

**New England Jesuit  
Oral History Program**



**Rev. James F. Bresnahan, S.J.  
Volume 89**

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ISBN 1-60067-086-5

May 2009

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AMDG

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral histories are the taped recordings of interviews with interesting and often important persons. They are not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. They are the voice of the person interviewed. These oral records are, in many instances, transcribed into printed documentary form. Though only so much can be done, of course, in an hour or sometimes two, they are an important historical record whose value increases with the inevitable march of time.

For whatever reason, New England Jesuits, among others around the world, have not made any significant number of oral histories of their members. Given the range of their achievements and their impact on the Church and society, this seems to many to be an important opportunity missed. They have all worked as best they could for the greater glory of God. Some have done extraordinary things. Some have done important things. All have made valuable contributions to spirituality, education, art, science, discovery, and many other fields. But living memories quickly fade. Valuable and inspiring stories slip away.

This need not be. Their stories can be retold, their achievements can be remembered, their adventures saved. Their inspiration can provide future generations with attractive models. That is what Jesuit oral history is all about.

## Publications

1. Fr. George W. Nolan
2. Fr. John F. Broderick
3. Fr. Joseph S. Scannell
4. Fr. Joseph G. Fennell
5. Fr. James F. Morgan
6. Fr. John V. Borgo
7. Bro. William J. Spokesfield
8. Fr. Lawrence E. Corcoran
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10. Fr. William F. Carr
11. Fr. Alwyn C. Harry
12. Fr. John F. Foley
13. Fr. Leo F. Quinlan
14. Fr. Patrick A. Sullivan
15. Fr. John J. McGrath
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32. Bro. Calvin A. Clarke
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34. Fr. Paul T. McCarty
35. Fr. Anthony R. Picariello
36. Fr. Joseph H. Casey
37. Fr. Joseph E. Mullen
38. Fr. Joseph A. Paquet
39. Fr. William G. Devine
40. Fr. Philip K. Harrigan
41. Fr. John J. Mullen
42. Fr. James B. Malley
43. Fr. John F. Devane
44. Bro. H. Francis Cluff
45. Fr. William J. Raftery
46. Fr. John J. Mandile
47. Fr. John W. Keegan
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50. Bro. Edward L. Niziolek
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72. Fr. William J. Cullen
73. Fr. Thomas Vallamattam
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75. Fr. Donald L. Larkin
76. Fr. Paul A. Schweitzer
77. Archbp. Lawrence A. Burke
78. Fr. William C. McInnes
79. Fr. Stanley J. Bezuszka
80. Fr. John B. Handrahan
81. Fr. Henry "Harry" J. Cain
82. Fr. William D. Ibach
83. Fr. Herbert J. Cleary
84. Fr. Martin F. McCarthy
85. Fr. Francis A. Sullivan
86. Fr. Robert J. Daly
87. Bro. Cornelius C. Murphy
88. Fr. Robert D. Farrell
89. Fr. James F. Bresnahan
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97. Fr. Michael A. Fahey
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99. Fr. George A. Gallarelli
100. Fr. Francis R. Allen
101. Fr. Walter R. Pelletier
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Interview with Fr. James F. Bresnahan, S.J.  
by Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
December 10, 2008

**EARLY YEARS**

**RICHARD ROUSSEAU:** Welcome to our conversation. Let's begin with you and your family. So could you tell us something about where and when you were born?

**JAMES BRESNAHAN:** I was born on December 28, 1926 in Springfield, Massachusetts. My father, James F. Bresnahan, was twenty-one years older than my mother. He would die in 1938 when I was twelve. My mother was his second wife, his first wife having died leaving no children. My mother, Margaret Anna Riley Bresnahan, was born in Holyoke. The families of my parents were known to one another—the Bresnahans in Springfield and the Rileys in Holyoke.

I was the oldest of three boys, Daniel, Thomas, and myself. My brother Daniel was twenty months younger and Tom was eight years younger. My mother lovingly raised us after my dad died. Dan and Tom and I have always been close through the years. My brother Dan died recently, on February 14, 2009.

My mother had been a public school teacher before she married my dad, and so she wanted us in the public schools. We lived in the Holy Name Parish in the Forest Park section of Springfield, and they had a fine school there. But I went to the White Street School and then Forest Park Junior High and Classical High School. Classical was a great and important experience for me, because it was an excellent school. Recently it was closed. My mother was president of the PTA for a time, and was elected president of a Catholic women's group.

#### HIS PARENTS

RR: Before we get into schools, tell us a little bit more about your father and mother.

JB: My father survived the Depression monetarily, and was delighted to have three sons. As soon as Franklin Roosevelt was elected in 1932, he ended Prohibition and the ban on sale of alcohol. So my dad opened a package store at 550 Sumner Avenue near the "X" in Springfield. The Jesuit MacDonnell brothers, John, Joe, Larry, Vin, and Martin, as well as the Sheehans, Jim and John, (all deceased now) lived in the neighborhood, but were in the Catholic schools.

My mother had graduated in 1917 from Smith College in Northampton, which was a street car ride from her home in Holyoke. I think her father had her live there in her senior year. She was the youngest of three girls; my aunts were Mary and Gertrude.

My father was the middle brother of three boys; my uncles were Michael and Daniel; both of them died when I was an infant. My father's parents were, I think, both born in Ireland. They died before I was born. They had come to the States during or shortly after the Civil War. My mother's mother and father,

I think, were both born in the States. My grandmother Riley lived with us at the end of her life and died in 1937. But, as I said, my mother was almost a generation behind my father in age.

#### CHOICE OF HOLY CROSS

RR: Tell us a bit more about your high school years.

JB: Although I went to Classical High School, a very important influence on us was Holy Name Parish, to which we belonged. At one point, the pastor and his five curates were all Holy Cross grads. One of those curates in particular, Fr. Paul O'Day, was especially influential on me. He was really the reason I decided to go to Holy Cross when I graduated from high school. He knew the Jesuits well from his college days. He told me that, when he was down at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, he used to visit the Jesuits who had taught him at Holy Cross as scholastics and who were then studying theology at Woodstock.

In June 1944, as I was about to begin at Holy Cross, we received the news of the death of my first cousin, Frank Buckley, my Aunt Mary's only son, who was killed in Italy in the drive on Rome during World War II. Frank had been like an older brother to my brothers and myself after my father's death. My Aunt Mary never really recovered from the loss of Frank.

Then, on July 5, 1944 I began my first semester at Holy Cross (with John MacDonnell and Henry Murphy, both of whom left after a year to enter the Jesuits). I studied for six straight semesters without a break, except for a few days between semesters—this was scheduled by the naval programs at Holy Cross. We were only a few civilians, I having been turned down by the Draft Board because of my nearsightedness. So I went through those six semesters until the

war ended, and we then had a normal senior year, 1946-1947.

#### IMPORTANT INFLUENCES

**JB:** I have to mention both Fr. Pat Cummings and Fr. Frank Hart as very important in the development of my spiritual life while at Holy Cross and eventually in my desire to join the Society. Ray Swords and Joe Riel were scholastics who influenced me very positively, too. I should also mention Fr. Jim Duffy, an economics professor, and Fr. Tom Shortell, the famous labor leader, who helped shape my thought on economics and politics, as well as Fr. “Sleepy” Joe Sullivan, who taught me ethics.

Interestingly, one classmate of mine was Michael Harrington, who later wrote *The Other America*, a well-known book about poverty that influenced President Kennedy. He was known to us as “Ed” Harrington. Another dear friend, Jack Havens, my first roommate, became a lifelong friend until his death in the '90s. It was a great time, and after graduation in '47, I began Harvard Law School and stayed there for two years.

#### HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

**RR:** How did that go for you there?

**JB:** There were ten of us from Holy Cross in the first year at Harvard Law, the largest group from any Catholic college. Three of us became Jesuits. It was in the course of second year of law school that I decided that I did want to enter the Society. Before that, I had resisted the idea, but then it became something I really wanted to do. So I consulted with Fr. Pat Cummings, and then went through the interviews at the provincial’s residence in Boston.

One of the interviewers was an old friend of Paul O'Day from his college days at Holy Cross, Fr. Ray McInnis, who was the Jesuit tertianship instructor at the time. I left Law School in good standing with an option to return.

#### SHADOWBROOK AND WESTON

RR: There you were in the novitiate.

JB: Yes, I went up to Shadowbrook on July 30, 1949, for my novitiate, where Fr. John Post was the novice master. My impression of him was very positive. I was twenty-two years old, and it seemed to me that he dealt differently with us older men than with some of the younger novices, who were high school graduates and seemed to have found him formidable, even forbidding.

RR: That's right. The same thing happened to me coming in from college.

JB: I just liked him tremendously and found him inspiring. I also learned some important gifts from him, especially during my first long retreat. Then at the end of novitiate, interestingly enough, when I talked to the Provincial, Fr. William E. Fitzgerald, I said, "Maybe it would be a good idea for me to stay on for a year of juniorate." Of course, I had gone through AB Greek program at Holy Cross, so I had already had all the standard juniorate academics. I suppose if I had said, "I think I ought to go right to philosophy," he would have said, "No, you should stay on." But when I said, a bit naively, that maybe I should stay another year, he said, "Oh, no! We can't have our scholastics with long gray beards." So, off I went in 1951 after first vows to philosophy at Weston.

Those were two interesting years, 1951-1953. Our teachers, especially Fr. Paul Lucey and Fr. Reggie

[Reginald] O'Neill, were leading us away from the Suarezian version of scholasticism that had previously dominated at Weston College as well as when I was at Holy Cross. They turned us instead toward the Thomism being taught by the Jesuits at St. Louis.

My close and important friends in philosophy were Hal Levy and the late Fr. James McClean Murphy. And I also got to know the late Fr. Bob Drinan, who was then in theology. We admired the way he took on Senator Joe McCarthy. [Laughter] After those two years of philosophy I received a master's degree and licentiate in philosophy.

Then there were the summers at Keyser Island in South Norwalk, Connecticut—I shouldn't leave those out. Keyser Island was still the province villa, and we went there the summer during philosophy and the summer after philosophy on the way to regency.

RR: Keyser Island was a little rough and ready, but it was a nice break.

JB: Yes. There we discovered the late city edition of the *New York Times*. [Laughter] That was a delight. And we had memorable picnics on one of the off-shore islands.

#### REGENCY AND BACK TO LAW SCHOOL

RR: What did you do during regency?

JB: The first two years, 1953-1955, I was sent back to law school to complete my third year for the LLB (the Bachelor of Laws—in the 1960s, it was transformed into a JD, Doctor of Jurisprudence). My second year back at Harvard Law School I completed an LLM (Master of Laws), which, ironically, is a higher degree than a JD. And that was a good time for me.

I lived at 300 Newbury Street, where Fr. Joe "Hinc" MacDonnell was the superior—uncle of the

McDonnell boys, also from Springfield. He was a delightful man, and gave me great support, especially when my mother was dying.

In the fall of my first year back at Harvard Law, my mother became ill with breast cancer in the fall and died in May 1954. So I had to postpone taking the bar exam, and then took it and passed after the LLM year. It was obviously a particularly important time for me. As one priest said to me, "When your mother dies, you don't have a home anymore. Your home is gone." Of course, I still had my two brothers and my mother's two sisters, my aunts, who had moved up to Springfield from New Jersey when my mother became ill. Nevertheless, that comment was true.

RR: So both your father and mother died fairly young. Do you think that affected your life in some ways?

JB: I'm sure of it. It gave me a whole new understanding of, and openness to, the importance of death. In 1938 we had buried my father out of our home. He was laid out in the casket in our living room. Danny and I came down in the morning, having slept well, knelt at the casket, said a prayer, and then ate our breakfast. That was the way it was done then. Wakes were at home. When my mother died in May 1954, she had decided on the local Hafey's Funeral Home (family of Bob Hafey, who was then a Jesuit) to handle her wake and funeral. Those experiences impressed me with the importance of death as well as the good care of the dying and of those who mourn them. I learned about loss.

As regents we scholastics stayed at Holy Cross during the summers. And I came to know well [Lt. Commander] Fr. Joseph T. O'Callahan, who received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic work

on the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin* during World War II. He was a strong influence on my Jesuit life. Once he asked me, “Who are your heroes?”—an important question for all of us.

#### TEACHING AT CHEVERUS

JB: Then, in third year of regency, 1955-1956, right after taking and passing the Massachusetts Bar Exam, I had, by contrast, an interesting year teaching second year high school at Cheverus High School in Portland, Maine. That turned out to be a great experience. I taught a second-year home room—religion, English, and Latin; that included Caesar’s Gallic Wars. I guess the best thing I did for the students was to require them to write a weekly essay—the main thing I felt I could contribute to them.

I had the chance, interestingly enough, to be the freshman football coach and scout for the varsity team. I had always loved football. I had even tried to play it in high school, but I wasn’t particularly good at it. But I had a wonderful time coaching the team and going to all the games of future opponents of the varsity to scout them. I checked out the plays they would be using against us. I didn’t travel with the varsity, but I did help our coach, Bill Curran, with the kind of information that resulted in Cheverus beating South Portland High School in football for the first time in its history! Also, my brother, Tom, then a senior at Holy Cross, came to us for a time during spring football practice, thus beginning his coaching career.

Although I was also assigned swimming coach, I had no experience with competitive swimming. All I could do was stand by the pool and urge them on. On March 10, 1956, when we were traveling down on the

Maine Turnpike on a trip to the New England Swimming Finals, I heard on the car radio about the Shadowbrook fire that destroyed our novitiate.

#### THEOLOGY

RR: Yes. What happened after regency?

JB: In September 1956 I began theology at Weston. Two of my favorite people, Fr. Frank Lawlor and Fr. Phil Donnelly, were among our teachers. They were two important people in my life.

And, by the way, it was at that time that my first publication came out with your help, Dick. When you would come out from BC to encourage our group, you suggested that we each try to write an essay, which we would then critique together. My first publication was "The Court and our Conscience" in *America* (Jan. 31, 1959). It dealt with the Supreme Court decision in Brown against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, on racial integration of the schools. And, of course, that led to other publications later on.

RR: Could you give a general impression of Weston, as compared with your other academic experiences?

JB: I liked theology. As I said, I especially enjoyed Frank Lawlor and Phil Donnelly, who encouraged us to do broader thinking. Of course, Phil was not enamored of the *Nouvelle Théologie*, but what he emphasized to us about the utter gratuity of grace was later better defended by Karl Rahner's "supernatural existential." I guess I first came into contact with Rahner's writings and those of Lonergan toward the end of theology while getting ready for the "ad grad" exam.

RR: Did you ever actually meet Rahner?

JB: Yes, I finally met him in the '60s on a visit to Georgetown, and he became the subject of my dissertation at Yale. But I'll talk about that later. During

my four years of theology, I also began to do some speaking and some theology teaching for Sisters.

So, my four years of theology at Weston were a good time for me. However, there was something strange about the lifestyle. There was always the “long black line.” What about you? Where did you do your theology? Did you go to Woodstock?

RR: No, I was in Belgium at St. Albert de Louvain in the suburb of Egenhoven. At that time, it was a Belgian Jesuit seminary with over 300 students from around the world. Its professors were very influential at Vatican II.

#### ORDINATION AND TERTIANSHIP

RR: Who ordained you?

JB: I was ordained at the end of third year, on June 13, 1959, by Richard Cardinal Cushing, who had just been made a cardinal. When he arrived on Saturday at Weston, he announced, “I’m in my red robes, which the Jesuits got for me.”

RR: Where did you do tertianship?

JB: In 1960-1961, I went to tertianship at St. Beuno’s in North Wales, England. Our tertian instructor, Fr. Peter Paul Kennedy of the British Province, was introducing “directed retreats” in contrast to “preached” retreats, which were dominant up to that time. There were twenty-five or thirty of us tertians from different countries. In directing our long retreat, he would visit each of our rooms every third day. And there was a certain time each day when anyone could stop in to talk to him.

He did have one session each morning with all of us as a group when he put forth some “additional directions” for us to keep in mind. He’d say something about the style of prayer at the moment, and

the grace we would be asking for—”what I want.” He would then leave it to us to prepare and make the “points” for meditation for ourselves. By then, I was using some materials by Rahner for that. At the time, the typescript of what would eventually be published by Rahner as *The Spiritual Exercises* was available.

That’s why tertianship proved to be so very important in my life. Toward the end of it, Peter Paul Kennedy sent me out to “direct” my first eight-day retreat with four Sisters of La Retraite near London, a group similar to the Cenacle Sisters, who specialize in retreat work. I am still in touch with one of those Sisters. The four were novices who were making their first retreat, and I was directing my first! By the way, Kennedy was criticized by some members of the British Province for “letting us out” to do things like giving retreats. “Liberty Hall,” they would say of our tertianship.

#### AUXILIARY CHAPLAIN

RR: Where did you go for your pastoral experience?

JB: I spent the whole of Lent and Holy Week of my tertianship year as a civilian “auxiliary chaplain” with the US Army, Third Infantry Division, at Bamberg, Germany, thanks to John St. John, one of our New England Jesuits, who was a full colonel at the Heidelberg HQ of US Army Europe. They needed a priest, because the Catholic priest-officer had left the Army to return to his diocese. The folks there were already without an American-speaking priest for three or four months. I filled in, and it was quite a enlivening experience, especially helping the Army families. It was at that point that I realized how absolutely necessary it was to have the Mass in the vernacular.

After the Korean War was over and before Vietnam, American kids were no longer drafted. By 1961 many of the men in the ranks had been given a hard choice by a judge: "You can go to jail or you can join the Army." So the non-commissioned officers had an especially difficult job to whip these young men into shape. The result was that they needed help.

There was one young Lieutenant, Jim Johnson, trained as a Ranger, a graduate of St. John's College in Minnesota, who used to read the whole Mass out loud in English while I was reciting it in the Latin. That helped the men and their families grasp what was happening. I heard then, the year before Vatican II started, that among both French and Germans the vernacular was already being used in the Mass.

Also, I did what was needed to get the young kids organized as altar servers. I discovered that there were about twelve or fifteen kids who had missed making their First Communion, some for two or three years, because their fathers got transferred from one post to another. I said, "Before I leave, we're going to have a First Holy Communion service on Holy Thursday for all these kids." When we did that, I really experienced the gratitude of those families, who would have done anything for me, because they were so grateful for my taking care of their children. I was overwhelmed with that.

#### ROME AND THE RIGHT KIND OF LAW

RR: What was your first assignment after tertianship?

JB: Since I had a background in Anglo-American common law, the Provincial, Fr. Jim Coleran, thought that I should study canon law. And my good friend from Weston, Fr. Maurice Walsh, who afterwards was a canon lawyer in Jamaica for many years, had prob-

ably recommended me for the canon law program at the Gregorian University. I went to Rome to try it, but I found that I really disliked canon law. The only person in that faculty who made any sense to me was Fr. Ladislav Orsy, who later on came to the US and is still teaching at Georgetown. My problem was that there is no constitutional bill of rights in canon law. I found canon law strange and confining. The Code of Canon Law of 1917 was really patterned on the Napoleonic Code.

I did have good friends in Rome, especially Fr. John Günter Gerhartz who later became Provincial in Germany and then German Assistant to the General and finally Secretary of the Society. We are still in touch with each other. That summer after I left study of canon law in Rome, he arranged for me to study German. I wanted to try to penetrate deeper into Rahner's writings. I spent that summer of 1962 in Cologne at the Weisenhaus und Kinderheim, run by Sisters who needed a summer chaplain. It was the end of the year before Vatican II began, so I could say Latin Mass for the nuns. I also talked a lot with youngsters to learn some German.

#### FOUR YEARS AT FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY

RR: Where did you work then?

JB: At the end of that summer, I was assigned to Fairfield University to teach theology. The next four years, 1962-1966, I was at Fairfield working with you, Dick, in what we renamed the Religious Studies Department.

This was the period of Vatican II. When I began teaching theology at Fairfield, I followed the front-page news from Vatican II, and it enlivened our theology classes. Right now, I'm reading Fr. John

O'Malley's wonderful book on that council, and it reminds me of those days. Xavier Rynne's *Letters from Vatican City* was published in the *New Yorker*. One didn't have to sell the importance of theology to students.

#### AN IMPORTANT SUMMER

JB: Something very important happened to me during the summer of 1963. I went up to a three-week summer seminar program in Toronto with Bernard Häring, CSSR, the great moral theologian and author of *The Law of Christ*, a new approach to moral theology, influential in what would become the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*.

It was that summer of 1963, too, that the civil rights marches in the US began. I went down for the March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington, DC, with Fr. Frank Deevy and a group from the Catholic Interracial Council of Bridgeport, Connecticut. We were present at that great meeting where Dr. Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. And I remember, also during that time at Fairfield, hearing a talk by Hans Küng at Yale in nearby New Haven.

RR: Yes. Hans Küng was big news those days.

#### ANTI-WAR INVOLVEMENT

JB: After beginning PhD studies at Yale in 1966, I would return to teach for a year at Fairfield in 1969-1970 and participate in the fall 1969 Moratorium, again in Washington, DC, to try to stop the Vietnam War. That was a year of disturbance—Kent State and Cambodia.

As the 1970 graduation at Fairfield approached, the president of the senior class asked me to help plan an

alternative graduation. Those students didn't want to disturb the regular graduation itself, yet also wanted to protest against "business as usual." Many felt that they just couldn't take part in the regular graduation ceremonies out of their desire to object to the war. I felt that this kind of approach was quite appropriate, and we held an alternate ceremony. We held a sort of interfaith Mass with a Jewish professor and Art Anderson, a Protestant sociology professor. They were both nice guys, and did some readings before Mass. But I'm skipping a little bit ahead by mentioning 1969-1970.

#### ECUMENICAL STIMULUS

**JB:** I had returned to Fairfield in the midst of doing PhD studies at Yale. In 1966 I had started my PhD work with Prof. James M. Gustafson in New Haven. That was an important moment and a great blessing in my life. I was stimulated to begin those studies at Yale by the ecumenical work being done by you, Dick Rousseau, while we were together at Fairfield 1962-1966. Through you I met a young Episcopalian priest who had started a doctorate at Yale, was doing parish work, and was about to resume studying at Yale. He introduced me to Jim Gustafson at Yale.

#### VATICAN II AND ECUMENICAL DEVELOPMENTS

**RR:** Yes, I was working in ecumenism then.

**JB:** So our time at Fairfield U. was a very interesting time, because of the impact of the historic Vatican II in session in those years. It was front page news. It led me to start my PhD studies with Jim Gustafson at Yale in 1966. I saw it as a dimension of an ecumenical call to us from Christ.

I have to mention, too, that it was during that time at Fairfield U., starting in 1963, that I became close to the neighboring Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. I started giving retreats to them as well as theology courses in their novitiate next door. I also did a series of summer chaplaincies at Glen Moira, their summer place up in Otis, Massachusetts. I was retreat director several summers through to 1981. And that activity with the SNDs, with Sr. Patricia Agnes Manning SND and other Sisters, good friends still, while at Fairfield U. thus led to my giving many more retreats, both preached and directed.

It also was the occasion of my reviving my interest in fly-fishing for trout in the Berkshire streams, but I won't get into that here.

#### YALE 1966-1969 AND 1970-1972

RR: OK. How did your years at Yale go?

JB: I won't go into all the details that the time of my studies at Yale really deserves. But I can say that they were very exciting and formative of the ecumenical outlook I brought with me in later years in Denver and in Chicago—a delight in working with people of all faiths as well as those who belonged to no faith. This was in the ecumenical era initiated by Vatican II.

I found some good friends there, especially Jim and Louise Gustafson. As a Catholic working seriously among Protestants for the first time, I found it a decisive learning experience. When I was growing up in Springfield, we had been closer to Jews than to Protestants. Now Vatican II had opened up close cooperation with all “separated brothers and sisters.” I came to deeply esteem these Protestant friends, both professors and fellow students.

I did my dissertation at Yale on the kind of understanding of person, grace, and human freedom under grace that Karl Rahner would provide as the basis for fundamental moral theology—a new and deeper understanding of “natural law” in relation to “person.”

#### AT REGIS IN DENVER 1972-1974

JB: I finished my PhD work in 1972 and received my PhD. But I didn't want to go back to Fairfield, so I had the usual discernment process with our provincial. And the best solution arrived at for me was to go to Regis University in Denver. So, from 1972 to 1974, that's where I was assigned.

Fr. Ed Maginnis was chair of religious studies there and welcomed me. Ed is also a musician, and became a good and supportive friend. Another good friend there was Fr. Harry Hoewischer. And I had a number of other very close friends in the lay faculty there.

A significant event brought about my leaving there after two years. When I first arrived, I found that the faculty had a union called the National Education Association (NEA). They had already petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for a bargaining election. I asked, “Where's our AAUP (American Association of University Professors) Chapter?” I did that because you, Dick, and I had been very active in the AAUP at Fairfield. We found that there were twenty-one AAUP faculty members on the Regis campus, but they had never created a chapter. So we formed one. Then, as a chapter, we “intervened” in the NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) election, and we eventually won. We then had to negotiate a contract with the administration. And I should add that Fr. John Teeling, rector of the Jesuit community, was a member of our chapter, so it was not a question of

Jesuits only on the administration side.

We had a situation where the Jesuit president of Regis, the dean, and other administrators were confronted by fellow Jesuits and other lay faculty members. Dr. Michael Conner, the president of our chapter and a good friend of mine, led the bargaining (he subsequently died tragically). I had been elected vice-president of the chapter. Bargaining was difficult, but finally completed to our satisfaction.

But then Regis announced a cutback in faculty because of a fall-off in the number of students. I was “last in” to the Religious Studies Department, so I was to leave, though with “late notice.” That, however, had nothing to do with my role as vice president of the first NLRB-certified bargaining agent on a Jesuit campus or my participation in the recent bargaining unit!

RR: Of course not.

JB: Yet these had been two very happy years. I had developed some new student programs. For example, I arranged for some juniors and seniors to have the opportunity to work for academic credit in law offices to see what it was like. I would then get a report on them from the law office and was able to give them a mark. It was a good practical experience for them, and helped them decide whether or not they really wanted to go on to a law school.

RR: You had made some important changes.

JB: Yes, but things did work out for me in the end. Fr. Jim Hennessy, then president of the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago (JSTC) and on the Regis Board of Trustees, invited me for fall 1974, saying, “Come on to Chicago.” I was also helped by Jim Gustafson, who had moved from Yale to the University of Chicago. So, in that first year in Chicago 1974-1975, I

was “on terminal leave” from Regis and a “visiting scholar” at both JSTC and the University of Chicago Divinity School. The next year I went on the JSTC faculty and taught moral theology—Christian and Social Ethics.

By the way, fourteen years later, on February 5, 1988, I was invited back to Denver and presented a citation for “Outstanding Service” by the president of the AAUP/Regis chapter as well as from Dave Clark, the president of Regis University—acknowledging my service and dedication both to the AAUP Chapter and to Regis University. So peace had come back to that campus; let’s put it that way. At least the award acknowledged that what I had done in 1972-1974 was an important accomplishment and good for Regis.

That bargaining election at Regis was actually held before the National Labor Relations Board decided the “Yeshiva University Case” in New York, which held that, since faculty were not employees but supervisors, they were ineligible to have a formal bargaining unit. As a matter of fact, however, Regis administration continued to deal with the AAUP Chapter afterwards as a form of faculty participation in governance, an AAUP ideal. Or to use a theological term, we had developed “collegiality” on the college level. To that I, in part at least, made my contribution.

#### TEACHING AT JSTC UNTIL 1981

RR: How were your years at JSTC?

JB: Fr. Bill Guindon, SJ was the Dean at the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago, and shortly afterwards became president, when Fr. Jim Hennessy had a recurring brain aneurysm. So from 1975 until the JSTC

closed in 1981, I taught there and had a great ecumenical experience. Half of the students in our JSTC classes were from associated Protestant seminaries in the Chicago Cluster.

RR: An important development.

JB: I think this was an enormously important work, and I have never reconciled myself to the closing of JSTC. The story was that it was too expensive for the Assistancy to have had five Jesuit theologates; then closing of JSTC meant that having even three was still too much. The provincials claimed that two, Weston and Berkeley, would be sufficient. However, they never used that argument about some of the really second-rate colleges and universities that we run, which were never discarded as “too expensive.” Yet all three Jesuit seminaries, including Chicago, had received highest rating among seminaries.

#### MEDICAL ETHICS FOR PHYSICIANS

RR: What developed for you after JSTC closed?

JB: During 1977, my third year at JSTC, I had begun, on a part-time basis, to help some doctors at Northwestern U. Medical School (NUMS) and at Northwestern Memorial Hospital to develop a curricular medical ethics program. It started with one formal course that would go onto the medical students' transcripts. The students petitioned for that! Only about a quarter of US medical schools had similar curricular ethics programs at that time. Previously, there had only been informal discussion groups at Northwestern.

I was brought into this by one of the diocesan priests at Holy Name Cathedral, who was a great friend of Jesuits. He was in charge of the music at the time of Pope John Paul II's visit to Chicago. So Fr. Bob Oldershaw called me up and asked me if I'd be inter-

ested in talking with some of these doctors who wanted help with ethical issues. Apparently at Northwestern U. neither the philosophy nor religion departments up at Evanston had any interest in doing that. (The Medical School and the Hospital are miles away, off North Michigan Avenue in Chicago.) These doctors wanted to talk about their practical decisions in their diagnostic and therapeutic interactions with their patients, rather than about abstract ethical theories.

My background of training as a lawyer who had passed the Bar in Massachusetts, as well as my being an ordained priest, meant that I was already in two of the three classic professions: law, ministry, and medicine. I was interested in helping the third. People come to doctors and physically undress, and they open themselves in other ways to a priest or a lawyer. They speak of intimate issues, all of which requires maintaining confidentiality in these three professions. This is a shared fundamental dimension of professional ethics.

#### MEDICAL ETHICS AT NORTHWESTERN

RR: Yes, I agree.

JB: Helping the doctors seemed like a good thing to do. So, I worked with them in a limited way until JSTC closed in 1981. Of various possibilities I decided, with the provincial, that I should continue at Northwestern full-time, developing the ethics curriculum into the third and fourth years of medicine, when medical students move to the hospital wards and deal with real patients. That's where medical students are involved in actually caring for people. They are involved in rotations in various departments—surgery, psychiatry, pediatrics, internal medicine, ob/gyn, etc. So I kept on doing that, but now on a wider scale. And that activity also brought me in touch with young

doctors during their residency.

During these years at NUMS I continued to go back to New England in the summer time to make my own retreat, usually at Holy Cross. And for a time I continued to do retreat work with the SNDs, too.

One of the interesting things that had happened back when I was at Regis, Denver, was meeting my doctor there, Dr. Phil Clark. He was a graduate of Notre Dame, and in 1986 he persuaded Notre Dame to begin a yearly weekend conference on medical ethics, to which all physician alumni of Notre Dame would be invited. These MD alumni would not just reminisce about college years but would talk together about their current professional commitments. This would focus on a discussion of the ethical issues they encountered. So Phil had me invited to these as a visiting faculty person.

I took part in twenty-two of the twenty-three such conferences from 1986 onward. I felt the important thing for these men and women physicians was to have this annual meeting at Notre Dame, which they found so terribly important as the point of departure for their lives in medicine. The meeting involved small group discussions of these important ethical matters. Each small group then reported on their discussions in a general meeting. There was only one formal lecture at each conference. These annual meetings at Notre Dame were an important part of my life in Chicago during all the years I was there.

#### BACK TO NEW ENGLAND IN 2002

RR: How did you transition back to New England?

JB: In 2001, it was time for me to let the Northwestern Medical Ethics and Humanities Program, which I had initiated, be developed by other hands. So I left Prof.

Kathryn Montgomery, who in 1988 had become my program co-director and taken over as director, to be in charge, along with a younger person, Prof. Tod Chambers.

RR: So that's when you went to BC and then also to the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center?

JB: Yes, at the age of seventy-four, I returned to my New England Province and was assigned to live at the BC Jesuit Community. I had begun to have retinal problems by then.

After a year, I had an opportunity, from June 2002 to June 2003, to be an educational consultant to the Palliative Care Service at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. This was thanks to help from the late Fr. John Mullin SJ, long-time chaplain up there. I was appointed an adjunct professor in the Dartmouth Medical School and a consultant to the Anesthesia Department in the Hospital. It involved helping with training for and delivery of good care of the dying—long my special interest.

I enjoyed my year there very much, indeed. Dear Fr. John Mullin had been the chaplain up there for twenty-five years. He was a very congenial presence and companion for me up at DHMC. Afterwards, since I learned the geography of the hospital that year, whenever he needed someone to cover for him in the chaplaincy, I would fill in for him. But then, in the spring of 2007, sadly, he died, and that ended my helping out up there. This also meant separation from my good friends, Dr. Vin Memoli and Dr. John Sanders, both of whom I had known from Chicago days.

At the moment, I am pretty much retired from academic work, though I do a lot of reading and do think about some possible things to publish. And on occasion I have sat in on Tufts medical ethics meet-

ings, thanks to Fr. Jim Shaugnessy, SJ, whom I had taught at JSTC and who is chaplain at Tufts New England Medical Center. And on alternate weekends I also have helped at St. Mark's in Conway in western Massachusetts, and I treasure the friends I have made there. I also help out from time to time in St. Mary's parish in Lee, Massachusetts.

#### GOD'S PROVIDENCE

RR: Let me ask you a general question. As you look back over the years of your life as a Jesuit, can you see God's providence in the way things have happened to you? Were there times when you wanted to do something you felt important but weren't able to do so, until one day it just happened?

JB: Yes, I have to say that I see that in different ways. I was certainly heartbroken to leave Denver. I did not want to go. I cried in my room. It was where I had some of my closest faculty friendships, both Jesuit and lay, so I didn't want to leave them. Yet my leaving was providential in bringing me to Chicago and getting me the chance to work ecumenically with so many different people while at JSTC and then at Northwestern U. Many friends and colleagues were doctors with no apparent religion, secular Jews, religious Jews, secular Protestants, religious Protestants, secular Catholics, and religious Catholics. I was at home with them all. In effect, both part-time at first and then full-time, I was at Northwestern University Medical School for twenty-four years. And these were very rich years. They came serendipitously. They led to good friends back here in Boston and up at DHMC.

And while in Chicago, I was also involved in helping a Catholic hospital with their medical ethics consultation program. I lived for a few years at Colum-

bus Hospital (run by the Cabrini Sisters), when I first moved up north from the South Side where the Jesuit School had been located. Then a room became available at Clark Street Jesuit Residence, where I lived for fifteen years.

And, strangely enough, at Northwestern I found support in my teaching from one of my closest friends, a cardiologist originally from Argentina, whose mother was Catholic and whose father was Jewish. He considered himself to be Jewish, though not in the religious sense. He is a fascinating guy and a very close friend. I couldn't have had a stronger supporter on the medical faculty than Dick Davison. I used to go regularly on rounds with him in the Intensive Care Unit of Northwestern Memorial Hospital, of which he was in charge. As good friends, we supported each other. Then, once I came back, I found myself accepted in the medical culture, and helped out a bit with teaching ethics up at DHMC and occasionally also at Tufts.

#### THE BLESSING OF FRIENDS

RR: If there's anything important that you would like to add, feel free to do so.

JB: The greatest graces of my life were the many Jesuits and other dear friends over the years. I think of those Jesuits I have named and others I have not named, and especially, too, Prof. James Gustafson and his late wife Louise, who died a year ago, and so many others, not Jesuits. They have all been especially great blessings in my life. Also, of course, my two brothers, Tom, Dan, and their families have sustained me.

Now, I rejoice deeply in the election of Barak Obama, a graduate of Harvard Law School and president of the *Harvard Law Review*. He is one of the smartest people that ever ran for the presidency in

this country. He is a both African-American and white-American. I also rejoice in the policies he brings with him in these very difficult times. I happen to also be thoroughly supportive of his whole approach to economics and politics. I'm glad I lived to see this happening.

I'm now eighty-two, and so I don't think I can live much longer. As yet, I don't have any mortal illness knocking on my door. But I would hate to die with a Republican as president. [Laughter] I really would. It would leave me feeling that we haven't accomplished our goals of Catholic social justice. I lived through Nixon and that damn war in Vietnam. I tried to help bring those soldiers back. The soldiers in Vietnam were in an impossible situation, and the same thing is happening again now in Iraq. I have cherished the ideal of racial equality. So I obviously feel very strongly about those things.

This is due to my connection with the kind of formation that I had, starting back there in Holy Cross with Jim Duffy, Tom Shortell and welfare economics. Business should serve the common good. Markets must be controlled and greed confined. I have never understood why some people think that personal ethics can be separated from social ethics. The two are inevitably linked, in my view.

Weren't we interested in AAUP, because it led us into taking responsibility for the way we develop our own professional lives? It's about collegiality and participation in all situations of our lives.

I have just read Fr. John O'Malley's wonderful book on Vatican II for a second time. It's a great piece of work. If you haven't gotten to it yet, then put it on your list! And I thank God for good Pope John XXIII—I rejoice that I once saw him in person.

**RR:** That brings us to the end of our interesting conversation. It reminded me of our days together at Fairfield and our occasional meetings over the years. It has been inspiring. So we thank you again and ask God to continue to bless you.

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**Fr. James F. Bresnahan, S.J.**

**Born:** December 28, 1926, Springfield,  
Massachusetts  
**Entered:** July 30, 1949, Lenox, Massachusetts, St.  
Stanislaus Novitiate / Shadowbrook  
**Ordained:** June 13, 1959, Weston, Massachusetts,  
Weston College  
**Final Vows:** August 15, 1965, Fairfield, Connecticut,  
Fairfield University chapel

1939 Springfield, Massachusetts: Classical High School -  
Student  
1944 Worcester, Massachusetts: College of the Holy  
Cross - Student  
1947 Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Law School -  
Student  
1949 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate /  
Shadowbrook - Novice  
1951 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied  
philosophy  
1953 Boston/Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Law  
School, studied Law  
1955 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Taught  
sophomores

- 1956 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied theology
- 1960 St. Asaph, Flintshire, Great Britain: St. Beuno's College -Tertianship
- 1961 Rome, Italy: Gregorian University - Studied canon law
- 1962 Fairfield, Connecticut: Fairfield University - Taught theology
- 1966 New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University - Studied religious studies, ethics
- 1969 Fairfield, Connecticut: Fairfield University - Assistant professor, taught theology
- 1970 New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University - Studied religious studies, ethics
- 1971 Cambridge, Massachusetts: Weston Jesuit School of Theology - Visiting professor, taught moral theology
- Worcester, Massachusetts: College of the Holy Cross - Visiting lecturer, taught ethics
- Yale University - completed doctoral dissertation
- 1972 Denver, Colorado: Regis College - Associate professor, taught religious studies, ethics
- 1974 Chicago, Illinois:
- 1974-1975 University of Chicago Divinity School and at Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago - Visiting scholar
- 1975-1981 Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago - Associate professor and professor of moral theology
- 1977-1980 Northwestern University Medical School Taught medical ethics
- 1980-2001 Northwestern University Medical School Taught medical ethics
- 1980-1989 Lecturer
- 1980-1996 Co-director, Ethics Program

- 1989-1997 Professor, clinical  
 1997- Professor, emeritus  
 Also 1981-1987 Ethics consultant, Columbus Hospital  
 1980-2001 Ethics consultant, Northwestern  
 Memorial Hospital  
 2001 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Boston College Jesuit  
 Community  
 2001-2002 Sabbatical  
 2002-2003 Adjunct professor, Dartmouth Medical  
 School Educational Consultant to  
 Palliative Care and Pain Medicine  
 Program, Dartmouth-Hitchcock  
 Medical Center  
 2002-2007 Occasional chaplain at DHMC  
 2007 Newton, Massachusetts: Boston College Jesuit  
 Community - Retired

### Degrees

- 1947 Bachelor of Arts (mcl), College of the Holy Cross  
 1953 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Boston College  
 Licentiate in Philosophy, Weston College  
 1954 Bachelor of Laws, Harvard Law School  
 1955 Master of Laws, Harvard Law School  
 1960 Licentiate in Sacred Theology (mcl), Weston College  
 1962 Bachelor of Canon Law, Gregorian University,  
 Rome, Italy  
 1968 Master of Philosophy, Religious Studies: Ethics, Yale  
 University  
 1972 Doctor of Philosophy, Religious Studies: Ethics,  
 Yale University

## Honors

1946 Alpha Sigma Nu, College of the Holy Cross  
1947 Senior Philosophy Prize, College of the Holy Cross  
1987 Award of Merit, Odontographic Society of Chicago  
1988 Outstanding Service Award, Regis College and  
Regis College AAUP, Denver

## Memberships

Massachusetts Bar Association - Admitted to practice  
October 17, 1955  
Bar of the US District Court of District of Massachusetts,  
January 6, 1975  
American Association of University Professors, 1967-2004  
Society of Christian Ethics 1969-  
Director 1981-1985  
Chicago Clinical Ethics Programs, 1988-2001  
President 1991-1992  
Metaphysical Society of America  
American Society of Bioethics and Humanities, 1998-2001  
[previously the Society of Health and Human  
Values] 1995-1997 Board member  
American Society of Law, Medicine and Ethics (to 2005)  
Council on Religion and Law  
Institute of Medicine of Chicago 1990-

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\_\_\_\_\_. "Advance Directives in the 1990's: Medical Care of the Dying and the Myth of Sisyphus." In *Healthcare Ethics: Critical Issues*. Edited by J. F. Monagle, D. C. Thomasma, Chapter 22, 213-16. New York: Aspen Publishers, 1994.

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- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Interaction of Religion and Law: A Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Perspective." *Hastings Law Journal* 29, no. 6 (July 1978): 1361-82.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Aspiration and Duty in the Draft 'Code of Professional Responsibility.'" *Proceedings of the Forty First Annual Convention of the Canon Law Society of America* (1979): 137-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Note on Recent Literature: Religion and Law in a New Perspective." *Annual of the Society of*

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- Siegler, M., and James F. Bresnahan, S.J., et al. "Exploring the Future of Dental Ethics: A Summary of the Odontographic Society of Chicago Centennial Symposium." *Journal of the American College of Dentists* 56, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 13-15.
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- \_\_\_\_\_. "Why Read Barth's Ethics?—A Response." In *Karl Barth and the Future of Theology*. 23-26. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Divinity School Assn., 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Methodology of 'Natural Law.' Ethical Reasoning in the Theology of Karl Rahner, and its Supplementary Development Using the Legal Philosophy of Lon L. Fuller*. Yale University Dissertation 1972. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, #72-29,520: xv, 651 pp. Microfilm.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Death as a Penalty in the United States." In *The Death Penalty and Torture*. Edited by F. Bockle and J. Pohier, 27-35. New York, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "An Ethics of Faith." In *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl*

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\_\_\_\_\_, and H. Kuehn H. "What Makes a Marriage Christian?" In *Karl Rahner in Dialog: Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982*. By Karl Rahner, Paul Imhof, and Hubert Biallowons. Translated and edited by Harvey D. Egan, S.J. Chapter 19, 117-22. New York, 1986.

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