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In Deed: A Conversation on Faculty Spirituality

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tual, and affective dimensions. At the end of the semester one student, Jennifer Korzen, said, "When I look back on the class, I realized I learned more about myself, literature, society, my peers, and religion than in any of my previous educational experiences. I learned that talking and sharing experiences with other people is the only way I can begin to discover who I am and what my 'true self' is." Student Brian Vineyard agreed. "Overall," he said, "I think I was really on the receiving end from the experience at the Alice Paul House."

The first-hand experience at the Alice Paul House and the interdisciplinary approach of the block made the course for many not only academically rigorous and intellectually stimulating, but also personally transformative. Professor Joseph Wessling, one of our colleagues, noticed this transformation when he came to one of our two-hour discussion periods. "What I witnessed," he said, "was a transformation of consciousness that I have not witnessed in any other classes including my own. These students, through their direct contact with abused women

and children, have had their eyes and their minds opened. Especially, their sympathetic imagination has been activated. They could identify feelingly with people whose experiences were very different from their own. Yet they were able to recognize the complexity of the problems."

William Madges is professor of theology and Carol Winklemann is assistant professor of English at Xavier University.



*A CONVERSATION
ON FACULTY
SPIRITUALITY*

COMPILED BY
JOHN C.
HAUGHEY, S.J.

Fifteen men and women from nine Jesuit Universities met on April 13 at Loyola University, Chicago, and engaged in a broad conversation on issues of faculty spirituality. The following selective transcript is an attempt to catch the substance and spirit of one part of that conversation.

Offering the Spiritual Exercises at Jesuit colleges and universities raises some rather complicated

issues. Perhaps the central question is whose interest is to be served by encouraging non-Jesuit faculty and staff to make the Exercises? Is this intended as a gift to the person or as an attempt to maintain the Jesuit identity of the institution? Also, does the quality of institutional life inspire the trust requisite to spiritual accompaniment? Perhaps the most fruitful way to ask the question would be, "Do our institutions manifest

and encourage the connection of mind and spirit implied in the term 'contemplation?'"

We invite your responses: your reflections on the issues raised here and experiences at your university.

Note: Each open quotation mark denotes a change in speaker. Words, phrases, and sentences not contained within quotation marks are inserted to help with transitions and to provide summaries of key points.

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FACULTY
DESIRES/FACULTY
RESISTANCES

“There is a great thirst for spirituality in the faculty, but there is also a great reluctance to assuage that thirst through anything supplied by the university.” Why? “Our faculty come to us from an ambiance, a graduate school ambiance, in which the connection between faith or spirituality and what they do as academics is not really made. They don’t expect that a connection can be made by or from anything connected to the university as such. Some would go so far as to say that seeking to connect them is inappropriate.”

“We find that the crux of the resistance is often traceable to the jargon used by those versed in spirituality. The jargon is unfamiliar or even alienating to many.”

“I find that many—~~may~~ be most—faculty became academics for what could be called a desire for contemplation. You might call it any number of things but the common denominator is this desire to think through to truth or to probe reality.... If spirituality were understood as the art of being better at contemplation, there would be a much greater interest in it.”

“Our culture—both

academic culture and the culture of mass communications—does not favor the contemplative approach.”

“Loneragan distinguishes rational consciousness, which comes to insight, from rational self-consciousness, which weighs insights in the chamber of interiority. The contemplative scholar leaves time for the weighing to take place.... Whatever it takes to make [us] see better, further, deeper into what we are doing and who we are who are doing it—this is what spirituality aims to do.”

So, if faculty began to see that what they do as faculty could be enhanced by a more explicit attention to their spirituality, then those who had some skill in this area of spirituality could be seen as useful—maybe even valuable!—to the faculty.

T H E P L A C E
O F I G N A T I A N
S P I R I T U A L I T Y

What has your experience been of faculty’s use of the Spiritual Exercises?

“There’s no interest at all without recruitment. Recruitment by someone who has profited from them greatly and can spell out how they have helped him or her precisely as faculty is essential to getting them to take notice of the opportunity.”

“There is an initial wariness because they are too closely linked to the institutional identity thing, I mean administration, Jesuits, Church, traditional Catholicism, etc., to be given a neutral hearing.”

At this point there was an intervention that suggested we must not run before we walk. “I’ve been at this question of faculty and their desires for the last ten years and I want to recommend that we not talk about the Spiritual Exercises or anything as fulsome as that till we have done something much more necessary for most of the faculty. I have in mind creating the conditions for a conversation to take place, a trusting conversation in which individual faculty have a chance to be heard in some depth about their needs, concerns, interests. The fruit of these must be friendship, trust, openness, mutuality. This is the foundation, the human *sine qua non* for anything substantive in spirituality or the programs it usually entails to take place. A place and an opportunity to talk to one another without someone’s agenda crowding the conversation are oddly rare in our schools.”

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"I am reminded of Gabriel Marcel's three-stage progression with the previous speaker's remarks. He claimed that we go from conversation to communion to community. Try to abridge the process and you end up with a group well practiced at having a thin level of interaction. If the human is not in place, efforts at divining divinity will fail."

What is the quality of conversation on your campuses? "It's a little better than the rest of society but not like it should be."

...

A recent source of fragmentation entered the conversation. "I have a sense that many of our faculty in the medical center where I work feel they have lost control of their lives. Their profession and its structures are in unprecedented upheaval that is personally affecting every fiber of their beings. One of the things that had kept their lives together was that there was a family spirit in the institution but with the cutbacks and structural downsizing and insecurity about the future, they feel there isn't any family to be part of anymore. Spiritual resources are needed by them as never before, they

would say, to withstand the near despair or fright they experience at present."

A more academic complication was given some attention. "So much of spirituality and the Ignatian emphases in education are concerned to effect a greater integration of the parts of a person's life while much of academe is looking at integration as an obsolescent aspiration that has disappeared with the advent of postmodernism. Try to get some departments to say what they stand for and you will learn the amount of fragmentation there is—though it will be euphemized as interpretive pluralism. To lack a center that holds, then, is not looked upon as a sorry state to be in but as an indication of epistemic sophistication."

Another: "Postmodernism has a good side to it. We can overdo integration, seeming to make an ideal out of a condition of motionlessness. Postmodernism has the happy consequence of making for a very lively academic atmosphere unless we get to the point where no one understands anyone else. Ignatian spirituality has been able to hold in fruitful tension many seemingly antithetical

influences in these last four centuries. The basic reason why is that it should always, in the spirit of the Exercises, begin with where the exercitant "is at" rather than with the imposition on him or her of a worldview. Hence, we shouldn't be daunted by today's postmodernism."

THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF SPIRITUALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL AIMS?

A very real difficulty was posed that we were not of one mind about. "To be interested in purveying Ignatian spirituality to our faculty makes us agents of an agenda; namely, the continuation of the Jesuit ethos at our universities. It would be an entirely different agenda if we were simply interested in the personal development, spiritual, intellectual, moral, vocational, of the faculty member independently of our institutional purposes.... As long as we are seen to be agents of the institution's agenda, the interested parties will be few. So we must be very clear ourselves about the telos of this whole thing. We began this day talking about the desires of the faculty. What about the desires of those at the university

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who want to keep it Jesuit and Catholic and who use the spiritual resources there to insure that this will happen?"

In response to this strong contention there were these reactions: "This is an important distinction and clarification but isn't there a middle way between the two? If there is a good use of the Spiritual Exercises then the choices the person takes will be to stick closer to God's agenda in Christ. As a faculty member this could and probably will include a closer identification with the Ignatian ethos of the institution while being transformed intellectually. So, to play one off against the other as inevitably contradictory isn't exactly fair."

The party who made the initial intervention commented: "I only partly agree; if you accept my point about perception my case is strong; I do accept your point about non-contradiction if the Exercises are done well. We must ask ourselves why these Exercises are so infrequently used by our faculties. I think this is because of the perceived conflict of interest there would be in those who direct them in the universities."

Further clarifications: "We are talking about

pastoral service of faculty; we are talking about ministry to the faculty for the sake of the faculty; we aren't minions of the President or of the Jesuit community in the work we do with faculty and staff. Whatever influence we exert, it is not to try to direct their choices but to free them from whatever ideology entraps them, including the ideologies that come with the territory of their respective disciplines and institutional self-interests. Assistance in someone's coming to his or her authenticity is what we can supply them with."

"Is the institution an embodiment of a spirituality? . . . that is what I am interested in. If it is then you can take young faculty or faculty still undecided about signing up or remaining and explain in clear terms what we stand for and why we function. This presumes there is a compelling vision in the institution that it has articulated and follows. Then the faculty member can say 'yes' or 'no' to what the place clearly stands for. As it is the place doesn't clearly stand for anything distinctive so faculty come and go and do their own thing and the same thing they would do at any other institution."

Participants in the conversation: Joe Appleyard, S.J., Boston College; Jim Blumeyer, S.J., St. Louis University; John Breslin, S.J., and Monika Hellwig, Georgetown University; Leo Klein, S.J., Xavier University; Jim O'Brien, S.J., Wheeling College; Pat O'Leary, S.J., Seattle University; Judy Roemer and George Schemel, S.J., University of Scranton; John Zuercher, S.J., Creighton University; participating from Loyola University, Chicago, were John C. Haughey, S.J.; Mark Link, S.J.; Jack O'Callaghan, S.J.; Sr. Gertrude Patch, RSCJ; and Larry Reuter, S.J.