



*Christ*  
**OUR HOPE**

POPE BENEDICT XVI  
APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
TO THE UNITED STATES

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## Address of Pope Benedict XVI at the White House Welcoming Ceremony

*April 16, 2008, at the White House, After the welcome of President Bush, Pope Benedict XVI responded with the following remarks.*

Mr. President, Thank you for your gracious words of welcome on behalf of the people of the United States of America. I deeply appreciate your invitation to visit this great country. My visit coincides with an important moment in the life of the Catholic community in America: the celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the elevation of the country's first Diocese – Baltimore – to a metropolitan Archdiocese, and the establishment of the Sees of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Louisville. Yet I am happy to be here as a guest of all Americans. I come as a friend, a preacher of the Gospel and one with great respect for this vast pluralistic society. America's Catholics have made, and continue to make, an excellent contribution to the life of their country. As I begin my visit, I trust that my presence will be a **source of renewal and hope for the Church in the United States**, and strengthen the resolve of Catholics to contribute ever more responsibly to the life of this nation, of which they are proud to be citizens. From the dawn of the Republic, America's quest for freedom has been guided by the conviction that the principles governing political and social life are intimately linked to a moral order based on the dominion of God the Creator. The framers of this nation's founding documents drew upon this conviction when they proclaimed the "self-evident truth" that all men are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights grounded in the laws of nature and of nature's God. The course of American history demonstrates the difficulties, the struggles, and the great intellectual and moral resolve which were demanded to shape a society which faithfully embodied these noble principles. In that process, which forged the soul of the nation, religious beliefs were a constant inspiration and driving force, as for example in the struggle against slavery and in the civil rights movement. In our time too, particularly in moments of crisis, Americans continue to find their strength in a commitment to this patrimony of shared ideals and aspirations. In the next few days, I look forward to meeting not only with America's Catholic community, but with other Christian communities and representatives of the many religious traditions present in this country. Historically, not only Catholics, but all believers have found here the freedom to worship God in accordance with the dictates of their conscience, while at the same time being accepted as part of a commonwealth in which each individual and group can make its voice heard. As the nation faces the increasingly complex political and ethical issues of our time, I am confident that the American people will find in their religious beliefs a precious source of insight and an inspiration to pursue reasoned, responsible and respectful dialogue in the effort to build a more humane and free society. Freedom is not only a gift, but also a summons to personal responsibility. Americans know this from experience – almost every town in this country has its monuments honoring those who sacrificed their lives in defense of freedom, both at home and abroad. The preservation of freedom calls for the cultivation of virtue, self-discipline, sacrifice for the common good and a sense of responsibility towards the less fortunate. It also demands the courage to engage in civic life and to bring one's deepest beliefs and values to reasoned public debate. In a word, freedom is ever new. It is a challenge held out to each generation, and it must constantly be won over for the cause of good (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 24). Few have understood this as clearly as the late Pope John Paul II. In reflecting on the spiritual victory of freedom over totalitarianism in his native Poland and in eastern Europe, he reminded us that history shows, time and again, that "in a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation", and a democracy without values can lose its very soul (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 46). Those prophetic words in some sense echo the conviction of President Washington, expressed in his Farewell Address, that religion and morality represent "indispensable supports" of political prosperity.

The Church, for her part, wishes to contribute to building a world ever more worthy of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gen* 1:26-27). She is convinced that faith sheds new light on all things, and that the Gospel reveals the noble vocation and sublime destiny of every man and woman (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 10). Faith also gives us the strength to respond to our high calling, and the hope that inspires us to work for an ever more just and fraternal society. Democracy can only flourish, as your founding fathers realized, when political leaders and those whom they represent are guided by truth and bring the wisdom born of firm moral principle to decisions affecting the life and future of the nation.

For well over a century, the United States of America has played an important role in the international community. On Friday, God willing, I will have the honor of addressing the United Nations Organization, where I hope to encourage the efforts under way to make that institution an ever more effective voice for the legitimate aspirations of all the world's peoples. On this, the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the need for global solidarity is as urgent as ever, if all people are to live in a way worthy of their dignity – as brothers and sisters dwelling in the same house and around that table which God's bounty has set for all his children. America has traditionally shown herself generous in meeting immediate human needs, fostering development and offering relief to the victims of natural catastrophes. I am confident that this concern for the greater human family will continue to find expression in support for the patient efforts of international diplomacy to resolve conflicts and promote progress. In this way, coming generations will be able to live in a world where truth, freedom and justice can flourish – a world where the God-given dignity and rights of every man, woman and child are cherished, protected and effectively advanced.

Mr. President, dear friends: as I begin my visit to the United States, I express once more my gratitude for your

Thursday 17 April 2008, Catholic University of America

Your Eminences, Dear Brother Bishops, Distinguished Professors, Teachers and Educators, "How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news" (Rom 10:15-17). With these words of Isaiah quoted by Saint Paul, I warmly greet each of you - bearers of wisdom - and through you the staff, students and families of the many and varied institutions of learning that you represent. It is my great pleasure to meet you and to share with you some thoughts regarding the nature and identity of Catholic education today. I especially wish to thank Father David O'Connell, President and Rector of the Catholic University of America. Your kind words of welcome are much appreciated. Please extend my heartfelt gratitude to the entire community - faculty, staff and students - of this University.

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. Spe Salvi, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the Church.

The dynamic between personal encounter, knowledge and Christian witness is integral to the diakonia of truth which the Church exercises in the midst of humanity. God's revelation offers every generation the opportunity to discover the ultimate truth about its own life and the goal of history. This task is never easy; it involves the entire Christian community and motivates each generation of Christian educators to ensure that the power of God's truth permeates every dimension of the institutions they serve. In this way, Christ's Good News is set to work, guiding both teacher and student towards the objective truth which, in transcending the particular and the subjective, points to the universal and absolute that enables us to proclaim with confidence the hope which does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5). Set against personal struggles, moral confusion and fragmentation of knowledge, the noble goals of scholarship and education, founded on the unity of truth and in service of the person and the community, become an especially powerful instrument of hope.

Dear friends, the history of this nation includes many examples of the Church's commitment in this regard. The Catholic community here has in fact made education one of its highest priorities. This undertaking has not come without great sacrifice. Towering figures, like Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and other founders and foundresses, with great tenacity and foresight, laid the foundations of what is today a remarkable network of parochial schools contributing to the spiritual well-being of the Church and the nation. Some, like Saint Katharine Drexel, devoted their lives to educating those whom others had neglected - in her case, African Americans and Native Americans. Countless dedicated Religious Sisters, Brothers, and Priests together with selfless parents have, through Catholic schools, helped generations of immigrants to rise from poverty and take their place in mainstream society.

This sacrifice continues today. It is an outstanding apostolate of hope, seeking to address the material, intellectual and spiritual needs of over three million children and students. It also provides a highly commendable opportunity for the entire Catholic community to contribute generously to the financial needs of our institutions. Their long-term sustainability must be assured. Indeed, everything possible must be done, in cooperation with the wider community, to ensure that they are accessible to people of all social and economic strata. No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.

Some today question the Church's involvement in education, wondering whether her resources might be better placed elsewhere. Certainly in a nation such as this, the State provides ample opportunities for education and attracts committed and generous men and women to this honorable profession. It is timely, then, to reflect on what is particular to our Catholic institutions. How do they contribute to the good of society through the Church's primary mission of evangelization?

All the Church's activities stem from her awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself: in his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1:9; Dei Verbum, 2). God's desire to make himself known, and the innate desire of all human beings to know the truth, provide the context for human inquiry into the meaning of life. This unique encounter is sustained within our Christian community: the one who seeks the truth becomes the one who lives by faith (cf. Fides et Ratio, 31). It can be described as a move from "I" to "we", leading the individual to be numbered among God's people.

This same dynamic of communal identity - to whom do I belong? - vivifies the ethos of our Catholic institutions. A university or school's Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction - do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear (cf. Gaudium et Spes, 22)? Are we ready to commit our entire self - intellect and will, mind and heart - to God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools? Is it given fervent expression liturgically, sacramentally, through prayer, acts of charity, a concern for justice, and respect for God's creation? Only in this way do we really bear witness to the meaning of who we are and what we uphold.

From this perspective one can recognize that the contemporary "crisis of truth" is rooted in a "crisis of faith". Only through faith can we freely give our assent to God's testimony and acknowledge him as the transcendent guarantor of the truth he reveals. Again, we see why fostering personal intimacy with Jesus Christ and communal witness to his loving truth is indispensable in Catholic institutions of learning. Yet we all know, and observe with concern, the difficulty

or reluctance many people have today in entrusting themselves to God. It is a complex phenomenon and one which I ponder continually. While we have sought diligently to engage the intellect of our young, perhaps we have neglected the will. Subsequently we observe, with distress, the notion of freedom being distorted. Freedom is not an opting out. It is an opting in - a participation in Being itself. Hence authentic freedom can never be attained by turning away from God. Such a choice would ultimately disregard the very truth we need in order to understand ourselves. A particular responsibility therefore for each of you, and your colleagues, is to evoke among the young the desire for the act of faith, encouraging them to commit themselves to the ecclesial life that follows from this belief. It is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth. In choosing to live by that truth, we embrace the fullness of the life of faith which is given to us in the Church.

Clearly, then, Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with orthodoxy of course content. It demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith. Only in faith can truth become incarnate and reason truly human, capable of directing the will along the path of freedom (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 23). In this way our institutions make a vital contribution to the mission of the Church and truly serve society. They become places in which God's active presence in human affairs is recognized and in which every young person discovers the joy of entering into Christ's "being for others" (cf. *ibid.*, 28).

The Church's primary mission of evangelization, in which educational institutions play a crucial role, is consonant with a nation's fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person's dignity. At times, however, the value of the Church's contribution to the public forum is questioned. It is important therefore to recall that the truths of faith and of reason never contradict one another (cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3017; St. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, III, 20, 43). The Church's mission, in fact, involves her in humanity's struggle to arrive at truth. In articulating revealed truth she serves all members of society by purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths. Drawing upon divine wisdom, she sheds light on the foundation of human morality and ethics, and reminds all groups in society that it is not praxis that creates truth but truth that should serve as the basis of praxis. Far from undermining the tolerance of legitimate diversity, such a contribution illuminates the very truth which makes consensus attainable, and helps to keep public debate rational, honest and accountable. Similarly the Church never tires of upholding the essential moral categories of right and wrong, without which hope could only wither, giving way to cold pragmatic calculations of utility which render the person little more than a pawn on some ideological chess-board.

With regard to the educational forum, the diakonia of truth takes on a heightened significance in societies where secularist ideology drives a wedge between truth and faith. This division has led to a tendency to equate truth with knowledge and to adopt a positivistic mentality which, in rejecting metaphysics, denies the foundations of faith and rejects the need for a moral vision. Truth means more than knowledge: knowing the truth leads us to discover the good. Truth speaks to the individual in his or her entirety, inviting us to respond with our whole being. This optimistic vision is found in our Christian faith because such faith has been granted the vision of the Logos, God's creative Reason, which in the Incarnation, is revealed as Goodness itself. Far from being just a communication of factual data - "informative" - the loving truth of the Gospel is creative and life-changing - "performative" (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 2). With confidence, Christian educators can liberate the young from the limits of positivism and awaken receptivity to the truth, to God and his goodness. In this way you will also help to form their conscience which, enriched by faith, opens a sure path to inner peace and to respect for others.

It comes as no surprise, then, that not just our own ecclesial communities but society in general has high expectations of Catholic educators. This places upon you a responsibility and offers an opportunity. More and more people - parents in particular - recognize the need for excellence in the human formation of their children. As *Mater et Magistra*, the Church shares their concern. When nothing beyond the individual is recognized as definitive, the ultimate criterion of judgment becomes the self and the satisfaction of the individual's immediate wishes. The objectivity and perspective, which can only come through a recognition of the essential transcendent dimension of the human person, can be lost. Within such a relativistic horizon the goals of education are inevitably curtailed. Slowly, a lowering of standards occurs. We observe today a timidity in the face of the category of the good and an aimless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom. We witness an assumption that every experience is of equal worth and a reluctance to admit imperfection and mistakes. And particularly disturbing, is the reduction of the precious and delicate area of education in sexuality to management of 'risk', bereft of any reference to the beauty of conjugal love.

How might Christian educators respond? These harmful developments point to the particular urgency of what we might call "intellectual charity". This aspect of charity calls the educator to recognize that the profound responsibility to lead the young to truth is nothing less than an act of love. Indeed, the dignity of education lies in fostering the true perfection and happiness of those to be educated. In practice "intellectual charity" upholds the essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation which ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth. It guides the young towards the deep satisfaction of exercising freedom in relation to truth, and it strives to articulate the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life. Once their passion for the fullness and unity of truth has been awakened, young people will surely relish the discovery that the question of what they can know opens up the vast adventure of what they ought to do. Here they will experience "in what" and "in whom" it is possible to hope, and be inspired to contribute to society in a way that engenders hope in others.

Dear friends, I wish to conclude by focusing our attention specifically on the paramount importance of your own professionalism and witness within our Catholic universities and schools. First, let me thank you for your dedication and generosity. I know from my own days as a professor, and I have heard from your Bishops and officials of the Congregation for Catholic Education, that the reputation of Catholic institutes of learning in this country is largely due to yourselves and your predecessors. Your selfless contributions - from outstanding research to the dedication of those working in inner-city schools - serve both your country and the Church. For this I express my profound gratitude. In regard to faculty members at Catholic colleges universities, I wish to reaffirm the great value of academic freedom. In virtue of this freedom you are called to search for the truth wherever careful analysis of evidence leads you. Yet it is also the case that any appeal to the principle of academic freedom in order to justify positions that contradict the faith and the teaching of the Church would obstruct or even betray the university's identity and mission; a mission at the heart of the Church's *munus docendi* and not somehow autonomous or independent of it.

Teachers and administrators, whether in universities or schools, have the duty and privilege to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. This requires that public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church's Magisterium, shapes all aspects of an institution's life, both inside and outside the classroom. Divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and, far from advancing freedom, inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral, intellectual or spiritual.

I wish also to express a particular word of encouragement to both lay and Religious teachers of catechesis who strive to ensure that young people become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith. Religious education is a challenging apostolate, yet there are many signs of a desire among young people to learn about the faith and practice it with vigor. If this awakening is to grow, teachers require a clear and precise understanding of the specific nature and role of Catholic education. They must also be ready to lead the commitment made by the entire school community to assist our young people, and their families, to experience the harmony between faith, life and culture.

Here I wish to make a special appeal to Religious Brothers, Sisters and Priests: do not abandon the school apostolate; indeed, renew your commitment to schools especially those in poorer areas. In places where there are many hollow promises which lure young people away from the path of truth and genuine freedom, the consecrated person's witness to the evangelical counsels is an irreplaceable gift. I encourage the Religious present to bring renewed enthusiasm to the promotion of vocations. Know that your witness to the ideal of consecration and mission among the young is a source of great inspiration in faith for them and their families.

To all of you I say: bear witness to hope. Nourish your witness with prayer. Account for the hope that characterizes your lives (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) by living the truth which you propose to your students. Help them to know and love the One you have encountered, whose truth and goodness you have experienced with joy. With Saint Augustine, let us say: "we who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher" (Sermons, 23:2). With these sentiments of communion, I gladly impart to you, your colleagues and students, and to your families, my Apostolic Blessing.

### **Address to the United Nations General Assembly**

18 April 2008.

[In French]

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I begin my address to this Assembly, I would like first of all to express to you, Mr President, my sincere gratitude for your kind words. My thanks go also to the Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, for inviting me to visit the headquarters of this Organization and for the welcome that he has extended to me. I greet the Ambassadors and Diplomats from the Member States, and all those present. Through you, I greet the peoples who are represented here. They look to this institution to carry forward the founding inspiration to establish a "centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends" of peace and development (cf. *Charter of the United Nations*, article 1.2-1.4). As Pope John Paul II expressed it in 1995, the Organization should be "a moral centre where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a 'family of nations'" (*Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations on the 50th Anniversary of its Foundation*, New York, 5 October 1995, 14).

Through the United Nations, States have established universal objectives which, even if they do not coincide with the total common good of the human family, undoubtedly represent a fundamental part of that good. The founding principles of the Organization - the desire for peace, the quest for justice, respect for the dignity of the person, humanitarian cooperation and assistance - express the just aspirations of the human spirit, and constitute the ideals which should underpin international relations. As my predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II have observed from this very podium, all this is something that the Catholic Church and the Holy See follow attentively and with interest, seeing in your activity an example of how issues and conflicts concerning the world community can be subject to common regulation. The United Nations embodies the aspiration for a "greater degree of international ordering" (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 43), inspired and governed by the principle of subsidiarity, and therefore capable of responding to the demands of the human family through binding international rules and through structures capable of harmonizing the day-to-day unfolding of the lives of peoples. This is all the more necessary at a time when we experience the obvious paradox of a multilateral consensus that continues to be in crisis because it is still subordinated to the decisions of a few, whereas the world's problems call for interventions in the form of collective action by the international community.

Indeed, questions of security, development goals, reduction of local and global inequalities, protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate, require all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law, and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet. I am thinking especially of those countries in Africa and other parts of the world which remain on the margins of authentic integral development, and are therefore at risk of experiencing only the negative effects of globalization. In the context of international relations, it is necessary to recognize the higher role played by rules and structures that are intrinsically ordered to promote the common good, and therefore to safeguard human freedom. These regulations do not limit freedom. On the contrary, they promote it when they prohibit behaviour and actions which work against the common good, curb its effective exercise and hence compromise the dignity of every human person. In the name of freedom, there has to be a correlation between rights and duties, by which every person is called to assume responsibility for his or her choices, made as a consequence of entering into relations with others. Here our thoughts turn also to the way the results of scientific research and technological advances have sometimes been applied. Notwithstanding the enormous benefits that humanity can gain, some instances of this represent a clear violation of the order of creation, to the point where not only is the sacred character of life contradicted, but the human person and the family are robbed of their natural identity. Likewise, international action to preserve the environment and to protect various forms of life on earth must not only guarantee a rational use of technology and science, but must also rediscover the authentic image of creation. This never requires a choice to be made between science and ethics: rather it is a question of adopting a scientific method that is truly respectful of ethical imperatives.

Recognition of the unity of the human family, and attention to the innate dignity of every man and woman, today find renewed emphasis in the principle of the responsibility to protect. This has only recently been defined, but it was already present implicitly at the origins of the United Nations, and is now increasingly characteristic of its activity. Every State has the primary duty to protect its own population from grave and sustained violations of human rights, as well as from the consequences of humanitarian crises, whether natural or man-made. If States are unable to guarantee such protection, the international community must intervene with the juridical means provided in the United Nations Charter and in other international instruments. The action of the international community and its institutions, provided that it respects the principles undergirding the international order, should never be interpreted as an unwarranted imposition or a limitation of sovereignty. On the contrary, it is indifference or failure to intervene that do the real damage. What is needed is a deeper search for ways of pre-empting and managing conflicts by exploring every possible diplomatic avenue, and giving attention and encouragement to even the faintest sign of dialogue or desire for reconciliation.

The principle of "responsibility to protect" was considered by the ancient *ius gentium* as the foundation of every action taken by those in government with regard to the governed: at the time when the concept of national sovereign States was first developing, the Dominican Friar Francisco de Vitoria, rightly considered as a precursor of the idea of the United Nations, described this responsibility as an aspect of natural reason shared by all nations, and the result of an international order whose task it was to regulate relations between peoples. Now, as then, this principle has to invoke the idea of the person as image of the Creator, the desire for the absolute and the essence of freedom. The founding of the United Nations, as we know, coincided with the profound upheavals that humanity experienced when reference to the meaning of transcendence and natural reason was abandoned, and in consequence, freedom and human dignity were grossly violated. When this happens, it threatens the objective foundations of the values inspiring and governing the international order and it undermines the cogent and inviolable principles formulated and consolidated by the United Nations. When faced with new and insistent challenges, it is a mistake to fall back on a pragmatic approach, limited to determining "common ground", minimal in content and weak in its effect.

This reference to human dignity, which is the foundation and goal of the responsibility to protect, leads us to the theme we are specifically focusing upon this year, which marks the sixtieth anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. This document was the outcome of a convergence of different religious and cultural traditions, all of them motivated by the common desire to place the human person at the heart of institutions, laws and the workings of society, and to consider the human person essential for the world of culture, religion and science. Human rights are increasingly being presented as the common language and the ethical substratum of international relations. At the same time, the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights all serve as guarantees safeguarding human dignity. It is evident, though, that the rights recognized and expounded in the Declaration apply to everyone by virtue of the common origin of the person, who remains the high-point of God's creative design for the world and for history. They are based on the natural law inscribed on human hearts and present in different cultures and civilizations. Removing human rights from this context would mean restricting their range and yielding to a relativistic conception, according to which the meaning and interpretation of rights could vary and their universality would be denied in the name of different cultural, political, social and even religious outlooks. This great variety of viewpoints must not be allowed to obscure the fact that not only rights are universal, but so too is the human person, the subject of those rights.

*[Continuing in English]*

The life of the community, both domestically and internationally, clearly demonstrates that respect for rights, and the guarantees that follow from them, are measures of the common good that serve to evaluate the relationship between justice and injustice, development and poverty, security and conflict. The promotion of human rights remains the most

effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security. Indeed, the victims of hardship and despair, whose human dignity is violated with impunity, become easy prey to the call to violence, and they can then become violators of peace. The common good that human rights help to accomplish cannot, however, be attained merely by applying correct procedures, nor even less by achieving a balance between competing rights. The merit of the *Universal Declaration* is that it has enabled different cultures, juridical expressions and institutional models to converge around a fundamental nucleus of values, and hence of rights. Today, though, efforts need to be redoubled in the face of pressure to reinterpret the foundations of the *Declaration* and to compromise its inner unity so as to facilitate a move away from the protection of human dignity towards the satisfaction of simple interests, often particular interests. The Declaration was adopted as a "common standard of achievement" (*Preamble*) and cannot be applied piecemeal, according to trends or selective choices that merely run the risk of contradicting the unity of the human person and thus the indivisibility of human rights.

Experience shows that legality often prevails over justice when the insistence upon rights makes them appear as the exclusive result of legislative enactments or normative decisions taken by the various agencies of those in power. When presented purely in terms of legality, rights risk becoming weak propositions divorced from the ethical and rational dimension which is their foundation and their goal. The *Universal Declaration*, rather, has reinforced the conviction that respect for human rights is principally rooted in unchanging justice, on which the binding force of international proclamations is also based. This aspect is often overlooked when the attempt is made to deprive rights of their true function in the name of a narrowly utilitarian perspective. Since rights and the resulting duties follow naturally from human interaction, it is easy to forget that they are the fruit of a commonly held sense of justice built primarily upon solidarity among the members of society, and hence valid at all times and for all peoples. This intuition was expressed as early as the fifth century by Augustine of Hippo, one of the masters of our intellectual heritage. He taught that the saying: *Do not do to others what you would not want done to you* "cannot in any way vary according to the different understandings that have arisen in the world" (*De Doctrina Christiana*, III, 14). Human rights, then, must be respected as an expression of justice, and not merely because they are enforceable through the will of the legislators.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As history proceeds, new situations arise, and the attempt is made to link them to new rights. Discernment, that is, the capacity to distinguish good from evil, becomes even more essential in the context of demands that concern the very lives and conduct of persons, communities and peoples. In tackling the theme of rights, since important situations and profound realities are involved, discernment is both an indispensable and a fruitful virtue.

Discernment, then, shows that entrusting exclusively to individual States, with their laws and institutions, the final responsibility to meet the aspirations of persons, communities and entire peoples, can sometimes have consequences that exclude the possibility of a social order respectful of the dignity and rights of the person. On the other hand, a vision of life firmly anchored in the religious dimension can help to achieve this, since recognition of the transcendent value of every man and woman favours conversion of heart, which then leads to a commitment to resist violence, terrorism and war, and to promote justice and peace. This also provides the proper context for the inter-religious dialogue that the United Nations is called to support, just as it supports dialogue in other areas of human activity. Dialogue should be recognized as the means by which the various components of society can articulate their point of view and build consensus around the truth concerning particular values or goals. It pertains to the nature of religions, freely practised, that they can autonomously conduct a dialogue of thought and life. If at this level, too, the religious sphere is kept separate from political action, then great benefits ensue for individuals and communities. On the other hand, the United Nations can count on the results of dialogue between religions, and can draw fruit from the willingness of believers to place their experiences at the service of the common good. Their task is to propose a vision of faith not in terms of intolerance, discrimination and conflict, but in terms of complete respect for truth, coexistence, rights, and reconciliation.

Human rights, of course, must include the right to religious freedom, understood as the expression of a dimension that is at once individual and communitarian - a vision that brings out the unity of the person while clearly distinguishing between the dimension of the citizen and that of the believer. The activity of the United Nations in recent years has ensured that public debate gives space to viewpoints inspired by a religious vision in all its dimensions, including ritual, worship, education, dissemination of information and the freedom to profess and choose religion. It is inconceivable, then, that believers should have to suppress a part of themselves - their faith - in order to be active citizens. It should never be necessary to deny God in order to enjoy one's rights. The rights associated with religion are all the more in need of protection if they are considered to clash with a prevailing secular ideology or with majority religious positions of an exclusive nature. The full guarantee of religious liberty cannot be limited to the free exercise of worship, but has to give due consideration to the public dimension of religion, and hence to the possibility of believers playing their part in building the social order. Indeed, they actually do so, for example through their influential and generous involvement in a vast network of initiatives which extend from Universities, scientific institutions and schools to health care agencies and charitable organizations in the service of the poorest and most marginalized. Refusal to recognize the contribution to society that is rooted in the religious dimension and in the quest for the Absolute - by its nature, expressing communion between persons - would effectively privilege an individualistic approach, and would fragment the unity of the person.



My presence at this Assembly is a sign of esteem for the United Nations, and it is intended to express the hope that the Organization will increasingly serve as a sign of unity between States and an instrument of service to the entire human family. It also demonstrates the willingness of the Catholic Church to offer her proper contribution to building international relations in a way that allows every person and every people to feel they can make a difference. In a manner that is consistent with her contribution in the ethical and moral sphere and the free activity of her faithful, the Church also works for the realization of these goals through the international activity of the Holy See. Indeed, the Holy See has always had a place at the assemblies of the Nations, thereby manifesting its specific character as a subject in the international domain. As the United Nations recently confirmed, the Holy See thereby makes its contribution according to the dispositions of international law, helps to define that law, and makes appeal to it.

The United Nations remains a privileged setting in which the Church is committed to contributing her experience "of humanity", developed over the centuries among peoples of every race and culture, and placing it at the disposal of all members of the international community. This experience and activity, directed towards attaining freedom for every believer, seeks also to increase the protection given to the rights of the person. Those rights are grounded and shaped by the transcendent nature of the person, which permits men and women to pursue their journey of faith and their search for God in this world. Recognition of this dimension must be strengthened if we are to sustain humanity's hope for a better world and if we are to create the conditions for peace, development, cooperation, and guarantee of rights for future generations.

In my recent Encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, I indicated that "every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs" (no. 25). For Christians, this task is motivated by the hope drawn from the saving work of Jesus Christ. That is why the Church is happy to be associated with the activity of this distinguished Organization, charged with the responsibility of promoting peace and good will throughout the earth. Dear Friends, I thank you for this opportunity to address you today, and I promise you of the support of my prayers as you pursue your noble task.

#### **Ecumenical Meeting at St. Joseph's Church, New York**

*18 April 2008.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, My heart abounds with gratitude to Almighty God - "the Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:6) - for this blessed opportunity to gather with you this evening in prayer. I thank Bishop Dennis Sullivan for his cordial welcome, and I warmly greet all those in attendance representing Christian communities throughout the United States. May the peace of our Lord and Savior be with you all!

Through you, I express my sincere appreciation for the invaluable work of all those engaged in ecumenism: the National Council of Churches, Christian Churches Together, the Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, and many others. The contribution of Christians in the United States to the ecumenical movement is felt throughout the world. I encourage all of you to persevere, always relying on the grace of the risen Christ whom we strive to serve by bringing about "the obedience of faith for the sake of his name" (Rom 1:5).

We have just listened to the scriptural passage in which Paul - a "prisoner for the Lord" - delivers his ardent appeal to the members of the Christian community at Ephesus. "I beg you," he writes, "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called ... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3). Then, after his impassioned litany of unity, Paul reminds his hearers that Jesus, having ascended into heaven, has bestowed upon men and women all the gifts necessary for building up the Body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:11-13).

Paul's exhortation resounds with no less vigor today. His words instill in us the confidence that the Lord will never abandon us in our quest for unity. They also call us to live in a way that bears witness to the "one heart and mind" (Acts 4:32), which has always been the distinguishing trait of Christian koinonia (cf. Acts 2:42), and the force drawing others to join the community of believers so that they too might come to share in the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8; cf. Acts 2:47; 5:14).

Globalization has humanity poised between two poles. On the one hand, there is a growing sense of interconnectedness and interdependency between peoples even when - geographically and culturally speaking - they are far apart. This new situation offers the potential for enhancing a sense of global solidarity and shared responsibility for the well-being of mankind. On the other hand, we cannot deny that the rapid changes occurring in our world also present some disturbing signs of fragmentation and a retreat into individualism. The expanding use of electronic communications has in some cases paradoxically resulted in greater isolation. Many people - including the young - are seeking therefore more authentic forms of community. Also of grave concern is the spread of a secularist ideology that undermines or even rejects transcendent truth. The very possibility of divine revelation, and therefore of Christian faith, is often placed into question by cultural trends widely present in academia, the mass media and public debate. For these reasons, a faithful witness to the Gospel is as urgent as ever. Christians are challenged to give a clear account of the hope that they hold (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

Too often those who are not Christians, as they observe the splintering of Christian communities, are understandably confused about the Gospel message itself. Fundamental Christian beliefs and practices are sometimes changed within communities by so-called "prophetic actions" that are based on a hermeneutic not always consonant with the datum of Scripture and Tradition. Communities consequently give up the attempt to act as a unified body, choosing instead to function according to the idea of "local options". Somewhere in this process the need for diachronic koinonia -



communion with the Church in every age - is lost, just at the time when the world is losing its bearings and needs a persuasive common witness to the saving power of the Gospel (cf. Rom 1:18-23).

Faced with these difficulties, we must first recall that the unity of the Church flows from the perfect oneness of the Trinitarian God. In John's Gospel, we are told that Jesus prayed to his Father that his disciples might be one, "just as you are in me and I am in you" (Jn 17:21). This passage reflects the unwavering conviction of the early Christian community that its unity was both caused by, and is reflective of, the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This, in turn, suggests that the internal cohesion of believers was based on the sound integrity of their doctrinal confession (cf. 1 Tim 1:3-11). Throughout the New Testament, we find that the Apostles were repeatedly called to give an account for their faith to both Gentiles (cf. Acts 17:16-34) and Jews (cf. Acts 4:5-22; 5:27-42). The core of their argument was always the historical fact of Jesus's bodily resurrection from the tomb (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30). The ultimate effectiveness of their preaching did not depend on "lofty words" or "human wisdom" (1 Cor 2:13), but rather on the work of the Spirit (Eph 3:5) who confirmed the authoritative witness of the Apostles (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-11). The nucleus of Paul's preaching and that of the early Church was none other than Jesus Christ, and "him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). But this proclamation had to be guaranteed by the purity of normative doctrine expressed in creedal formulae - symbola - which articulated the essence of the Christian faith and constituted the foundation for the unity of the baptized (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5; Gal 1:6-9; Unitatis Redintegratio, 2).

My dear friends, the power of the kerygma has lost none of its internal dynamism. Yet we must ask ourselves whether its full force has not been attenuated by a relativistic approach to Christian doctrine similar to that found in secular ideologies, which, in alleging that science alone is "objective", relegate religion entirely to the subjective sphere of individual feeling. Scientific discoveries, and their application through human ingenuity, undoubtedly offer new possibilities for the betterment of humankind. This does not mean, however, that the "knowable" is limited to the empirically verifiable, nor religion restricted to the shifting realm of "personal experience".

For Christians to accept this faulty line of reasoning would lead to the notion that there is little need to emphasize objective truth in the presentation of the Christian faith, for one need but follow his or her own conscience and choose a community that best suits his or her individual tastes. The result is seen in the continual proliferation of communities which often eschew institutional structures and minimize the importance of doctrinal content for Christian living.

Even within the ecumenical movement, Christians may be reluctant to assert the role of doctrine for fear that it would only exacerbate rather than heal the wounds of division. Yet a clear, convincing testimony to the salvation wrought for us in Christ Jesus has to be based upon the notion of normative apostolic teaching: a teaching which indeed underlies the inspired word of God and sustains the sacramental life of Christians today.

Only by "holding fast" to sound teaching (2 Thess 2:15; cf. Rev 2:12-29) will we be able to respond to the challenges that confront us in an evolving world. Only in this way will we give unambiguous testimony to the truth of the Gospel and its moral teaching. This is the message which the world is waiting to hear from us. Like the early Christians, we have a responsibility to give transparent witness to the "reasons for our hope", so that the eyes of all men and women of goodwill may be opened to see that God has shown us his face (cf. 2 Cor 3:12-18) and granted us access to his divine life through Jesus Christ. He alone is our hope! God has revealed his love for all peoples through the mystery of his Son's passion and death, and has called us to proclaim that he is indeed risen, has taken his place at the right hand of the Father, and "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" (Nicene Creed).

May the word of God we have heard this evening inflame our hearts with hope on the path to unity (cf. Lk 24:32). May this prayer service exemplify the centrality of prayer in the ecumenical movement (cf. Unitatis Redintegratio, 8); for without it, ecumenical structures, institutions and programs would be deprived of their heart and soul. Let us give thanks to Almighty God for the progress that has been made through the work of his Spirit, as we acknowledge with gratitude the personal sacrifices made by so many present and by those who have gone before us.

By following in their footsteps, and by placing our trust in God alone, I am confident that - to borrow the words of Father Paul Wattson - we will achieve the "oneness of hope, oneness of faith, and oneness of love" that alone will convince the world that Jesus Christ is the one sent by the Father for the salvation of all.

I thank you all.

### **Homily, Mass for Clergy and Religious, St. Patrick's Cathedral**

*Saturday 19 April 2008,*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, With great affection in the Lord, I greet all of you, who represent the Bishops, priests and deacons, the men and women in consecrated life, and the seminarians of the United States. I thank Cardinal Egan for his warm welcome and the good wishes which he has expressed in your name as I begin the fourth year of my papal ministry. I am happy to celebrate this Mass with you, who have been chosen by the Lord, who have answered his call, and who devote your lives to the pursuit of holiness, the spread of the Gospel and the building up of the Church in faith, hope and love.

Gathered as we are in this historic cathedral, how can we not think of the countless men and women who have gone before us, who labored for the growth of the Church in the United States, and left us a lasting legacy of faith and good works? In today's first reading we saw how, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles went forth from the Upper Room to proclaim God's mighty works to people of every nation and tongue. In this country, the Church's mission has always involved drawing people "from every nation under heaven" (cf. Acts 2:5) into spiritual unity, and enriching the

Body of Christ by the variety of their gifts. As we give thanks for past blessings, and look to the challenges of the future, let us implore from God the grace of a new Pentecost for the Church in America. May tongues of fire, combining burning love of God and neighbor with zeal for the spread of Christ's Kingdom, descend on all present! In this morning's second reading, Saint Paul reminds us that spiritual unity – the unity which reconciles and enriches diversity – has its origin and supreme model in the life of the triune God. As a communion of pure love and infinite freedom, the Blessed Trinity constantly brings forth new life in the work of creation and redemption. The Church, as "a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Spirit" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4), is called to proclaim the gift of life, to serve life, and to promote a culture of life. Here in this cathedral, our thoughts turn naturally to the heroic witness to the Gospel of life borne by the late Cardinals Cooke and O'Connor. The proclamation of life, life in abundance, must be the heart of the new evangelization. For true life – our salvation – can only be found in the reconciliation, freedom and love which are God's gracious gift.

This is the message of hope we are called to proclaim and embody in a world where self-centeredness, greed, violence, and cynicism so often seem to choke the fragile growth of grace in people's hearts. Saint Irenaeus, with great insight, understood that the command which Moses enjoined upon the people of Israel: "Choose life!" (*Dt* 30:19) was the ultimate reason for our obedience to all God's commandments (cf. *Adv. Haer.* IV, 16, 2-5). Perhaps we have lost sight of this: in a society where the Church seems legalistic and "institutional" to many people, our most urgent challenge is to communicate the joy born of faith and the experience of God's love.

I am particularly happy that we have gathered in Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Perhaps more than any other church in the United States, this place is known and loved as "a house of prayer for all peoples" (cf. *Is* 56:7; *Mk* 11:17). Each day thousands of men, women and children enter its doors and find peace within its walls. Archbishop John Hughes, who – as Cardinal Egan has reminded us – was responsible for building this venerable edifice, wished it to rise in pure Gothic style. He wanted this cathedral to remind the young Church in America of the great spiritual tradition to which it was heir, and to inspire it to bring the best of that heritage to the building up of Christ's body in this land. I would like to draw your attention to a few aspects of this beautiful structure which I think can serve as a starting point for a reflection on our particular vocations within the unity of the Mystical Body.

The first has to do with the stained glass windows, which flood the interior with mystic light. From the outside, those windows are dark, heavy, even dreary. But once one enters the church, they suddenly come alive; reflecting the light passing through them, they reveal all their splendor. Many writers – here in America we can think of Nathaniel Hawthorne – have used the image of stained glass to illustrate the mystery of the Church herself. It is only from the inside, from the experience of faith and ecclesial life, that we see the Church as she truly is: flooded with grace, resplendent in beauty, adorned by the manifold gifts of the Spirit. It follows that we, who live the life of grace within the Church's communion, are called to draw all people into this mystery of light.

This is no easy task in a world which can tend to look at the Church, like those stained glass windows, "from the outside": a world which deeply senses a need for spirituality, yet finds it difficult to "enter into" the mystery of the Church. Even for those of us within, the light of faith can be dimmed by routine, and the splendor of the Church obscured by the sins and weaknesses of her members. It can be dimmed too, by the obstacles encountered in a society which sometimes seems to have forgotten God and to resent even the most elementary demands of Christian morality. You, who have devoted your lives to bearing witness to the love of Christ and the building up of his Body, know from your daily contact with the world around us how tempting it is at times to give way to frustration, disappointment and even pessimism about the future. In a word, it is not always easy to see the light of the Spirit all about us, the splendor of the Risen Lord illuminating our lives and instilling renewed hope in his victory over the world (cf. *Jn* 16:33).

Yet the word of God reminds us that, in faith, we see the heavens opened, and the grace of the Holy Spirit lighting up the Church and bringing sure hope to our world. "O Lord, my God," the Psalmist sings, "when you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (*Ps* 104:30). These words evoke the first creation, when the Spirit of God hovered over the deep (cf. *Gen* 1:2). And they look forward to the new creation, at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and established the Church as the first fruits of a redeemed humanity (cf. *Jn* 20:22-23). These words summon us to ever deeper faith in God's infinite power to transform every human situation, to create life from death, and to light up even the darkest night. And they make us think of another magnificent phrase of Saint Irenaeus: "where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace" (*Adv. Haer.* III, 24, 1).

This leads me to a further reflection about the architecture of this church. Like all Gothic cathedrals, it is a highly complex structure, whose exact and harmonious proportions symbolize the unity of God's creation. Medieval artists often portrayed Christ, the creative Word of God, as a heavenly "geometer", compass in hand, who orders the cosmos with infinite wisdom and purpose. Does this not bring to mind our need to see all things with the eyes of faith, and thus to grasp them in their truest perspective, in the unity of God's eternal plan? This requires, as we know, constant conversion, and a commitment to acquiring "a fresh, spiritual way of thinking" (cf. *Eph* 4:23). It also calls for the cultivation of those virtues which enable each of us to grow in holiness and to bear spiritual fruit within our particular state of life. Is not this ongoing "intellectual" conversion as necessary as "moral" conversion for our own growth in faith, our discernment of the signs of the times, and our personal contribution to the Church's life and mission? For all of us, I think, one of the great disappointments which followed the Second Vatican Council, with its call for a

greater engagement in the Church's mission to the world, has been the experience of division between different groups, different generations, different members of the same religious family. We can only move forward if we turn our gaze together to Christ! In the light of faith, we will then discover the wisdom and strength needed to open ourselves to points of view which may not necessarily conform to our own ideas or assumptions. Thus we can value the perspectives of others, be they younger or older than ourselves, and ultimately hear "what the Spirit is saying" to us and to the Church (cf. *Rev* 2:7). In this way, we will move together towards that true spiritual renewal desired by the Council, a renewal which can only strengthen the Church in that holiness and unity indispensable for the effective proclamation of the Gospel in today's world.

Was not this unity of vision and purpose – rooted in faith and a spirit of constant conversion and self-sacrifice – the secret of the impressive growth of the Church in this country? We need but think of the remarkable accomplishment of that exemplary American priest, the Venerable Michael McGivney, whose vision and zeal led to the establishment of the Knights of Columbus, or of the legacy of the generations of religious and priests who quietly devoted their lives to serving the People of God in countless schools, hospitals and parishes.

Here, within the context of our need for the perspective given by faith, and for unity and cooperation in the work of building up the Church, I would like say a word about the sexual abuse that has caused so much suffering. I have already had occasion to speak of this, and of the resulting damage to the community of the faithful. Here I simply wish to assure you, dear priests and religious, of my spiritual closeness as you strive to respond with Christian hope to the continuing challenges that this situation presents. I join you in praying that this will be a time of purification for each and every particular Church and religious community, and a time for healing. I also encourage you to cooperate with your bishops who continue to work effectively to resolve this issue. May our Lord Jesus Christ grant the Church in America a renewed sense of unity and purpose, as all – Bishops, clergy, religious and laity – move forward in hope, in love for the truth and for one another.

Dear friends, these considerations lead me to a final observation about this great cathedral in which we find ourselves. The unity of a Gothic cathedral, we know, is not the static unity of a classical temple, but a unity born of the dynamic tension of diverse forces which impel the architecture upward, pointing it to heaven. Here too, we can see a symbol of the Church's unity, which is the unity – as Saint Paul has told us – of a living body composed of many different members, each with its own role and purpose. Here too we see our need to acknowledge and reverence the gifts of each and every member of the body as "manifestations of the Spirit given for the good of all" (*1 Cor* 12:7). Certainly within the Church's divinely-willed structure there is a distinction to be made between hierarchical and charismatic gifts (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). Yet the very variety and richness of the graces bestowed by the Spirit invite us constantly to discern how these gifts are to be rightly ordered in the service of the Church's mission. You, dear priests, by sacramental ordination have been configured to Christ, the Head of the Body. You, dear deacons, have been ordained for the service of that Body. You, dear men and women religious, both contemplative and apostolic, have devoted your lives to following the divine Master in generous love and complete devotion to his Gospel. All of you, who fill this cathedral today, as well as your retired, elderly and infirm brothers and sisters, who unite their prayers and sacrifices to your labors, are called to be forces of unity within Christ's Body. By your personal witness, and your fidelity to the ministry or apostolate entrusted to you, you prepare a path for the Spirit. For the Spirit never ceases to pour out his abundant gifts, to awaken new vocations and missions, and to guide the Church, as our Lord promised in this morning's Gospel, into the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13).

So let us lift our gaze upward! And with great humility and confidence, let us ask the Spirit to enable us each day to grow in the holiness that will make us living stones in the temple which he is even now raising up in the midst of our world. If we are to be true forces of unity, let us be the first to seek inner reconciliation through penance. Let us forgive the wrongs we have suffered and put aside all anger and contention. Let us be the first to demonstrate the humility and purity of heart which are required to approach the splendor of God's truth. In fidelity to the deposit of faith entrusted to the Apostles (cf. *1 Tim* 6:20), let us be joyful witnesses of the transforming power of the Gospel!

Dear brothers and sisters, in the finest traditions of the Church in this country, may you also be the first friend of the poor, the homeless, the stranger, the sick and all who suffer. Act as beacons of hope, casting the light of Christ upon the world, and encouraging young people to discover the beauty of a life given completely to the Lord and his Church. I make this plea in a particular way to the many seminarians and young religious present. All of you have a special place in my heart. Never forget that you are called to carry on, with all the enthusiasm and joy that the Spirit has given you, a work that others have begun, a legacy that one day you too will have to pass on to a new generation. Work generously and joyfully, for he whom you serve is the Lord!

The spires of Saint Patrick's Cathedral are dwarfed by the skyscrapers of the Manhattan skyline, yet in the heart of this busy metropolis, they are a vivid reminder of the constant yearning of the human spirit to rise to God. As we celebrate this Eucharist, let us thank the Lord for allowing us to know him in the communion of the Church, to cooperate in building up his Mystical Body, and in bringing his saving word as good news to the men and women of our time. And when we leave this great church, let us go forth as heralds of hope in the midst of this city, and all those places where God's grace has placed us. In this way, the Church in America will know a new springtime in the Spirit, and point the way to that other, greater city, the new Jerusalem, whose light is the Lamb (*Rev* 21:23). For there God is even now preparing for all people a banquet of unending joy and life. Amen.

**St. Joseph's Seminary (Dunwoodie), Archdiocese of New York**

### **Address to Youth with Disabilities**

Your Eminence, Bishop Walsh, Dear Friends, I am very happy to have this opportunity to spend a brief moment with you. I thank Cardinal Egan for his welcome and especially thank your representatives for their kind words and for the gift of the drawing. Know that it is a special joy for me to be with you. Please give my greetings to your parents and family members, and your teachers and caregivers.

God has blessed you with life, and with differing talents and gifts. Through these you are able to serve him and society in various ways. While some people's contributions seem great and others' more modest, the witness value of our efforts is always a sign of hope for everyone.

Sometimes it is challenging to find a reason for what appears only as a difficulty to be overcome or even pain to be endured. Yet our faith helps us to break open the horizon beyond our own selves in order to see life as God does.

God's unconditional love, which bathes every human individual, points to a meaning and purpose for all human life.

Through his Cross, Jesus in fact draws us into his saving love (cf. Jn 12:32) and in so doing shows us the way ahead - the way of hope which transfigures us all, so that we too, become bearers of that hope and charity for others.

Dear friends, I encourage you all to pray every day for our world. There are so many intentions and people you can pray for, including those who have yet to come to know Jesus. And please do continue to pray for me. As you know I have just had another birthday. Time passes!

Thank you all again, including the Cathedral of Saint Patrick Young Singers and the members of the Archdiocesan Deaf Choir. As a sign of strength and peace and with great affection in our Lord, I impart to you and your families, teachers and caregivers my Apostolic Blessing.

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### **Address to Seminarians and Youth:**

Your Eminence, Dear Brother Bishops, Dear Young Friends, "Proclaim the Lord Christ ... and always have your answer ready for people who ask the reason for the hope that is within you" (1 Pet 3:15). With these words from the First Letter of Peter I greet each of you with heartfelt affection. I thank Cardinal Egan for his kind words of welcome and I also thank the representatives chosen from among you for their gestures of welcome. To Bishop Walsh, Rector of Saint Joseph Seminary, staff and seminarians, I offer my special greetings and gratitude.

Young friends, I am very happy to have the opportunity to speak with you. Please pass on my warm greetings to your family members and relatives, and to the teachers and staff of the various schools, colleges and universities you attend. I know that many people have worked hard to ensure that our gathering could take place. I am most grateful to them all. Also, I wish to acknowledge your singing to me Happy Birthday! Thank you for this moving gesture; I give you all an "A plus" for your German pronunciation! This evening I wish to share with you some thoughts about being disciples of Jesus Christ ? walking in the Lord's footsteps, our own lives become a journey of hope.

In front of you are the images of six ordinary men and women who grew up to lead extraordinary lives. The Church honors them as Venerable, Blessed, or Saint: each responded to the Lord's call to a life of charity and each served him here, in the alleys, streets and suburbs of New York. I am struck by what a remarkably diverse group they are: poor and rich, lay men and women - one a wealthy wife and mother - priests and sisters, immigrants from afar, the daughter of a Mohawk warrior father and Algonquin mother, another a Haitian slave, and a Cuban intellectual.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Saint John Neumann, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, Venerable Pierre Toussaint, and Padre Felix Varela: any one of us could be among them, for there is no stereotype to this group, no single mold. Yet a closer look reveals that there are common elements. Inflamed with the love of Jesus, their lives became remarkable journeys of hope. For some, that meant leaving home and embarking on a pilgrim journey of thousands of miles. For each there was an act of abandonment to God, in the confidence that he is the final destination of every pilgrim. And all offered an outstretched hand of hope to those they encountered along the way, often awakening in them a life of faith. Through orphanages, schools and hospitals, by befriending the poor, the sick and the marginalized, and through the compelling witness that comes from walking humbly in the footsteps of Jesus, these six people laid open the way of faith, hope and charity to countless individuals, including perhaps your own ancestors.

And what of today? Who bears witness to the Good News of Jesus on the streets of New York, in the troubled neighborhoods of large cities, in the places where the young gather, seeking someone in whom they can trust? God is our origin and our destination, and Jesus the way. The path of that journey twists and turns ? just as it did for our saints ? through the joys and the trials of ordinary, everyday life: within your families, at school or college, during your recreation activities, and in your parish communities. All these places are marked by the culture in which you are growing up. As young Americans you are offered many opportunities for personal development, and you are brought up with a sense of generosity, service and fairness. Yet you do not need me to tell you that there are also difficulties: activities and mindsets which stifle hope, pathways which seem to lead to happiness and fulfillment but in fact end only in confusion and fear.

My own years as a teenager were marred by a sinister regime that thought it had all the answers; its influence grew - infiltrating schools and civic bodies, as well as politics and even religion - before it was fully recognized for the monster it was. It banished God and thus became impervious to anything true and good. Many of your grandparents and great-grandparents will have recounted the horror of the destruction that ensued. Indeed, some of them came to America precisely to escape such terror.

Let us thank God that today many people of your generation are able to enjoy the liberties which have arisen through the extension of democracy and respect for human rights. Let us thank God for all those who strive to ensure that you can grow up in an environment that nurtures what is beautiful, good, and true: your parents and grandparents, your teachers and priests, those civic leaders who seek what is right and just.

The power to destroy does, however, remain. To pretend otherwise would be to fool ourselves. Yet, it never triumphs; it is defeated. This is the essence of the hope that defines us as Christians; and the Church recalls this most dramatically during the Easter Triduum and celebrates it with great joy in the season of Easter! The One who shows us the way beyond death is the One who shows us how to overcome destruction and fear: thus it is Jesus who is the true teacher of life (cf. Spe Salvi, 6). His death and resurrection mean that we can say to the Father "you have restored us to life!" (Prayer after Communion, Good Friday). And so, just a few weeks ago, during the beautiful Easter Vigil liturgy, it was not from despair or fear that we cried out to God for our world, but with hope-filled confidence: dispel the darkness of our heart! dispel the darkness of our minds! (cf. Prayer at the Lighting of the Easter Candle).

What might that darkness be? What happens when people, especially the most vulnerable, encounter a clenched fist of repression or manipulation rather than a hand of hope? A first group of examples pertains to the heart. Here, the dreams and longings that young people pursue can so easily be shattered or destroyed. I am thinking of those affected by drug and substance abuse, homelessness and poverty, racism, violence, and degradation - especially of girls and women. While the causes of these problems are complex, all have in common a poisoned attitude of mind which results in people being treated as mere objects? a callousness of heart takes hold which first ignores, then ridicules, the God-given dignity of every human being. Such tragedies also point to what might have been and what could be, were there other hands - your hands - reaching out. I encourage you to invite others, especially the vulnerable and the innocent, to join you along the way of goodness and hope.

The second area of darkness - that which affects the mind - often goes unnoticed, and for this reason is particularly sinister. The manipulation of truth distorts our perception of reality, and tarnishes our imagination and aspirations. I have already mentioned the many liberties which you are fortunate enough to enjoy. The fundamental importance of freedom must be rigorously safeguarded. It is no surprise then that numerous individuals and groups vociferously claim their freedom in the public forum. Yet freedom is a delicate value. It can be misunderstood or misused so as to lead not to the happiness which we all expect it to yield, but to a dark arena of manipulation in which our understanding of self and the world becomes confused, or even distorted by those who have an ulterior agenda.

Have you noticed how often the call for freedom is made without ever referring to the truth of the human person? Some today argue that respect for freedom of the individual makes it wrong to seek truth, including the truth about what is good. In some circles to speak of truth is seen as controversial or divisive, and consequently best kept in the private sphere. And in truth's place - or better said its absence - an idea has spread which, in giving value to everything indiscriminately, claims to assure freedom and to liberate conscience. This we call relativism. But what purpose has a "freedom" which, in disregarding truth, pursues what is false or wrong? How many young people have been offered a hand which in the name of freedom or experience has led them to addiction, to moral or intellectual confusion, to hurt, to a loss of self-respect, even to despair and so tragically and sadly to the taking of their own life? Dear friends, truth is not an imposition. Nor is it simply a set of rules. It is a discovery of the One who never fails us; the One whom we can always trust. In seeking truth we come to live by belief because ultimately truth is a person: Jesus Christ. That is why authentic freedom is not an opting out. It is an opting in; nothing less than letting go of self and allowing oneself to be drawn into Christ's very being for others (cf. Spe Salvi, 28).

How then can we as believers help others to walk the path of freedom which brings fulfillment and lasting happiness? Let us again turn to the saints. How did their witness truly free others from the darkness of heart and mind? The answer is found in the kernel of their faith; the kernel of our faith. The Incarnation, the birth of Jesus, tells us that God does indeed find a place among us. Though the inn is full, he enters through the stable, and there are people who see his light. They recognize Herod's dark closed world for what it is, and instead follow the bright guiding star of the night sky. And what shines forth? Here you might recall the prayer uttered on the most holy night of Easter: "Father we share in the light of your glory through your Son the light of the world ... inflame us with your hope!" (Blessing of the Fire).

And so, in solemn procession with our lighted candles we pass the light of Christ among us. It is "the light which dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy, casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride" (Exsultet). This is Christ's light at work. This is the way of the saints. It is a magnificent vision of hope - Christ's light beckons you to be guiding stars for others, walking Christ's way of forgiveness, reconciliation, humility, joy and peace.

At times, however, we are tempted to close in on ourselves, to doubt the strength of Christ's radiance, to limit the horizon of hope. Take courage! Fix your gaze on our saints. The diversity of their experience of God's presence prompts us to discover anew the breadth and depth of Christianity. Let your imaginations soar freely along the limitless expanse of the horizons of Christian discipleship. Sometimes we are looked upon as people who speak only of prohibitions. Nothing could be further from the truth! Authentic Christian discipleship is marked by a sense of wonder. We stand before the God we know and love as a friend, the vastness of his creation, and the beauty of our Christian faith.

Dear friends, the example of the saints invites us, then, to consider four essential aspects of the treasure of our faith: personal prayer and silence, liturgical prayer, charity in action, and vocations.

What matters most is that you develop your personal relationship with God. That relationship is expressed in prayer. God by his very nature speaks, hears, and replies. Indeed, Saint Paul reminds us: we can and should "pray constantly" (1 Thess 5:17). Far from turning in on ourselves or withdrawing from the ups and downs of life, by praying we turn towards God and through him to each other, including the marginalized and those following ways other than God's path (cf. Spe Salvi, 33). As the saints teach us so vividly, prayer becomes hope in action. Christ was their constant companion, with whom they conversed at every step of their journey for others.

There is another aspect of prayer which we need to remember: silent contemplation. Saint John, for example, tells us that to embrace God's revelation we must first listen, then respond by proclaiming what we have heard and seen (cf. 1 Jn 1:2-3; Dei Verbum, 1). Have we perhaps lost something of the art of listening? Do you leave space to hear God's whisper, calling you forth into goodness? Friends, do not be afraid of silence or stillness, listen to God, adore him in the Eucharist. Let his word shape your journey as an unfolding of holiness.

In the liturgy we find the whole Church at prayer. The word liturgy means the participation of God's people in "the work of Christ the Priest and of His Body which is the Church" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 7). What is that work? First of all it refers to Christ's Passion, his Death and Resurrection, and his Ascension - what we call the Paschal Mystery. It also refers to the celebration of the liturgy itself. The two meanings are in fact inseparably linked because this "work of Jesus" is the real content of the liturgy. Through the liturgy, the "work of Jesus" is continually brought into contact with history; with our lives in order to shape them. Here we catch another glimpse of the grandeur of our Christian faith. Whenever you gather for Mass, when you go to Confession, whenever you celebrate any of the sacraments, Jesus is at work. Through the Holy Spirit, he draws you to himself, into his sacrificial love of the Father which becomes love for all. We see then that the Church's liturgy is a ministry of hope for humanity. Your faithful participation, is an active hope which helps to keep the world - saints and sinners alike - open to God; this is the truly human hope we offer everyone (cf. Spe Salvi, 34).

Your personal prayer, your times of silent contemplation, and your participation in the Church's liturgy, bring you closer to God and also prepare you to serve others. The saints accompanying us this evening show us that the life of faith and hope is also a life of charity. Contemplating Jesus on the Cross we see love in its most radical form. We can begin to imagine the path of love along which we must move (cf. Deus Caritas Est, 12). The opportunities to make this journey are abundant. Look about you with Christ's eyes, listen with his ears, feel and think with his heart and mind. Are you ready to give all as he did for truth and justice? Many of the examples of the suffering which our saints responded to with compassion are still found here in this city and beyond. And new injustices have arisen: some are complex and stem from the exploitation of the heart and manipulation of the mind; even our common habitat, the earth itself, groans under the weight of consumerist greed and irresponsible exploitation. We must listen deeply. We must respond with a renewed social action that stems from the universal love that knows no bounds. In this way, we ensure that our works of mercy and justice become hope in action for others.

Dear young people, finally I wish to share a word about vocations. First of all my thoughts go to your parents, grandparents and godparents. They have been your primary educators in the faith. By presenting you for baptism, they made it possible for you to receive the greatest gift of your life. On that day you entered into the holiness of God himself. You became adoptive sons and daughters of the Father. You were incorporated into Christ. You were made a dwelling place of his Spirit. Let us pray for mothers and fathers throughout the world, particularly those who may be struggling in any way - socially, materially, spiritually. Let us honor the vocation of matrimony and the dignity of family life. Let us always appreciate that it is in families that vocations are given life.

Gathered here at Saint Joseph Seminary, I greet the seminarians present and indeed encourage all seminarians throughout America. I am glad to know that your numbers are increasing! The People of God look to you to be holy priests, on a daily journey of conversion, inspiring in others the desire to enter more deeply into the ecclesial life of believers. I urge you to deepen your friendship with Jesus the Good Shepherd. Talk heart to heart with him. Reject any temptation to ostentation, careerism, or conceit. Strive for a pattern of life truly marked by charity, chastity and humility, in imitation of Christ, the Eternal High Priest, of whom you are to become living icons (cf. Pastores Dabo Vobis, 33). Dear seminarians, I pray for you daily. Remember that what counts before the Lord is to dwell in his love and to make his love shine forth for others.

Religious Sisters, Brothers and Priests contribute greatly to the mission of the Church. Their prophetic witness is marked by a profound conviction of the primacy with which the Gospel shapes Christian life and transforms society. Today, I wish to draw your attention to the positive spiritual renewal which Congregations are undertaking in relation to their charism. The word charism means a gift freely and graciously given. Charisms are bestowed by the Holy Spirit, who inspires founders and foundresses, and shapes Congregations with a subsequent spiritual heritage. The wondrous array of charisms proper to each Religious Institute is an extraordinary spiritual treasury. Indeed, the history of the Church is perhaps most beautifully portrayed through the history of her schools of spirituality, most of which stem from the saintly lives of founders and foundresses. Through the discovery of charisms, which yield such a breadth of spiritual wisdom, I am sure that some of you young people will be drawn to a life of apostolic or contemplative service. Do not be shy to speak with Religious Brothers, Sisters or Priests about the charism and spirituality of their Congregation. No perfect community exists, but it is fidelity to a founding charism, not to particular individuals, that the Lord calls you to discern. Have courage! You too can make your life a gift of self for the love of the Lord Jesus and, in him, of every member of the human family (cf. Vita Consecrata, 3).

Friends, again I ask you, what about today? What are you seeking? What is God whispering to you? The hope which never disappoints is Jesus Christ. The saints show us the selfless love of his way. As disciples of Christ, their extraordinary journeys unfolded within the community of hope, which is the Church. It is from within the Church that you too will find the courage and support to walk the way of the Lord. Nourished by personal prayer, prompted in silence, shaped by the Church's liturgy you will discover the particular vocation God has for you. Embrace it with joy. You are Christ's disciples today. Shine his light upon this great city and beyond. Show the world the reason for the hope that resonates within you. Tell others about the truth that sets you free. With these sentiments of great hope in you I bid you farewell, until we meet again in Sydney this July for World Youth Day! And as a pledge of my love for you and your families, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

### **Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI at Ground Zero**

*On Sunday 20 April 2008, prayer at the site of the terrorist attack in New York City, 11 September 2001.*

O God of love, compassion, and healing, look on us, people of many different faiths and traditions, who gather today at this site, the scene of incredible violence and pain. We ask you in your goodness to give eternal light and peace to all who died here —the heroic first-responders: our fire fighters, police officers, emergency service workers, and Port Authority personnel, along with all the innocent men and women who were victims of this tragedy simply because their work or service brought them here on September 11, 2001. We ask you, in your compassion to bring healing to those who, because of their presence here that day, suffer from injuries and illness. Heal, too, the pain of still-grieving families and all who lost loved ones in this tragedy. Give them strength to continue their lives with courage and hope. We are mindful as well of those who suffered death, injury, and loss on the same day at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Our hearts are one with theirs as our prayer embraces their pain and suffering. God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world: peace in the hearts of all men and women and peace among the nations of the earth. Turn to your way of love those whose hearts and minds are consumed with hatred. God of understanding, overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy, we seek your light and guidance as we confront such terrible events. Grant that those whose lives were spared may live so that the lives lost here may not have been lost in vain. Comfort and console us, strengthen us in hope, and give us the wisdom and courage to work tirelessly for a world where true peace and love reign among nations and in the hearts of all.

### **Homily, Mass at Yankee Stadium, Bronx, New York**

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter 20 April 2008,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, In the Gospel we have just heard, Jesus tells his Apostles to put their faith in him, for he is "the way, and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). Christ is the way that leads to the Father, the truth which gives meaning to human existence, and the source of that life which is eternal joy with all the saints in his heavenly Kingdom. Let us take the Lord at his word! Let us renew our faith in him and put all our hope in his promises! With this encouragement to persevere in the faith of Peter (cf. Lk 22:32; Mt 16:17), I greet all of you with great affection. I thank Cardinal Egan for his cordial words of welcome in your name. At this Mass, the Church in the United States celebrates the two hundredth anniversary of the creation of the Sees of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Louisville from the mother See of Baltimore. The presence around this altar of the Successor of Peter, his brother bishops and priests, and deacons, men and women religious, and lay faithful from throughout the fifty states of the Union, eloquently manifests our communion in the Catholic faith which comes to us from the Apostles. Our celebration today is also a sign of the impressive growth which God has given to the Church in your country in the past two hundred years. From a small flock like that described in the first reading, the Church in America has been built up in fidelity to the twin commandment of love of God and love of neighbor. In this land of freedom and opportunity, the Church has united a widely diverse flock in the profession of the faith and, through her many educational, charitable and social works, has also contributed significantly to the growth of American society as a whole.

This great accomplishment was not without its challenges. Today's first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, speaks of linguistic and cultural tensions already present within the earliest Church community. At the same time, it shows the power of the word of God, authoritatively proclaimed by the Apostles and received in faith, to create a unity which transcends the divisions arising from human limitations and weakness. Here we are reminded of a fundamental truth: that the Church's unity has no other basis than the Word of God, made flesh in Christ Jesus our Lord. All external signs of identity, all structures, associations and programs, valuable or even essential as they may be, ultimately exist only to support and foster the deeper unity which, in Christ, is God's indefectible gift to his Church. The first reading also makes clear, as we see from the imposition of hands on the first deacons, that the Church's unity is "apostolic". It is a visible unity, grounded in the Apostles whom Christ chose and appointed as witnesses to his resurrection, and it is born of what the Scriptures call "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; cf. Acts 6:7).

"Authority" ... "obedience". To be frank, these are not easy words to speak nowadays. Words like these represent a "stumbling stone" for many of our contemporaries, especially in a society which rightly places a high value on personal freedom. Yet, in the light of our faith in Jesus Christ - "the way and the truth and the life" - we come to see the fullest meaning, value, and indeed beauty, of those words. The Gospel teaches us that true freedom, the freedom of the children of God, is found only in the self-surrender which is part of the mystery of love. Only by losing



ourselves, the Lord tells us, do we truly find ourselves (cf. Lk 17:33). True freedom blossoms when we turn away from the burden of sin, which clouds our perceptions and weakens our resolve, and find the source of our ultimate happiness in him who is infinite love, infinite freedom, infinite life. "In his will is our peace".

Real freedom, then, is God's gracious gift, the fruit of conversion to his truth, the truth which makes us free (cf. Jn 8:32). And this freedom in truth brings in its wake a new and liberating way of seeing reality. When we put on "the mind of Christ" (cf. Phil 2:5), new horizons open before us! In the light of faith, within the communion of the Church, we also find the inspiration and strength to become a leaven of the Gospel in the world. We become the light of the world, the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13-14), entrusted with the "apostolate" of making our own lives, and the world in which we live, conform ever more fully to God's saving plan.

This magnificent vision of a world being transformed by the liberating truth of the Gospel is reflected in the description of the Church found in today's second reading. The Apostle tells us that Christ, risen from the dead, is the keystone of a great temple which is even now rising in the Spirit. And we, the members of his body, through Baptism have become "living stones" in that temple, sharing in the life of God by grace, blessed with the freedom of the sons of God, and empowered to offer spiritual sacrifices pleasing to him (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). And what is this offering which we are called to make, if not to direct our every thought, word and action to the truth of the Gospel and to harness all our energies in the service of God's Kingdom? Only in this way can we build with God, on the one foundation which is Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:11). Only in this way can we build something that will truly endure. Only in this way can our lives find ultimate meaning and bear lasting fruit.

Today we recall the bicentennial of a watershed in the history of the Church in the United States: its first great chapter of growth. In these two hundred years, the face of the Catholic community in your country has changed greatly. We think of the successive waves of immigrants whose traditions have so enriched the Church in America. We think of the strong faith which built up the network of churches, educational, healthcare and social institutions which have long been the hallmark of the Church in this land. We think also of those countless fathers and mothers who passed on the faith to their children, the steady ministry of the many priests who devoted their lives to the care of souls, and the incalculable contribution made by so many men and women religious, who not only taught generations of children how to read and write, but also inspired in them a lifelong desire to know God, to love him and to serve him. How many "spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God" have been offered up in these two centuries! In this land of religious liberty, Catholics found freedom not only to practice their faith, but also to participate fully in civic life, bringing their deepest moral convictions to the public square and cooperating with their neighbors in shaping a vibrant, democratic society. Today's celebration is more than an occasion of gratitude for graces received. It is also a summons to move forward with firm resolve to use wisely the blessings of freedom, in order to build a future of hope for coming generations.

"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own, to proclaim his glorious works" (1 Pet 2:9). These words of the Apostle Peter do not simply remind us of the dignity which is ours by God's grace; they also challenge us to an ever greater fidelity to the glorious inheritance which we have received in Christ (cf. Eph 1:18). They challenge us to examine our consciences, to purify our hearts, to renew our baptismal commitment to reject Satan and all his empty promises. They challenge us to be a people of joy, heralds of the unfailing hope (cf. Rom 5:5) born of faith in God's word, and trust in his promises.

Each day, throughout this land, you and so many of your neighbors pray to the Father in the Lord's own words: "Thy Kingdom come". This prayer needs to shape the mind and heart of every Christian in this nation. It needs to bear fruit in the way you lead your lives and in the way you build up your families and your communities. It needs to create new "settings of hope" (cf. Spe Salvi, 32ff.) where God's Kingdom becomes present in all its saving power.

Praying fervently for the coming of the Kingdom also means being constantly alert for the signs of its presence, and working for its growth in every sector of society. It means facing the challenges of present and future with confidence in Christ's victory and a commitment to extending his reign. It means not losing heart in the face of resistance, adversity and scandal. It means overcoming every separation between faith and life, and countering false gospels of freedom and happiness. It also means rejecting a false dichotomy between faith and political life, since, as the Second Vatican Council put it, "there is no human activity - even in secular affairs - which can be withdrawn from God's dominion" (Lumen Gentium, 36). It means working to enrich American society and culture with the beauty and truth of the Gospel, and never losing sight of that great hope which gives meaning and value to all the other hopes which inspire our lives.

And this, dear friends, is the particular challenge which the Successor of Saint Peter sets before you today. As "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation", follow faithfully in the footsteps of those who have gone before you! Hasten the coming of God's Kingdom in this land! Past generations have left you an impressive legacy. In our day too, the Catholic community in this nation has been outstanding in its prophetic witness in the defense of life, in the education of the young, in care for the poor, the sick and the stranger in your midst. On these solid foundations, the future of the Church in America must even now begin to rise!

Yesterday, not far from here, I was moved by the joy, the hope and the generous love of Christ which I saw on the faces of the many young people assembled in Dunwoodie. They are the Church's future, and they deserve all the prayer and support that you can give them. And so I wish to close by adding a special word of encouragement to

them. My dear young friends, like the seven men, "filled with the Spirit and wisdom" whom the Apostles charged with care for the young Church, may you step forward and take up the responsibility which your faith in Christ sets before you! May you find the courage to proclaim Christ, "the same, yesterday, and today and for ever" and the unchanging truths which have their foundation in him (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 10; Heb 13:8). These are the truths that set us free! They are the truths which alone can guarantee respect for the inalienable dignity and rights of each man, woman and child in our world - including the most defenseless of all human beings, the unborn child in the mother's womb. In a world where, as Pope John Paul II, speaking in this very place, reminded us, Lazarus continues to stand at our door (Homily at Yankee Stadium, October 2, 1979, No. 7), let your faith and love bear rich fruit in outreach to the poor, the needy and those without a voice. Young men and women of America, I urge you: open your hearts to the Lord's call to follow him in the priesthood and the religious life. Can there be any greater mark of love than this: to follow in the footsteps of Christ, who was willing to lay down his life for his friends (cf. Jn 15:13)?

In today's Gospel, the Lord promises his disciples that they will perform works even greater than his (cf. Jn 14:12). Dear friends, only God in his providence knows what works his grace has yet to bring forth in your lives and in the life of the Church in the United States. Yet Christ's promise fills us with sure hope. Let us now join our prayers to his, as living stones in that spiritual temple which is his one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Let us lift our eyes to him, for even now he is preparing for us a place in his Father's house. And empowered by his Holy Spirit, let us work with renewed zeal for the spread of his Kingdom.

"Happy are you who believe!" (cf. 1 Pet 2:7). Let us turn to Jesus! He alone is the way that leads to eternal happiness, the truth who satisfies the deepest longings of every heart, and the life who brings ever new joy and hope, to us and to our world. Amen.

## COMMENTS

**Pastor and Prophet** [Editorial, *America* MAY 5, 2008 ] **T** he enduring impression Pope Benedict XVI left with most Americans following his recent visit to Washington, D.C., and New York was of a **pastor ministering to his flock**. In repeated gestures, from meeting with the victims of sexual abuse to blessing the disabled and speaking with the survivors of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, he showed his **desire to heal those who are wounded and broken**. His numerous comments on sexual abuse by members of the clergy demonstrated awareness of the depth of the hurt to victims and their families as well as to the American Catholic Church as a whole. From his confession of shame to reporters during the flight to the United States to his spontaneous acknowledgment of his own human weakness at the Mass at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral, he signaled that **like Peter, he is an ordinary Christian who struggles to be a disciple**. Though commentators have often depicted his German heritage as a source of rigidity and heavy-handedness, Benedict's Bavarian *Gemütlichkeit* revealed itself with a relaxed smile, and it projected warm joy throughout his public appearances. His natural graciousness enabled him to look those he encountered in the eyes and to listen to them attentively. Though he is known to prefer more traditional liturgical styles himself, he appeared to relish the multilingual, multiethnic liturgical events prepared for him, which are so characteristic of the United States today. His prayer at ground zero was a gem of quiet commemoration, and the visit to the Park East Synagogue on the eve of Passover was a gesture of undiminished goodwill toward the Jewish community. Just as he came to heal, Pope Benedict also **came to unify**. His homilies and addresses allowed no gloating by one church faction over another. In addressing the bishops, for instance, he balanced pro-life issues with social justice concerns. "Is it consistent," he asked, **"to profess our beliefs in church on Sunday, and then during the week to promote business practices or medical procedures contrary to those beliefs? Is it consistent for practicing Catholics to ignore or exploit the poor and marginalized, to promote sexual behavior contrary to Catholic moral teaching, or to adopt positions that contradict the right to life of the human being from conception to natural death?"** Though Pope Benedict's **critique of American culture—of individualism, secularism, materialism and the cult of untrammelled freedom**—was clear, his reproof was consistently gentle: questioning rather than condemning, edifying rather than hectoring. With his gentle voice and peaceful demeanor, Benedict did not fail to offer a prophetic word to the world. At the **United Nations General Assembly**, he upheld the necessity of the organization for the defense of human rights and gave new prominence to "the duty to protect," that is, the responsibility of the international community to intervene when a government either fails to protect its own people or is itself guilty of violating their rights. He made clear that the United Nations serves human solidarity by making the strong responsible for defending the weak. Pope Benedict also extrapolated a seldom discussed teaching of Pope John XXIII in the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*—that the **legitimacy of governments depends on their respect for and defense of the rights of their people**. It is not "intervention," he argued, that should be interpreted as "a limitation on sovereignty," but rather **"nonintervention" that causes harm out of indifference to the victims of oppression**. With international missions foundering in long-lasting conflicts like those in Congo and Sudan, however, the pope's remarks place the **burden on the international community to build the capacity to deal with major humanitarian emergencies**. **While Pope Benedict showed appreciation** for American culture, especially for the flowering of liberty, and for U.S. Catholics, he also laid bare our temptations and failings. He spoke to young people about the "callousness of heart" that leads to "drug and substance abuse, homelessness, poverty, racism, violence and degradation—especially of girls and women." He also warned against **relativism, "which, in disregarding truth, pursues what is false and wrong," leading to "addiction, to moral or intellectual confusion, to hurt, to a loss of self-respect, even to despair..."** This portrait is unflattering. Americans may find it hard to look in the mirror

Benedict held up to us. We may want to avert our eyes. But the challenge of the visit is to learn from Pope Benedict's criticism as well as his praise, take it to heart and find new ways to redeem the shadow side of our American character. For, as he reminded us, with our eyes fixed on the saints whose lives enable us to "soar freely along the limitless expanse of the horizon of Christian discipleship," we too can live the Gospel life in 21st-century America.

**Catholicism and The New Atheism** [By [Richard R. Gaillardetz](#) | MAY 5, 2008] **One of the less noted contributions of the Second Vatican Council is its brief treatment of atheism in its "[Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World](#)."** In that groundbreaking document, the council avoided the shrill condemnations of atheism that were so common in pre-conciliar texts. Instead, the council acknowledged the diverse motives for modern atheism, from the overreaching claims of the positive sciences to modern atheism's legitimate rejection of "a faulty notion of God" (No. 19). The bishops invited Christians to go beyond condemnation and "seek out the secret motives that lead the atheistic mind to deny God" (No. 20). By way of contrast, the so-called "new atheists"—figures like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris—engage in an aggressive and decidedly non-dialogical attack on religion. They insist that **religion is fundamentally toxic to human society and must be directly challenged and eradicated where possible**. Consider the second part of the title of Hitchens's volume, [God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything](#). Islamic and Christian fundamentalism receive the lion's share of criticism, but Catholicism does not escape attack. Harris skewers Catholicism for its anti-Semitic history, the evils perpetrated by the Spanish Inquisition and the Catholic leadership's scandalous protection of clerical child abusers. Hitchens joins Harris in mentioning the scandal of sexual abuse but also lampoons Catholicism for its supposed reliance on superstition and condemns its pursuit of power in order to control the lives of others. Almost all of these critics challenge Catholicism's dogmatism and overbearing exercise of authority, which they see as directly opposed to the use of human reason and the primacy of conscience. The committed Catholic (indeed, the committed practitioner of any great religious tradition) is bound to bristle at the aggressive tone and the tendency toward caricature and sweeping generalization that runs through these works. It is tempting simply to dismiss these attacks. Yet the Second Vatican Council's mandate for respectful engagement with the critics of faith invites an alternative course of action. We must certainly defend the integrity and reasonableness of our deepest religious convictions, but an adequate Catholic response must go beyond traditional apologetics; we must also ask ourselves whether there is anything in our Catholic Christian culture that invites these attacks and might be avoided without abandoning what is essential to our faith. I focus on three elements in the Catholic faith that call for our attention: Catholic practices that suggest a naïve theism; the nature of Catholic truth claims; and the exercise of church authority.

**Naïve Theism** As Michael Buckley, S.J., pointed out in his classic study of atheism ([At the Origins of Modern Atheism](#)), all forms of modern atheism are parasitic upon a particular form of theism. The proponents of the new atheism presuppose a naïve form of theism that perceives God, as Karl Rahner put it, as an individual being, albeit the Supreme Being, who is simply another "member of the larger household of reality" ([Foundations of Christian Faith](#)). Yet the god of this naïve theism more closely resembles a benevolent Zeus than the god of the Judeo-Christian tradition. One imagines a god standing on the sidelines of human history but occasionally intervening in the course of human events. Still, we should ask ourselves whether there are popular Catholic beliefs or practices that may, however unintentionally, support such naïve theism. As one example, consider the procedures for the canonization of saints. Vatican regulations require that for beatification one verified miracle be attributable to the "servant of God"; for canonization two are required. In these rules, miracles are described as events attributed to the intercession of the servant of God and certified as inexplicable according to modern science. Without denying the possibility of such events, I wonder whether the emphasis on their scientifically inexplicable character risks giving the impression that God's action in the world cannot be reconciled with a scientific account of the workings of our physical universe. Does this interventionist view of divine action invite accusations of superstition and caricatures of divine activity by those outside the community of faith? It is vital that our religious beliefs and practices affirm a fundamental compatibility between divine action and scientific accounts of our world. It may be opportune to consider revised procedures that would focus less on the scientifically inexplicable and more on diverse testimony to the continuing influence and impact of the servant of God on those who remain on their earthly pilgrimage. Pope Benedict's recent encyclical on hope makes effective use of the lives of select saints as moving embodiments of Christian hope. I suspect that it is this evangelical witness rather than the verification of miraculous interventions that the contemporary skeptic is more likely to find compelling.

**Catholic Truth Claims**. We have not been left on this earth to wander blindly in search of the divine. Catholics believe that God communicates the divine self to us in revelation. This revelation has been mediated in various forms throughout human history and has achieved its unsurpassable form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Spirit-inspired testimony to this divine revelation is found in Holy Scripture and continues to unfold in the tradition of the church. Within that tradition, the revealed message of God's offer of salvation has been given formal expression in dogma. Unfortunately, the presentations of church teaching that one sometimes hears from catechists and clergy can succumb to what Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., has called a "digital" view of dogma ([The Liberation of Dogma](#)). This understanding divests dogma of its analogical, imaginative and transformative character and renders it strictly informational. One can easily get the impression that by learning church dogma one has somehow "mastered" God, much as a chemistry student masters the periodic table. Presentations based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the gift of infallibility can create the impression that Catholic dogma is static, as if the very language of dogmatic statements is immune to historical, philosophical or cultural influence. For Catholics, dogmatic statements symbolically mediate revelation without exhausting our encounter with God. Although dogmas play a valid role by affirming the truth of our most central convictions, they

are not the only, nor even necessarily the primary way in which we encounter divine revelation. The narrative power of Scripture, the symbolic efficacy of the liturgy, the moving testimony of the lives of saints and ordinary believers—all of these can mediate God's word to us. Moreover, the charism of infallibility, which Catholics hold is active when the church believes and teaches that which is central to the divine offer, does not exempt church teaching from reasoned inquiry and critique. Catholic teaching on infallibility proceeds from our confidence that the Spirit of God so abides in the church that our most central convictions about God are utterly reliable and will not lead us away from God's saving offer. Insofar as they remain human statements, subject to the limits of language and history, dogmatic pronouncements, although not erroneous, are always subject to reformulation. No human statement, however much its formulation may be assisted by the Spirit and protected from essential error, can capture the holy mystery of God. Religious authority figures should resist presenting dogma as if it brought all theological reflection to a close. The church's teachers should also continue to acknowledge, clearly and without apology, that not all official church teaching has the status of dogma. In many instances the teaching office of the church proposes as formal church teaching or binding church discipline its best insight, here and now, regarding the application of the faith to often complex issues, even as it acknowledges the possibility of error. Pope Benedict has noted that in today's world the possibility of revealed truth is itself under attack. If that is the case, then the church has a particularly pressing obligation to offer a credible account of divine revelation. For this account to be credible, it should include the following three points: the acknowledgment that church dogma does not exhaust the holy mystery of God; the recognition that church dogma, although not erroneous, is not exempt from the linguistic and philosophical limits to which all human statements are subject; and the unambiguous admission that not all church teaching is taught with the same degree of authority and that noninfallible teaching remains open to substantive revision. These steps might go a long way toward thwarting the tendency of the church's critics to lump Roman Catholicism together with the various religious fundamentalisms that succumb to simplistic and seemingly irrational conceptions of divine truth.

**Church Leadership.** The Catholic Church is a human institution that has always embraced the need for authoritative church structures. Yet often it is not church authority itself, but the particular manner in which church authority is exercised that opens the Catholic Church to such harsh attacks from contemporary critics. Many who observe the Catholic Church from the "outside" see an institution prone to heavy-handed and arbitrary wielding of authority. They see ecclesiastical pronouncements on complex ethical issues and wonder how church officials can pronounce on them with such certitude. Some outside the church see an unwillingness on the part of church leadership to consider the wisdom of ordinary believers or to entertain the insights of contemporary scholarship when these insights might challenge official church positions. They also see too many church leaders obsessed with the trappings of rank and privilege, titles and prerogatives, leaders more at home in the court of a 19th-century monarch than in a modern institution. There are, of course, many Catholic leaders whose style of leadership is far removed from these stereotypes, but they are often better known to those inside the church than to those outside. If truth be told, the deepest wisdom of our great tradition presents a vision of church authority often at odds with church practice. Scripture teaches that authentic church authority is always to be exercised as a service, not as an instrument for control (Mt 20:25-8). Voices within our tradition like St. Paulinus of Nola or Cardinal Newman have insisted that church leaders consult the faithful, not because it was politically correct to do so but because of an ancient conviction that the Spirit of God might speak through the whole people of God. We can appeal to great figures of the past like St. Augustine and Pope Gregory the Great or to the more recent teaching of Vatican II and find reminders that the exercise of church authority must be subject to humility. This humility presupposes that we belong to a pilgrim church that is being led by the Spirit but that has not yet arrived at its final destination and is therefore always in need of reform and renewal. Can we afford to overlook the popularity of Pope John XXIII throughout the world, a popularity based largely on his humble and self-effacing style of leadership, the exercise of which was for that very reason all the more effective? Later, Pope John Paul II would exemplify authentic Christian authority in his resolute determination, often against the wishes of his closest advisers, to admit the mistakes and grievous sins perpetrated by Catholics past and present. In his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (Nos. 95-96), Pope John Paul II even invited other Christian leaders to explore with him new ways of exercising his papal ministry as a ministry of unity and not division. Is it a coincidence that these two figures were the most widely admired popes of the 20th century by those outside the Catholic Church? Theirs was an exercise of authority that seemed credible even to those who did not share the faith of the church. Many of us become frustrated when we read atheists' attacks on religion, because we do not recognize ourselves and our religious communities in their scathing portraits. Yet we must resist channeling our frustration into equally vicious counterattacks. Instead, let us search our own faith traditions and purge them of all that obscures what is most precious to us. For we remain convinced that our deepest religious convictions do not "poison everything" but affirm all that is good and gently invite all into communion with that Holy Mystery "in whom we live and move and have our being."

**An Evangelical Moment? To combat the rise of atheism, Christians must first look to themselves.** BY RICHARD J. MOUW

Popular evangelicalism is at a vulnerable point: many of our former heroes have embarrassed us. There may now be more receptivity to some new thoughts about what it means to work for the common good. appointments, Franklin Foer commented in *The New Republic* that we seldom hear about possible evangelical candidates for the nation's highest court. Evangelicals speak up loudly about the need for conservative justices, he wrote, but when conservative nominations are forthcoming the candidates are typically Catholics. On issues of public policy, Foer observed, Catholics have "intellectual heft" and evangelicals do not. Foer is right about evangelicalism as a popular movement. This lack of heft has made them an especially easy target for the new atheists. They would not attack evangelicals with such passion if it were not for the noise factor. As a force in the public square, evangelical Christians have been hard to ignore in recent years. What has led us to be so noisy? It was not always so. In my youth it was not uncommon for the more liberal types to complain that evangelicals were much too quiet about issues of social concern. My guess is that nowadays those people—the ones who are still around—are looking back wistfully to the good old days. Evolution played a big role in silencing us in earlier decades. The historian George Marsden once observed that moving from the 19th to the 20th century was for North American evangelicals an immigrant experience of sorts. The migration was not geographic but cultural. Most of the 19th-century evangelicals were active in public life, even playing a key role in promoting abolition and women's suffrage. Entering into a new century, however, evangelicals found themselves defending the fundamentals of their faith against an emerging Protestant liberal movement. The battle did not go well for the evangelicals, who lost control of the major Northern denominations and theological faculties. Soon they lost again, in the battle against evolutionism that came to a head with the famous Scopes trial. This time their defeat brought with it much public ridicule. The evangelicals retreated to the margins of culture, adopting a theological perspective that emphasized their status as a "true remnant" and viewed the flow of history in apocalyptic terms. From Minority to Majority

Consciousness A sense of cultural marginalization characterized American evangelicalism well into the 1970s. Then suddenly in 1979 a movement that had for a half-century defined itself as a cognitive minority in a society headed toward Armageddon now proclaimed itself to be the Moral Majority. Evangelicals had once again become a noisy presence in the public square. The shift from minority to majority status took place without much theological reflection. Not long after Jerry Falwell appeared on the public scene, for example, he confessed that he had once preached a sermon denouncing Martin Luther King Jr., on the grounds that preachers ought not to be involved in politics. Now he was ready to admit that King had been right. Unfortunately, Falwell never offered much of an explanation as to the theological basis for his change of heart. Had he now embraced a different understanding of "Bible prophecy" from the dispensationalism that had shaped his previous ministry? Did he have a new doctrine of the church? What was his theological grasp now of the common good, public justice and the relationship between church and state? Answers to these questions were not forthcoming.

My own take is that for the past two centuries evangelicals have gone back and forth between two eschatological perspectives. Typically we have done so without much theological awareness. Thus, in the late 1970s, when the prospects for cultural influence suddenly looked good, the evangelicals switched back to a more hopeful eschatology. Once again America was a chosen nation that could serve God's revealed purposes, if only the faithful would restore the nation to its founding vision.

If this new activism was not generated by a new theological discovery, what did account for the enthusiasm for public policy issues? One factor was a shift in class. By the 1980s, many evangelical Pentecostal and holiness congregations, which had once resided on the wrong side of the tracks, had become flourishing megachurches sitting on the best real estate in town. This turnabout nurtured a sense of cultural leverage.

What motivated evangelicals to use their leverage aggressively to bring about change was a concern about the rearing of children. In large part the religious right has arisen as a response to the sexual revolution that was sparked in the 1960s. The increasing visibility of pornography, the gay rights movement, the promiscuity that came with the availability of the pill—all of these made evangelical parents very nervous about the introduction of sex education in the public schools. Many early initiatives by the religious right were directed against school boards.

That was also the case with creation science, a crusade that had much to do with parental concern about schools. While the "young earth" adherents have presented their views as an alternative science, there has not been much careful, give-and-take dialogue about the nature of scientific inquiry and the relationship between the Bible and science. Much of the rhetoric has been fueled by conspiracy theories, relying heavily on sloganeering and the use of biblical materials as proof-texts.

#### A New Openness Among Evangelicals

The irony is that while grass-roots evangelicals have been embarrassing themselves in public life, many of their sons and daughters have gained a significant voice in the American academy. The cover story of *The Atlantic* for October 2000 boldly announced, "The Opening of the Evangelical Mind." Alan Wolfe, who wrote the story, not only chronicled the scholarly contributions of evangelical schools like Calvin College, Wheaton College and Fuller Seminary, but he also pointed out that the history and theology departments at the University of Notre Dame have become a home for many evangelical professors and graduate students. Just recently Mark Noll left Wheaton to assume the professorship at Notre Dame previously held by George Marsden, who had moved to Notre Dame from Calvin College after making his mark in American religious history there. Harvard Divinity School has established an endowed chair in evangelical thought. And evangelical scholars have been instrumental in forming an array of faith-based associations in several disciplines, like literature, history, philosophy and the natural and social sciences.

The problem is not that evangelical Christianity lacks the intellectual resources to remedy the much-publicized defects of popular evangelicalism. Rather, the challenge is to



find some way of repairing the disconnection between grass-roots evangelicals and evangelical academics who have been making their marks in the scholarly disciplines. Surely there is much to criticize in the freewheeling attacks on the faith that have been launched by the new atheists, and evangelical scholars have a contribution to make to those debates. It is also an opportune time for evangelicals to speak clearly to our own community of faith.

Popular evangelicalism is at a vulnerable point: many of our former heroes have embarrassed us. There may be more receptivity now to new thoughts about what it means to work for the common good.

We academics will need pastoral support in making such a case to our own people. We can take encouragement from the fact that some wise evangelical pastors have emerged as public leaders during the past decade. Bill Hybels, Joel Hunter and Rick Warren, for example, have not only taken on different issues (AIDS, global warming, economic justice) than the religious right traditionally did, but have done so with a sense of kinship with the evangelical scholarly community and a spirit of civility toward those whom the religious right often identified as enemies of the faith.

This may be the right time for evangelicals to reflect on how people whom we have identified as our enemies may actually be speaking some truths to us. Perhaps in the mysterious ways of providence the new atheists have been raised up as unwitting servants of the Lord for such a time as this.

**At the UN:** Touring a city defined by its diversity, the pope shook hands with its former mayor, [Edward I. Koch](#), and rubbed the fuzz on several babies' heads. **Benedict, a man who has shunned the spotlight for most of his life, was greeted like a rock star.** The pope flew to New York on the Alitalia papal plane, called "Shepherd One," from Washington, where he had largely devoted his efforts to addressing the issue of sexual abuse by priests. On Thursday afternoon, he held a surprise meeting there with five victims from Boston, the city where the scandal unfolded with particular anger and division. But for the first day since he arrived in America, the pope did not address the scandal on Friday. After being greeted at Kennedy Airport by Cardinal Edward C. Egan, head of the New York archdiocese, Benedict flew by helicopter directly to the United Nations. The 81-year-old pope, who was a young German prisoner in the war that forged the United Nations, insisted that human rights — more than force or pragmatic politics — must be the basis for ending war and poverty. **"The promotion of human rights remains the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security,"** Benedict told the United Nations [General Assembly](#). "Indeed, the victims of hardship and despair, whose human dignity is violated with impunity, become easy prey to the call to violence, and they can then become violators of peace," he said. He made no explicit reference to a nation or conflict in particular, and he laid no specific blame in the half-hour speech, which was densely packed with philosophy and theology. But he did mention briefly some specific priorities for the Vatican, like protecting the environment, and making sure that poor nations, especially in Africa, also reap the benefits of globalization. And in a passage that will have particular resonance for the current United Nations leadership, which is trying to **establish the right of the outside world to intervene in situations where nations fail to shield their own citizens from atrocities**, the pope said that "every state has the primary duty to protect its own population from grave and sustained violations of human rights." The concept, known as "responsibility to protect," is one that [Ban Ki-moon](#), the secretary general, has backed as a way for international institutions to take action in regions like Darfur. "If states are unable to guarantee such protection," the pope said, "the international community must intervene with the juridical means provided in the United Nations charter and in other international instruments." In an apparent allusion to countries that claim such international actions constitute intervention in their national affairs, he said they "should never be interpreted as an unwarranted imposition or a limitation of sovereignty." He added, "On the contrary, it is indifference or failure to intervene that do the real damage." In his speech, Benedict touched on themes important both to his three-year-old papacy and his decades of writing as a cardinal and one of the church's leading intellectuals. At base, the pope presented the idea that there are universal values that transcend the diversity — cultural, ethnic or ideological — embodied in an institution like the United Nations, founded to help prevent the ruin of another world war. Those values are at the base of human rights, he said, as they are for religion. Thus religion, he said, cannot be shut out of a body like the United Nations, which he said aims at "a social order respectful of the dignity and rights of the person." "A vision of life firmly anchored in the religious dimension can help achieve this," he said. **"Recognition of the transcendent value of every man and woman favors conversion of heart, which then leads to a commitment to resist violence, terrorism, war and to promote justice and peace.** Benedict was introduced to the thronged General Assembly hall by Mr. Ban, who called the United Nations a secular institution but is "home to all men and women of faith around

the world.” The speech to the General Assembly is a papal tradition: Pope Paul VI made an appearance in 1965, and [Pope John Paul II](#) in 1979 and 1995. On Friday afternoon, Benedict met with local Jewish clergy at the [Park East Synagogue](#), an Orthodox congregation on the Upper East Side founded in 1890. It was the first papal visit to a synagogue in this country; only two other visits have ever been recorded, both in Europe. Rabbi Arthur Schneier, a Holocaust survivor who has led the synagogue since 1962, greeted Benedict and told him that his visit was “a reaffirmation of your outreach, good will, and commitment to enhancing Jewish-Catholic relations.” He presented Benedict with a silver Seder plate and a box of matzo, just in time for Passover, which begins on Saturday evening. “The Jewish community make a valuable contribution to the life of the city,” the pope told the Jewish leaders, “and I encourage all of you to continue building bridges of friendship with all the many different ethnic and religious groups present in your neighborhood.” The pope then posed for photographs with several prominent Jewish New Yorkers, including Mr. Koch, the former mayor. Later in the evening, the pope met with the ministers of various denominations, including the Rev. Bernice King, daughter of the Rev. Dr. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) Ms. King declined to say what they discussed, saying only, “He blessed me.”

**Pope Benedict and the lasting impact of his U.S. trip** [By [Peter Steinfels](#) Published: April 26, 2008 NY Times] As theologian and now as pope, Joseph Ratzinger has been, above all, **a man of the God crisis**. For him, God is the answer to questions that “can never be erased from the human heart,” as he said in his Washington meeting with other religious leaders. “What is the origin and destiny of mankind?” he said to them. “What are good and evil? What awaits us at the end of our earthly existence? “Only by addressing these deeper questions can we build a solid basis for the peace and security of the human family.” Yet in his view **modernity**, in a myriad of ways — from materialism to relativism to the technological mind-set — **has shunted those questions aside or thrown up intellectual barriers to answering them**. Europe has been the heartland of the God crisis. So naturally it has preoccupied a European intellectual like Benedict. His response has two parts. Over the years he has offered a finely woven fabric of ideas about Christian faith, reason, truth and freedom. His arguments are certainly not beyond challenge, not even by theologians and philosophers who share his conclusions. But there is little doubt that they are serious and substantial. But Benedict has never thought that a purely intellectual response was adequate. There was also an inescapably personal dimension to the God crisis — **a matter of opening oneself, of inner conversion and personal decision**. This movement of the heart could be stirred by the witness of believers, by the solidarity and charity of the Christian community, by the power of worship or the beauty of religious art. Warning against an individualistic piety, Pope Benedict told the American bishops, “If we are truly to gaze upon him who is the source of our joy, we need to do so as members of the people of God.” The God crisis, therefore, cannot be separated from the church crisis. If the church has become dysfunctional, inarticulate or spiritless, it will be incapable of addressing those deeper questions with responses that satisfy both the mind and the heart. But for Benedict, the God crisis always takes priority. Whether speaking of truth to educators or human rights to the [United Nations](#), he returns again and again to the question of “foundations,” which for him ultimately mean God. He grows impatient whenever talk of the church seems to supplant talk of God. Of course, Benedict came to the United States knowing that the God crisis is hardly as acute here as it is in Europe and that what has been troubling American Roman Catholicism is the church crisis. And just as the God crisis has both a personal dimension and an intellectual one, the church crisis has both a personal dimension and a structural one. The pope certainly addressed the personal dimension. He exhorted the bishops to be “engaging and imaginative.” He worried out loud about the state of the liturgy and whether preaching had “lost its salt.” He underlined the need for more priests. He urged the healing of divisions in Catholic ranks. He called on all Catholics to take their beliefs into public life. Most of all, in meeting with victims of sexual abuse by priests, he offered a model of pastoral sensitivity. About the structural dimension of the church crisis, however, he said nothing. Does the American church need new or refurbished structures of transparency, accountability and consultation in a wide range of matters, including finances, parish closings and the appointment and assignment of bishops and pastors? Should new roles for the laity in parish leadership be more formally recognized? Are changes beyond prayer and exhortation needed to combat the growing shortage of priests? What about the ordination of married men or women or the reintroduction of female deacons? Such structural changes are favored by many moderate-to-liberal Catholics. There are less publicized ones favored by some conservatives, including tight episcopal control over Catholic higher education, restoration of traditional forms of seminary training and broad resort to oaths of fidelity. The pope’s silence about all such institutional nuts and bolts is not surprising. For one thing, he believes that church structures must evolve, as he says, “organically” rather than by grand design. His suspicion of structural changes goes further, however. He often dismisses them, especially liberal ones, as “power games” or as superficial diversions from the foundational God crisis and the interior transformation it entails. Indeed, the very mode of calculating gains and losses in Catholic ranks, parishes without priests, a decline in religious literacy or Mass attendance among young Catholics seems foreign to Benedict’s outlook. At one level, this stance is unassailable. Who would deny his reminder of some years ago that “the church does not exist for herself but must be God’s instrument”? But what if the instrument needs significant repair or reconstruction? What if, to change the metaphor, the problem is not so much weak foundations, at least not yet in the United States, as a leaking roof, bad wiring and faulty plumbing? Will addressing the God crisis, perhaps with the pastoral sensitivity Benedict demonstrated on his visit, spontaneously generate responses to the church crisis? Or is addressing the structural dimension of the church crisis a prerequisite to successfully addressing the God crisis? The lasting impact of Pope Benedict’s visit may hang on the answers to those



two questions.

**Pope urges U.S. church to 'put aside all anger' and unite.** [By John Thavis for [Catholic News Service](#)] Pope Benedict XVI urged the Catholic Church in the United States to move past divisions and scandal toward a "new sense of unity and purpose." The pope, in St. Patrick's Cathedral April 19, once again addressed the damage and suffering caused by the clerical scandal and called for a time of purification and healing. He said it was time to "put aside all anger and contention" inside the church and **embark on a fresh mission of evangelization in society**. The setting was New York's 130-year-old Gothic cathedral, built with "the pennies of the poor," as Cardinal Egan said. The pope responded by using the building's architectural harmony as a metaphor for the church's inner unity. Just as the cathedral's stained-glass windows flood the interior with splendor, the beauty of life in the church can really only be understood and experienced from the inside. Yet sometimes "the light of faith can be dimmed by routine, and the splendor of the church obscured by the weaknesses of her members". One of the great disappointments which followed the Second Vatican Council, with its call for a greater engagement in the church's mission to the world, has been the experience of **division between different groups, different generations, different members of the same religious family**". It is important for everyone in the church to open themselves to points of view that "may not necessarily conform to our own ideas or assumptions." The cathedral itself has been the site of protests in recent years over church teaching on abortion, homosexuality and other issues. The pope said all were "called to be forces of unity within Christ's body" by seeking **inner reconciliation through penance**. "I join you in praying that this will be a time of purification for each and every particular church and religious community, and a time for healing. I also encourage you to cooperate. The pope said the church must be a "beacon of hope" promoting a culture of life. "The proclamation of life, must be the heart of the new evangelization". The church must work in a society that seems to have forgotten God and to resent even the most elementary demands of Christian morality." the faith is more than a set of rules. Our most urgent challenge is to communicate the joy born of faith and the experience of God's love.

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**Divisions and abandoning tradition weakens Christian witness** [By Cindy Wooden for [Catholic News Service](#)] To about 250 representatives of U.S. ecumenical organizations and a dozen Christian churches and denominations the Pope stated that the witness of Christians in the world is weakened not only by their divisions, but also by communities that turn their backs on Christian tradition. He acknowledging that the agreements found in their theological dialogues have contributed to agreements later approved by the Vatican. Unfortunately, not Christians, as they observe the splintering of Christian communities, are confused about the Gospel message itself". For instance when fundamental Christian **beliefs and practices are changed by so-called 'prophetic actions' based** on a reading of Christianity "not consonant" with the Bible and in Christian tradition. That has taken place when some Christian communities have ordained women to the priesthood and episcopacy, blessed homosexual unions and ordained gay men. In a world marked by a greater sense of global unity and interdependence, the "fragmentation and individualism" seen in Christian denominations is divisive. The unity of the early Christians was based on the sound integrity of their doctrinal confession. But now, there are signs that **some Christians are taking the same "relativistic approach" to doctrine that many modern people take to moral and ethical values**. The Christian **faith is not a matter of picking and choosing** what to believe and what to discard from the Scriptures and Christian tradition. When Christians think they only need to follow their own consciences and find a church that suits their individual tastes, the **result is a "continual proliferation of communities which eschew institutional structures and minimize the importance of doctrinal content** for Christian living,". When the Catholic Church asserts its doctrines, it is not throwing up an obstacle to progress in Christian unity. "A convincing testimony to the salvation in Christ has to be based upon normative apostolic teaching". If Christians hold the faith that Jesus gave to his apostles, then the Christian churches will be able to find their unity and present a united witness to a troubled world.

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**Pope achieved objectives critical to future of U.S. church** [By John Thavis for [Catholic News Service](#)] Benedict XVI achieved in the US three objectives critical to the pastoral future of the American church. First, brought a certain **closure to the priestly sex scandal**. Second, he set forth a **moral challenge to the U.S. culture** on economic justice and abortion. Third, he issued a firm appeal **to conservative and liberal Catholics to set aside anger and unite** in order to effectively evangelize society. The pope addressed clerical sex abuse on five different occasions. The pope's unscheduled meeting with five sex abuse victims seemed to mark an emotional turning point indirectly also to all the other scandal victims in the United States. The pope attacked the **new secularism** that undermines traditional moral values and the voice of religion. He pointed out the signs of a **breakdown in the foundations of society: alienation, anger and polarization, increased violence, a weakening of the moral sense; a coarsening of social relations; and a growing forgetfulness of God**. To counter these trends, people need the church's message of hope and fidelity to the Gospel. Today the US' secular-moral balance **risks tipping toward a godless, individualist form of freedom**, linking to environmental degradation." Ecology is part of the respect for creation and the creator. He praised the vitality of parish life and movements and the U.S. Catholics' continuing contribution to the life of the country. Unfortunately, **some Catholics are not in line with church teaching**. The **US church needs a long-term program of religious education**. One of his strongest themes was church unity. All church groups, associations and programs exist only to support and foster deeper unity in Christ. The pope's focus was religion and its place in all areas of life.

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**What the Pope accomplished.** [from Newsweek] "I will do all possible to be a real successor to Peter, who also was a man with all his faults and sins but who remains finally the rock for the church," the pontiff said. Such off-the-cuff moment conveyed authentic humility, acknowledging his inability to offer charisma comparable to his predecessor's. From the day of his election, church watchers have labeled him a "transition pope." But his U.S. tour seems to have successfully combined showmanship and quiet spirituality. Benedict, a reclusive academic, brought a new perspective to members of the American church. So if this week was a test, Benedict distinguished himself. "The way he has addressed different issues in America, show he's a very insightful. His messages were cordial yet firm, and direct. "Things aren't exactly as they should be, and we need to do more," was the gist of what he told audiences, an even-handed approach rather than the critical lashing that some had expected.

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**Stadium Religion** [By [Richard J. Mouw](#)] A few years ago, when the "Promise Keepers" movement was getting quite a bit of attention in the religious world, much of the focus was on the male-bonding character of the events. The evangelical organizers, led by a well-known football coach, convened crowds of men, filling stadiums around the country. The rallies featured songs of praise, messages about marital fidelity, and urgings for men to confess their sins to each other-including explicit calls to work for racial reconciliation. The Pope now comes to America and fills Yankee Stadium. What does all of this mean? In one sense, I think, it is not unrelated to the promise of the Promise Keepers. There is a deep yearning for an authoritative voice, for someone or some group that can tell us about values, standards of behavior, that are not of our own making. In many Christian contexts there is an unfortunate disconnect between "high" theology and the actual hopes and fears of ordinary believers. But the attraction of a pope-in-a-stadium has its own unique meaning. In a "post-modern" age Benedict represents something that is decidedly pre-modern. He comes to America as one who knows how to walk ancient paths. He models a chastity that stands in sharp contrast to the easy promiscuity of our culture. Yet he is conversant with our present-day patterns of thought. He brings much learning to what he has to say to us. Some of us may want to argue with him about some important topics. But do so with humility and respect for what he represents. It may be that we can even learn some lessons from him about how to fill stadiums for purposes that go beyond mere fun and games!

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**A surge of the heart** [By [Fr James Martin](#)] I've been to baseball, football and basketball games and have heard the cheers at a last-minute home run, touchdown or basket; I've heard ovations at the theater, the opera, and rock concerts; and I've have even received some applause for lectures and talks of my own. But I've never heard something that could be fairly described as an explosion of communal affection. When the assembled 60,000 people in that stadium first caught sight of the pope, they erupted in a cheer that pierced my heart. I felt proud to be a Catholic and happy to be among so many Catholics who felt that way, too. After a few years of thinking (rightly) about the sexual abuse crisis, worrying (reasonably) about divisions among American Catholics, and wondering (not surprisingly) what the church would do in the face of declining priestly and religious vocations, it was good to spend a day celebrating being Catholic. The crowd's distinctive voice was an expression of the joy of being part of a community of believers. At the end of the Mass, when Benedict left the stage, when the popemobile drew within 20 yards, I wanted to experience it. The popemobile moved toward our spot, and when it passed directly in front of us, Pope Benedict looked at us, and raised his hand in blessing. And out of me came a loud cry of joy! I had felt hoarse all day, until that moment. Somehow I had found my voice! At that moment, I felt a tremendous sense of gratitude for being a part of a worldwide church. For being a part of a community of believers. For being part of the communion of saints. And also, for being able to see that while some of my old disagreements with the former Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger are not unreasonable, that he is the Vicar of Christ, and is, for this poor and flawed Catholic, and for all Catholics, the Successor of St. Peter. So this "man of faults," as he called himself, connects me with the apostles, and so connects me with Jesus Christ. The church is like a family. It drives you crazy sometimes, but you still love it. Not grudgingly, but fully and unreservedly. As well, you may drive everyone else in it crazy, and you will still be a part of them. Not grudgingly, but fully and unreservedly. It will always be flawed, and so will you. It will always be a part of you, and you will always be a part of it. Moreover, I have committed myself to this imperfect and beautiful, traditional and progressive, confusing and clarifying, bizarre and familiar, graceful and sinful community for the rest of my life. So for being Catholic I cry out, just like I cried out at Yankee Stadium, under the bright sun, along with 60,000 of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

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**A few good men and women** [By [Alejandro Bermudez](#)] The Pope wasn't even on the plane back to Rome when pundits began [wrapping up the Pope's visit with a list of complaints](#). Indeed, American "cafeteria Catholicism" will be alive and well when the Pope arrives back in Rome. And the number of Catholics awaiting a Pope that will bring the changes they want will likely remain the same. If this is the way to measure Benedict's success, then he probably deserves a D -. But the Pope is a minimalist. He hopes lapsed Catholics will come back to the Church. He hopes Catholics with a list of "buts" will drop them and embrace the fullness of the Church's teachings. He hopes many non-Catholics will come to the Church attracted by the "Splendor of Truth." But he does not count on that happening. Moreover, he believes that any expectation that practicing Catholics will become some kind of triumphant majority is unrealistic, even naive. Joseph Ratzinger was always fascinated by the story of Gedeon. Israel was facing an army whose size was like "a multitude of locusts," but Gedeon had only ten thousand soldiers. "But the Lord said to Gedeon: Gedeon's soldiers are still too many, bring them to the waters, and there I will try them." God selected only the 300

men “And the Lord said to Gedeon: By the three hundred men, I will save you and deliver Madian into thy hand.” And God delivered. The Pope has praised the many achievements of America and American Catholics. But, if anything, he has raised the bar of what being a Catholic means. That bar is very high. Will he be the one identifying who is or who isn't a good Catholic? Nein. He knows better. He will let American Catholics each take their side in history by the way they live up to God.

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**A future of hope.** [By [Colleen Carroll Campbell](#)] Since Pope Benedict began his visit dedicated to “Christ Our Hope,” flashes of hope have touched even sexual abuse victims who felt heard after telling their stories to the pope. And they have inspired Catholics throughout America who struggle to keep the faith despite sin, scandals and the distractions of our secular age. The pope challenged his “young friends” to proclaim Jesus Christ and the teachings of their Catholic faith with boldness, defend human life, serve the needy with love and remain open to God's call to the priesthood and religious life. Weary of the divisions that have plagued the Church since their childhood and uninterested in waging the battles for a more democratic, culturally accommodating Church that consumed their elders, the young hunger for a faith that transforms culture. These young adults see connections, not conflicts, between their focus on a personal relationship with Jesus and their attraction to ancient Catholic devotions and between belonging to a hierarchical Church and embracing the universal call to holiness. They are buoyed to know that Catholics must embrace a faith that reaches out to the world while remaining true to teachings handed down through the ages — comes as particularly good news to them. Yet it also comes as a challenge. You're on the right track, he tells them, but much work still must be done. Stay humble. Stay prayerful. And treat others — including the elders with whom you disagree — the way you want them to treat you.

**Turn to Jesus** [By [Amy Welborn](#)] How did this trip change our perceptions of Benedict? This “poor successor of St. Peter” who continually asked for our prayers I'd imagine is pleased by his reception here. But only for the greater purpose of opening our hearts to what he has devoted his life to saying. When I think back on this incredibly busy, rich, substantive visit — I picture a mirror held up to American Catholics, asking us to consider who we are, honestly. Benedict, at every turn, gave due credit to the strengths of the American church, and its promise. But at every turn, members of every particular group had a chance to look in the mirror and consider how, perhaps, they had succumbed to the culture and set their eyes not on Christ, but on comfort, safety and the world's priorities. Everyone: Bishops, priests, religious, educators, the young, and the entire Church. We were asked, over and over, to ask ourselves, “Can this world see Christ through us? How are we dealing with our sins? Does this world have any reason at all to take us seriously?” He laid out the obstacles— a tepid presentation of faith, a loss of nerve when it comes to presenting Jesus as truth. The deep divide between what so many of us profess we believe and how we act the rest of the week. The divisiveness within the Church — always the divisiveness. What I couldn't help but wonder about was the creative energies of Catholics — and by creative, I mean apostolates and missions and ministry. Now, when you look at the public face of the Church in this country, it is still marked by division and an unhealthy commitment to — identity politics. For if you have been alive and involved in this Church over the past 40 years, you know that an **astounding amount of Catholic intellectual energies have been diverted into intra-Church squabbles**. Our minds and our time have been occupied with fighting amongst ourselves on everything from the ordination of women to whether blue is an appropriate color for Advent. Oh, my God, how much time have we spent at these things? What we like to say about babies and bathwater definitely applies. But the point is ... can we move on? Benedict asked us to consider the question, “Why bother with this Catholic business?” If we've got any answers that are about anything other than Christ, crucified, risen and alive today, we might want to start giving our egos a rest. “You are Christ's disciples today. Shine his light upon this great city and beyond. Show the world the reason for the hope that resonates within you. Tell others about the truth that sets you free. “Get busy.

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**The face of the Pastor.** [By [Peter Steinfels](#)]. The pope is a complex person of extremely nuanced views, which do not fit easily into an American framework that tends to equate religion with morality and morality with rules. The papacy, moreover, is an institution of many dimensions: it teaches, it inspires, it steers, it disciplines, it unites, it leads in prayer. The face that Benedict chose to show to the public was the face of the pastor. Not the theologian, not the governor, not the “decider” — all of which he is, in addition — but the pastor. The face of the leader who must deal with flesh-and-blood individuals. The face of the leader who must use discretion and sensitivity, who must listen and reconcile. The face of the leader who leaves the 99 sheep to search for the one that is lost. The US Catholic church would have confronted serious problems even sexual scandals had never been committed, problems involving leadership, the breakup of the old ethnic-based Catholic subcultures and other social changes, world-historical shifts in equality and dignity. While the papal visit barely budged the US church toward dealing with those problems, none of them will be adequately addressed without the kind of pastoral sensibility that Benedict, very deliberately, chose to project. There has been much to rejoice in over the past days, but it is this that gives me most comfort.

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**Pope & U.N.**[By Cindy Wooden and Benedicta Cipolla for *Catholic News Service*] Neither government nor religion has a right to change or limit human rights, because those rights flow from the dignity of each person created in God's image, according to Benedict XVI. Human rights cannot be limited or rewritten on the basis of national interests or

majority rule. Pope Benedict said he came to the United Nations as a sign of his esteem for the organization, founded after the devastation of World War II when several governments ignored the fact that human beings were created by God and that the basic principles of right and wrong are written in the heart of each person. "In consequence freedom and human dignity were grossly violated." The pope insisted that when one country has a problem with another, it must not act unilaterally, but seek the assistance of the United Nations. Pope Benedict proclaimed the equality of all people, the basic right to life and to freedom, liberty of conscience and the free practice of religion. It is essential that governments recognize they are not the creators of human rights and they cannot limit them.

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**Pope to American Bishops: Moral Formation.** [by Dr. Jeff Mirus] **Three American Obstacles.** The Pope identified three problems which dilute what would otherwise be a vibrant American religious spirit. 1) Secularism: Many Catholics feel perfectly comfortable professing their faith on Sunday while engaging in business practices and medical procedures which contradict the faith while exploiting the poor, promoting immoral behavior, and denying the right to life. Secularization privatizes religion by divorcing belief and behavior. 2) Materialism, which focuses our attention on the present prosperity now in this life, at the expense of the promises in the age to come" (Mk 10:30). How easy it is to be entranced by science and technology, believing that they can fulfill our deepest needs through our own efforts. 3) Individualism. The American preoccupation with autonomy causes us to lose sight of our responsibilities toward others. This preoccupation gives rise to a form of piety which sometimes emphasizes our private relationship with God at the expense of our calling to be members of a redeemed community." We fail to reflect the faith in our community life. These three problems must be addressed by moral formation.

**Christian Formation** makes us emphasize whatever will help us make the right connections between belief and behavior, so that the Catholic community will once again vigorously to live its faith. There are six specific areas critical to this task.

**Christian Health Care:**

**Involvement in Public Life:** The Pope called attention to the "crucial" role of the laity as leaven in society. "It cannot be assumed that all Catholic citizens think in harmony with the Church's teachings on today's key ethical questions."

**Marriage and the family:** In the family we experience the fundamental elements of peace, justice, love, the role of authority, concern for the weak, mutual help, readiness to accept and forgive. The family is also the "primary place for evangelization". The rise of divorce and infidelity—the abandonment of formal marriage by many—must be faced: "proclaim boldly the arguments from faith and reason in favor of the institution of marriage, understood as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman, open to the transmission of life."

**Sexual mores:** Sexually abusive behavior need to be placed in a wider context: the right of children to grow up with a healthy understanding of sexuality,

**Priests:** many **priests feel they have lost trust and esteem not only on their relationships with the laity but with their bishops**; many bishops have distanced themselves from their priests in order to escape blame.

**Prayer:** The Holy Father stressed adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, contemplation of the mysteries of the Rosary, and fidelity to prayer.

