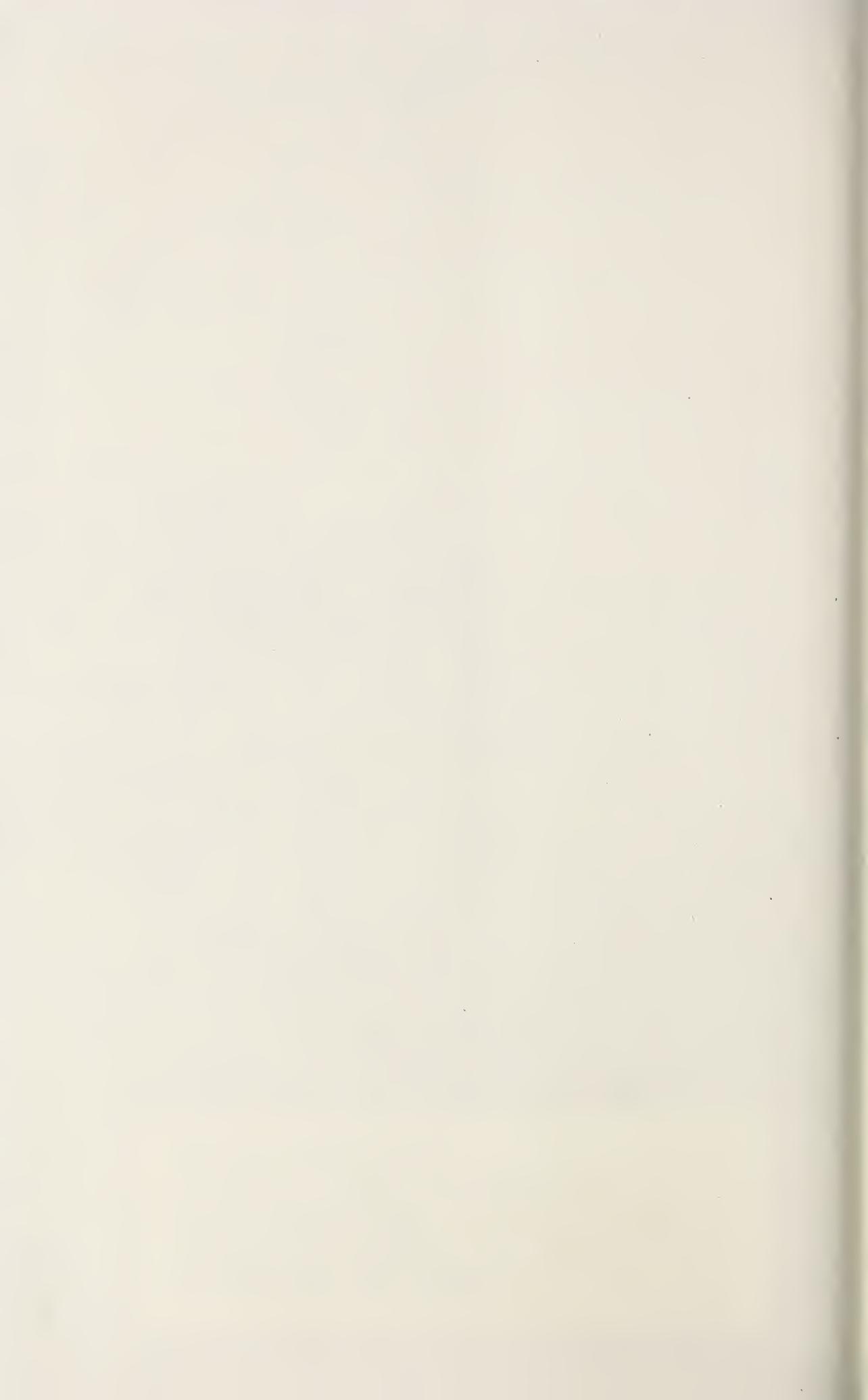
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