

JESUS OF NAZARETH FROM THE BAPTISM IN THE JORDAN TO THE TRANSFIGURATION

Joseph Ratzinger—Pope Benedict XVI

New York: Doubleday, 2007

*Digest and **emphasis** by John Gueguen, 2008*

Introduction: An Initial Reflection on the Mystery of Jesus

“Religions do not aim merely to answer the question about our provenance; all religions try in one way or another to lift the veil of the future. They seem important precisely because they impart knowledge about what is to come, and so show man the path he has to take to avoid coming to grief” (p. 2).

“It is in Jesus that the promise of the new prophet is fulfilled....We have to start here if we are truly to understand the figure of Jesus as it is presented to us in the New Testament; all that we are told about his words, deeds, sufferings, and glory is anchored here. This is the central point, and if we leave it out of account, we fail to grasp what the figure of Jesus is really all about, so that it becomes self-contradictory and, in the end, unintelligible....[The] teaching [of Jesus] does not come from any school.[It] is not the product of human learning, of whatever kind. It originates from immediate contact with the Father....It is the Son’s word” (pp. 6-7).

Chapter One: The Baptism of Jesus

“Jesus’ Baptism is understood as a repetition of the whole of history, which both recapitulates the past and anticipates the future....Looked at from this angle, the sacrament of Baptism appears as the gift of participation in Jesus’ world-transforming struggle in the conversion of life that took place in his descent and ascent” (p. 20).

Chapter Two: The Temptations of Jesus

“What picture of God are we working with? The dispute about interpretation is ultimately a dispute about who God is. Yet, in practice, the struggle over the image of God, which underlies the debate about valid biblical interpretation, is decided by the picture we form of Christ: Is he, who remained without worldly power, really the Son of the living God?” (p. 36).

“We are dealing here with the vast question as to how we can and cannot know God, how we are related to God and how we can lose him. The arrogance that would make God an object and impose our laboratory conditions upon him is incapable of finding him. For it already implies that we deny God as God by placing ourselves above him, by discarding **the whole dimension of love**, of interior listening...” (p. 37).

“The fundamental commandment of Israel is also the fundamental commandment for Christians: God alone is to be worshiped” (p. 45).

Chapter Three: The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

“The term...*evangelion*...figures in the vocabulary of the Roman emperors, who understood themselves as lords, saviors, and redeemers of the world....The idea was that what comes from the emperor is a saving message, that it is not just a piece of news [‘good news’], but a change of the world for the better” (pp. 46-47).

“In order to understand [Jesus’] message—his action and his suffering—it may be useful to look at how the word *kingdom* has been understood in the history of the Church” (p. 49).

“ ‘Kingdom of God’ is...an inadequate translation [of the Hebrew *malkut* and the Greek *basilea*]. It would be better to speak of God’s being-Lord, of his lordship” (p. 56).

“...there is a growing tendency to hold that Christ uses these words to refer to himself: He, who is in our midst, is the ‘Kingdom of God,’ only we do not know him (cf Jn 1:30)...He himself is the treasure; communion with him is the pearl of great price” (pp. 60-61).

“Ethics is not denied; it is freed from the constraints of moralism and set in the context of **a relationship of love**—of relationship to God. And that is how it comes truly into its own” (p. 62).

Chapter Four: The Sermon on the Mount

The Beatitudes

“The Beatitudes are the transposition of Cross and Resurrection into discipleship. But they apply to the disciple because they were first paradigmatically lived by Christ himself” (p. 74).

“Enmity with God is the source of all that poisons man; overcoming this enmity is the basic condition for **peace** in the world. **Only the man who is reconciled with God can also be reconciled and in harmony with himself, and only the man who is reconciled with God and with him-**

self can establish peace around him and throughout the world....That there be peace on earth (cf Lk 2:14) is the will of God and, for that reason, it is a task given to man as well” (p. 85).

“The crucified Christ is **the persecuted just man** portrayed in the words of Old Covenant prophecy...but also prefigured in Plato’s writings (*Republic* II 361e-362a). And in this guise he himself is the advent of God’s Kingdom” (p. 89).

“In the other Beatitudes, Christology is present, so to speak, in veiled form; here, however, the message that he himself is the center of history emerges openly. Jesus ascribes to his ‘ I ’ a normative status that no teacher of Israel—indeed, no teacher of the Church—has a right to claim for himself. Someone who speaks like this is no longer a prophet..., an ambassador and trustee of another; he himself is the reference point of the righteous life, its goal and center” (p. 90).

“Edith Stein once said that anyone who honestly and passionately searches for truth is on the way to Christ. It is of such people that the Beatitude speaks—of this **thirst and hunger that is blessed** because it leads men to God, to Christ, and therefore opens the world to the Kingdom of God” (pp. 91-92).

“As we witness the abuse of economic power, as we witness the cruelties of a capitalism that degrades man to the level of merchandise, we have also realized **the perils of wealth**, and we have gained a new appreciation of what Jesus meant when he warned of riches, of the man-destroying divinity Mammon, which grips large parts of the world in a cruel stranglehold. Yes indeed, the Beatitudes stand opposed to our spontaneous sense of existence, our hunger and thirst for life. They demand ‘conversion’—that we inwardly turn around to go in the opposite direction from the one we would spontaneously like to go in. But this U-turn brings what is pure and noble to the fore and gives a proper ordering to our lives.

“The Greek world...was...deeply aware that man’s real sin, his deepest temptation, is *hubris*—the arrogant presumption of autonomy that leads man to put on the airs of divinity, to claim to be his own god, in order to possess life totally and to draw from it every last drop of what it has to offer. This awareness that man’s true peril consists in the temptation to ostentatious self-sufficiency, which at first seems so plausible, is brought to its full depth in the Sermon on the Mount in light of the figure of Christ.

“We have seen that the Sermon on the Mount is a hidden Christology. Behind the Sermon on the Mount stands the figure of Christ, the man who is God, but who, precisely because he is God, descends, empties himself, all the way to death on the Cross. The saints, from Paul through Francis of Assisi down to Mother Teresa, have lived out this op-

tion and have thereby shown us the correct image of man and his happiness. **In a word, the true morality of Christianity is love. And love does admittedly run counter to self-seeking—it is an exodus out of oneself, and yet this is precisely the way in which man comes to himself....It is only on the way of love, whose paths are described in the Sermon on the Mount, that the richness of life and the greatness of man's calling are opened up**" (pp. 98-99).

The Torah of the Messiah

[commentary on Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*; Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000]

"The question about Jesus—who he really was, and what he really wanted—as well as the whole question as to what Judaism and Christianity actually are: This is the point at issue. Was Jesus in reality a liberal rabbi—a forerunner of Christian liberalism? Is the Christ of faith, and therefore, the whole faith of the Church, just one big mistake?" (p. 107).

"The issue that is really at the heart of the debate [concerning the Sabbath] is thus finally laid bare. **Jesus understands himself as the Torah—as the word of God in person....**The heart of the Sabbath disputes is the question about the Son of Man—the question about Jesus Christ himself" (pp. 110-111).

"Discipleship of Jesus offers no politically concrete program for structuring society [unlike the Torah, which gives the People a juridical and social framework for daily life and for just politics]. The Sermon on the Mount cannot serve as a foundation for a state and social order....**This restructuring of the social order finds its basis and its justification in Jesus' claim that he, with his community of disciples, forms the origin and center of a new Israel**" (p. 114).

"What has Jesus brought?...He has brought the God of Israel to the nations, so that all the nations now pray to him and recognize Israel's Scriptures as his word, the word of the living God. He has brought the gift of universality, which was the one great definitive promise to Israel and the world...over and above the bonds of descent according to the flesh....It is what proves him to be the Messiah" (pp. 116-117).

"The concrete political and social order is released from the directly sacred realm, from theocratic legislation, and is transferred to the freedom of man, whom Jesus has...taught thereby to see the right and the good" (p. 118)

"Jesus' intention is not to abolish either the family or the Sabbath-as-celebration-of-creation, but he has to create a new and broader context for both" (p. 120).

“It would be good for the Christian world to look respectfully at [the] obedience of Israel, and thus to appreciate better the great commandments of the Decalogue, which Christians have to transfer into the context of God’s universal family and which Jesus, as the ‘new Moses,’ has given to us” (p. 122).

Chapter Five: The Lord’s Prayer

“The Sermon on the Mount...draws a comprehensive portrait of the right way to live. It aims to show us how to be a human being. **We could sum up its fundamental insights by saying that man can be understood only in light of God, and that his life is made righteous only when he lives it in relation to God. But God is not some distant stranger. He shows us his face in Jesus. In what Jesus does and wills we come to know the mind and will of God himself**” (p. 128).

“Christ, who is the truth, has given us these words, and in them he gives us the Holy Spirit....This also reveals something of the specificity of Christian mysticism. It is not in the first instance immersion in the depths of oneself, but encounter with the Spirit of God in the word that goes ahead of us. It is encounter with the Son and the Holy Spirit and thus a becoming-one with the living God who is always both in us and above us” (pp. 131-132).

“The first thing we must do is step outside ourselves and open ourselves to God. **Nothing can turn out right if our relation to God is not rightly ordered. For this reason, the Our Father begins with God and then...shows us the way toward being human**” (p. 134).

Our Father Who Art in Heaven

“The gift of God is God himself. The ‘good things’ [Mt 7:9] that he gives us are himself. This reveals in a surprising way what prayer is really all about: It is not about this or that, but about God’s desire to offer us the gift of himself—that is the gift of all gifts, the ‘one thing necessary.’ **Prayer is a way of gradually purifying and correcting our wishes and of slowly coming to realize what we really need: God and his Spirit**” (pp. 136-137).

“Jesus alone was fully entitled to say ‘my Father,’ because he alone is truly God’s only-begotten Son, of one substance with the Father. By contrast, the rest of us have to say ‘our Father.’ Only within the ‘we’ of the disciples can we call God ‘Father,’ because only through communion with Jesus Christ do we truly become ‘children of God.’ In this sense, the word our is really rather demanding: It requires that we step out of the closed circle of our ‘I.’ It requires that we surrender ourselves to

communion with the other children of God. It requires that we strip ourselves of what is merely our own, of what divides. It requires that we accept the other, the others—that we open our ear and our heart to them” (pp. 140-141).

Hallowed Be Thy Name

“He says of himself simply, ‘ I am who I am’—he *is* without any qualification. This pledge is a name and a non-name at one and the same time. The Israelites were therefore perfectly right in refusing to utter this self-designation of God, expressed by the word YHWH, so as to avoid degrading it to the level of names of pagan deities....Translations were wrong to write out this name....By doing so, they have dragged the mystery of God, which cannot be captured in images or in names lips can utter, down to the level of some familiar item within a common history of religions....Our only recourse is to try as reverently as possible to pick up and purify the polluted fragments of the divine name. But there is no way we can do that alone. All we can do is plead with him not to allow the light of his name to be destroyed in this world” (pp. 143-144).

Thy Kingdom Come

“With [this] petition...the Lord wants to show us how to pray and order our action in just this way. **The first and essential thing is a listening heart, so that God, not we, may reign. The Kingdom of God comes by way of a listening heart.** This is its path. And that is what we must pray for again and again” (p. 146).

Thy Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven

“The essence of heaven is oneness with God’s will, the oneness of will and truth. Earth becomes ‘ heaven’ when and insofar as God’s will is done there....This why we pray...that earth may become ‘ heaven’ ” (pp. 147-148).

“And in this light, we now understand that Jesus himself is ‘ heaven’ in the deepest and truest sense of the word—he in whom and through whom God’s will is wholly done” (p. 150).

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

“When we consider Jesus’ message in its entirety, then it is impossible to expunge the eucharistic dimension....This petition helps us to transcend the purely material and to request already now what is to come ‘ tomorrow,’ the new bread. **And when we pray for ‘tomorrow’s’ bread today, we are reminded to live already today from tomorrow, from the love of God, which calls us all to be responsible for one another**” (p. 156).

**And Forgive Us Our Trespasses,
as We Forgive Those Who Trespass against Us**

“The fact that all individual beings are deeply interwoven and that all are encompassed in turn by the being of the One, the Incarnate Son, is something we are no longer capable of seeing [because of] the trivialization of evil in which we take refuge [and because of] our individualistic image of man. We can no longer grasp substitution because we think that every man is ensconced in himself alone” (p. 159).

“The overcoming of guilt has a price: We must put our heart—or, better, our whole existence—on the line....This act...can become effective only through communion with the One who bore the burdens of us all. [This] petition [is] a Christological prayer. **It calls us...with him to work through and suffer through evil by means of love**” (p. 160).

And Lead Us Not into Temptation

“The object of [this] petition is to ask God not to mete out more than we can bear, not to let us slip from his hands” (p. 164).

But Deliver Us from Evil

“The Our Father in general and this petition in particular [tries] to tell us that it is only when you have lost God that you have lost yourself; then you are nothing more than a random product of evolution....Evils (plural) can be necessary for our purification, but evil (singular) destroys....This is why we pray that...we ourselves may not be lost” (p. 166).

“[This] last petition brings us back to the first three: In asking to be liberated from the power of evil, we are ultimately asking for God’s Kingdom, for union with his will, and for sanctification of his name [as we also beg him] to set a limit to the evils that ravage the world and our lives” (p. 167).

Chapter Six: The Disciples

“We cannot simply pick the laborer in God’s harvest in the same way an employer seeks his employees. God must always be asked for them and he himself must choose them....You cannot make yourself a disciple—it is an event of election, a free decision of the Lord’s will, which in its turn is anchored in his communion of will with the Father” (p. 170).

“The whole of Israel is restored and the twelve tribes are newly assembled. In this sense, the number twelve is a return to the origins of Israel, and yet at the same time it is a symbol of hope....[Twelve] is a cosmic number that expresses the comprehensiveness of the newly reborn People of God. The Twelve stand as patriarchs of this universal people

founded on the Apostles....Past, present, and future intermingle when viewed in terms of the Twelve” (p. 171).

“Jesus reveals himself here as the new Jacob....He himself...is the true Jacob, the ‘ Son of Man,’ the patriarch of the definitive Israel....The Apostles have to learn to be with him in a way that enables them, even when they go to the ends of the earth, to be with him still. Being with him includes the missionary dynamic by its very nature, since Jesus’ whole being is mission” (p. 172).

“No matter how many gods may have been at large in the world, God is only one, and only one is Lord. If we belong to him, everything else loses its power....The world is now seen as something rational: It emerges from eternal reason, and this creative reason [the *Logos*] is the only true power over the world and in the world....To ‘exorcise’ the world...is a paramount, central task of the messengers of Jesus Christ” (p. 174).

“God’s dominion, God’s Kingdom, means precisely the disempowerment of [the ‘demons’] by the intervention of the one God, who is good, who is the Good itself....Only becoming-one with God can be the true process of man’s healing....**Whoever truly wishes to heal man must see him in his wholeness and must know that his ultimate healing can only be God’s love**” (pp. 176-177).

“Alongside [Jacob’s] twelve sons who prefigure Israel stand the seventy... members of the house of Jacob at the time of the emigration to Egypt... who represent the whole world. Now at last [‘pagan’ converts] could become full members of the People of God by believing in Jesus as the Son of God....[The seventy disciples] are an intimation of the universal character of the Gospel, which is meant for all the peoples of the earth” (pp. 179-180).

Chapter Seven: The Message of the Parables

The Nature and Purpose of Parables

“The type of interpretation that makes Jesus a moralist, a teacher of an enlightened and individualistic morality [is] theologically impoverished, and does not even come close to the real figure of Jesus” [p. 186].¹

“In the sense that the Kingdom of God is ‘realized’ in his coming, it is perfectly possible to speak of an ‘eschatology in process of realization’: Jesus, as the One who has come, is nonetheless the One who comes throughout the whole of history....” (p. 188)

“Prophets fail: their message goes too much against general opinion and the comfortable habits of life. It is only through failure that their word becomes efficacious” (p. 189).

“God cannot be seen through the world—that is what the modern concept of reality says. And so there is even less reason to accept the demand he places on us: To believe in him as God and to live accordingly seems like a totally unreasonable requirement. In this situation, the parables really do lead to non-seeing and non-understanding, to ‘hardening of heart.’ This means...that knowledge of God...is one with life itself, and that it cannot exist without ‘repentance.’...**Knowledge of God is possible only through the gift of God’s love becoming visible, but this gift too has to be accepted.** In this sense, the mystery of the Cross is inscribed right at the heart of the parables” (pp. 193-194).

Three Major Parable from the Gospel of Luke

1) The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)

“One thing is clear: A new universality is entering the scene, and it rests on the fact that deep within I am already becoming a brother to all those I meet who are in need of my help....The risk of goodness [toward others] is something we must relearn from within, but we can do that only if we ourselves become good from within, if we ourselves are ‘neighbors’ from within....” (pp. 198-199).

“The great theme of love, which is the real thrust of the text, is only now given its full breadth. For now we realize that we are all ‘alienated,’ in need of redemption. **Now we realize that we are all in need of the gift of God’s redeeming love ourselves, so that we too can become ‘lovers’ in our turn.** Now we realize that we always need God, who makes himself our neighbor so that we can become neighbors. The two characters in this story are relevant to every single human being. **Everyone is ‘alienated,’ especially from love...**” (p. 201).

2) The Two Brothers and the Good Father (Lk 15:11-32)

“Becoming inwardly one with direction and norm is what freedom is all about. A false autonomy thus leads to slavery....History has taught us this all too clearly: ...the totally free man has become a wretched slave. ...[The younger brother] is on a pilgrimage toward the truth of his existence, and that means ‘homeward.’ [This explains] what ‘conversion’ is, what sort of sufferings and inner purifications it involves” (pp. 204-205).

3) The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-13)

“The next life only brings to light the truth already present in this life. **By awakening us, this parable at the same time summons us to the love and responsibility that we owe now to our poor brothers and sisters....**The Lord wants to lead us from foolish cleverness toward true wisdom: he wants to teach us to discern the real good” (p. 215).

“But our thoughts go even further. Do we not recognize in the figure of Lazarus...the mystery of Jesus...?” (pp. 216-217).

Chapter Eight: The Principal Images of John’s Gospel

Introduction: The Johannine Question

“The unity of *Logos* and act is the goal at which the Gospel is aiming.... There are three important passages where [John] uses the word *remember* and so gives us the key to understanding what he means by ‘memory.’...: ‘His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for thy house will consume me” ’ (Jn 2:17);...‘When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken’ (Jn 2:22);...‘His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him’ (Jn 12:16)...” (pp. 231-232).

“The Resurrection teaches us a new way of seeing; it uncovers the connection between the words of the Prophets and the destiny of Jesus. It evokes ‘remembrance’ [*anamnesis*], that is, it makes it possible to enter into the interiority of the events, into the intrinsic coherence of God’s speaking and acting” (p. 232).

“By means of these texts the Evangelist himself gives us the decisive indications as to how his Gospel is composed and what sort of vision lies behind it. It rests upon...a co-remembering in the ‘we’ of the church. This remembering is an understanding under the guidance of the Holy Spirit..., who is the Spirit of truth. In this sense, the Gospel itself opens a path of understanding that always remains bound to the scriptural word [*Logos*], and yet from generation to generation can lead, and is meant to lead, ever anew into the depth of all the truth” (pp. 233-234).

“This means that the Gospel of John...escorts us, in virtue of understanding through remembering, beyond the external into the depth of words and events that come from God [i.e. divine inspiration] and lead back to him...” (pp. 234-235).

“[Jesus] does not break the Torah, but brings its whole meaning to light and wholly fulfills it” (p. 235).

“Only if we constantly keep in mind the liturgical context of Jesus’ discourses, indeed of the whole structure of John’s Gospel, will we be able to understand its vitality and depth.... It is evident that Jesus’ discourses direct us toward worship and in this sense toward ‘sacrament,’ at the same time embracing the questioning and seeking of all people” (pp. 237-238).

The Principal Johannine Images

WATER [Jn 3:5; 4:14; 5; 7:37 ff; 9:7; 13:4 f; 19: 31,34; 1 Jn 5:6-8; Rev 22:1]

“Faith in Jesus is the way we drink the living water, the way we drink life that is no longer threatened by death” (p. 245).

“The saints are oases around which life sprouts up and something of the lost paradise returned. And ultimately, Christ himself is always the well-spring who pours himself forth in abundance” (p. 248).

VINE AND WINE [Jn 2:1-12; 15:1-10]

“Here, in response to the Church’s prayer, the Lord anticipates his return; he comes already now; he celebrates the marriage feast with us here and now. In so doing, he lifts us out of our own time toward the coming ‘hour.’... The superabundance of Cana is therefore a sign that God’s marriage-feast with his people, his self-giving for humanity, has begun.... In the coming of Jesus, the promise of the last days enters into the Now” (p. 252).

“The Lord always speaks in the present and with an eye to the future. He is also speaking with us and about us” (p. 257).

“Purification, fruit, remaining [abiding], commandment, love, unity—these are the key words for the drama of being in and with the Son in the vine that the Lord’s words place before our soul. Purification—the Church and the individual need constant purification. Processes of purification...run through the whole of history, the whole life of those who have dedicated themselves to Christ...” (p. 260).

“Purification and fruit belong together; only by undergoing God’s purifications can we bear the fruit that flows into the Eucharistic mystery and so leads to the marriage feast that is the goal toward which God directs history. **Fruit and love belong together: the true fruit is the love that God has passed through the Cross, through God’s purifications.** ‘Remaining’ is an essential part of all this.... Patient steadfastness in communion with the Lord amid all the vicissitudes of life is placed center stage here.... This is the way to produce good wine” (p. 262).

BREAD [Jn 6:1-15, 18, 28, 33, 35, 51, 53, 63; 12:24]

“I only want to draw out the principal message [about the Bread of Life] and, above all, to situate it in the context of the whole tradition to which it belongs and in terms of which it has to be understood” (p. 264).

“The Torah...was Moses’ fundamental and enduring gift; [it is] what really set Israel apart—this knowledge of God’s will and so of the right path of

life.... This joy of knowing God's will, and so of being privileged to live in accordance with God's will.... In some sense, it is true that **in and through the Torah man can make God's will his food**. So the Torah is 'bread' from God, then. And yet it shows us only God's back, so to speak. It is a 'shadow.'..." (pp. 266-267).

"The Law has become a Person. When we encounter Jesus, we feed on the living God himself, so to speak.... The whole of Pauline theology is present in this dialogue. The highest things, the things that really matter, we cannot achieve on our own; we have to accept them as gifts and enter into the dynamic of the gift, so to speak..." (p. 268).

"Eucharistic piety needs to be constantly learning from this great Christological—indeed, cosmic—dynamism.... Earthly bread can become the bearer of Christ's presence because it contains in itself the mystery of the Passion, because it unites in itself death and resurrection" (pp. 270-271).

THE SHEPHERD [Jn 1:29; 10:1 ff; 11:52; 19:34, 37; 21:15-17, 19]

"Man lives on truth and on being loved; on being loved by the truth. He needs God, the God who draws close to him, interprets for him the meaning of life, and thus points him toward the path of life.... **Ultimately what he needs most is the Word, love, God himself.** Whoever gives him *that* gives him 'life in abundance,' and also releases the energies man needs to shape the earth intelligently and to find for himself and for others the goods that we can have only in common with others" (p. 279).

"In this sense, there is an inner connection between the bread discourse and the shepherd discourse: In both cases the issue is what man lives on.... Just as the bread discourse does not merely allude to the Word, but goes on to speak of the Word that became flesh and also gift 'for the life of the world,' so too the shepherd discourse revolves completely around the idea of Jesus laying down his life for the 'sheep.' The Cross is at the center of the shepherd discourse, ...as a free gift of his very self.... Jesus interprets for us what happens at the institution of the Eucharist.... He does not give us *something*, but rather he gives himself. And that is how he gives life" (pp. 279-180).

"The shepherd in Jesus' service must always lead beyond himself in order to enable others to find their full freedom; and therefore he must always go beyond himself into unity with Jesus and with the Trinitarian God. Jesus' own 'I' is always opened into 'being with' the Father; he is never alone, but is forever receiving himself from and giving himself back to the Father" (p. 283).

Chapter Nine – Two Milestones on Jesus' Way

1) Peter's Confession [Jn 6:38 f; 12:24 f; 20:28]

“There is no need to enter here into a detailed discussion of the theory [that the Lord appeared to Peter, as to Paul] since this book...is primarily concerned with the Lord himself.... **It is only the combination of Peter's confession and Jesus' teaching of the disciples that furnishes us with the full, essential Christian faith**” (p. 298).

“The whole scene [where the people turn away] remains uncomfortably relevant to the present, because in the end we do in fact constantly think in terms of ‘flesh and blood,’ and not in terms of the Revelation that we are privileged to receive in faith.... Jesus interprets his own mystery, his own self, in light of his gift of himself as the living bread. The people do not like this; many go away... (p. 299).

“We will need to ponder [John's version] of Peter's confession more closely in the context of the Last Supper. It clearly reveals Jesus' priestly mystery.... This title [‘holy one of God’] points backward to the eucharistic discourse, and forward—along with this discourse—to the mystery of the Cross; it is thus anchored in the Paschal Mystery, in the heart of Jesus' mission, and shows what makes the figure of Christ completely different from the then current forms of messianic expectation” (p. 302).

“What firm conclusion can we draw from all of this?... It is during Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin that we see what was actually scandalous about him: not a political messianism, [but this:].... **He [a man] seemed to be putting himself on an equal footing with the living God himself.** This was what the strictly monotheistic faith of the Jews was unable to accept. This was the idea to which even Jesus could only slowly and gradually lead people. **This was also what permeated his entire message—while preserving unbroken unity with faith in the one God; this was what was new, characteristic, and unique about his message....** (pp. 303-304).

“In him, the great messianic words are fulfilled in a disconcerting and unexpected way.... In the end, they send us upon a never-ending journey. They are so vast that we can never grasp them completely; they always surpass us. Throughout her entire history, the pilgrim Church has been exploring them ever more deeply. Only by touching Jesus' wounds and encountering his Resurrection are we able to grasp them, and then they become our mission” (pp. 304-305).

2) The Transfiguration [Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:1-9; Lk 9:28-36]

“The hoped for salvation and the Passion are joined together intimately and then developed into a picture of the Redemption that accords with

Scripture's deepest intention, although in terms of the prevailing expectations of the day it constitutes a startling novelty. **Scripture had to be read anew with the suffering of Christ, and so it must ever be.** We constantly have to let the Lord draw us into conversation with Moses [the Law] and Elias [the Prophets]; **we constantly have to learn from him, the Risen Lord, to understand Scripture afresh**" (pp. 312-313).

"The Lord has pitched the tent of his body among us [re: the feast of tabernacles] and has thus inaugurated the messianic age" (p. 315).

"The [Father's] solemn proclamation of [Jesus'] Sonship is followed by the command, 'Listen to him.'... **Jesus himself is the Torah.** This one command brings the theophany to its conclusion and sums up its deepest meaning. **The disciples must** accompany Jesus back down the mountain and **learn ever anew to 'listen to him'**... (p. 316).

Chapter Ten – Jesus Declares His Identity

"This book seeks to understand Jesus' earthly path and his preaching..." (pp. 320-321).

SON OF MAN

"With this term Jesus both concealed his mystery and, at the same time, gradually made it accessible, was new and surprising" (p. 324).

"The identification of the Son of Man who judges the world with those who suffer in every way presupposes the judge's identity with the earthly [human] Jesus and reveals the inner unity of Cross and glory, of earthly existence in lowliness and future authority to judge the world. **The Son of Man is one [divine] Person alone, and that Person is Jesus.** This identity shows us the way, shows us the criterion according to which our lives will one day be judged" (p. 328).

THE SON

"[In] the nascent Church's Christological reading of the Old Testament ...'dominion' over the peoples of the earth has lost its political character.... **Universality is achieved through the humility of communion in faith; this king rules by faith and love, and in no other way....** [He] inevitably collides with the total claim made by the imperial political power. Indeed, [he] **will always come into conflict with totalitarian political regimes and will be driven into the situation of martyrdom—into communion with the Crucified, who reigns solely from the wood of the Cross**" (pp. 337-339).

"The will of the Son is one with the will of the Father. This motif constantly recurs throughout the Gospels.... When we pray [the Our Father]

we are asking that the drama of the Mount of Olives, **the struggle of Jesus' entire life and work, be brought to completion in us; that together with him, the Son, we may unite our wills with the Father's will, thus becoming sons...in union of will that becomes union of knowledge...** (p. 341).

"The Son wills to draw into his filial knowledge all those whom the Father wills should be there.... **The mystery of Trinitarian love that comes to light in the term 'the Son' is perfectly one with the Paschal mystery of love that Jesus brings to fulfillment in history.**

"Finally, Jesus' prayer is seen [to be] the interior locus of the term 'the Son.' Of course, Jesus' prayer is different from the prayer of a creature: **It is the dialogue of love within God himself—the dialogue that God is...** Paul tells us that Jesus' gift of participation in his Spirit of Sonship empowers Christians to say: 'Abba, Father.' Paul makes it clear that this new form of Christian prayer is possible only through Jesus, through the only-begotten Son.

"The term 'Son' along with its correlate 'Father (Abba)' gives us a true glimpse into the inner being of Jesus—indeed, into the inner being of God himself. Jesus' prayer is the true origin of the term 'the Son.' It has no prehistory.... We have to reckon with the originality of Jesus. Only he is 'the Son' " (pp. 341, 344-345).

"It is not the Scripture experts, those who are professionally concerned with God, who recognize him; they are too caught up in the intricacies of their detailed knowledge. Their great learning distracts them from simply gazing upon the whole, upon the reality of God as he reveals himself.... **Purity of heart is what enables us to see. Therein consists the ultimate simplicity that opens up our life to Jesus' will to reveal.** We might also say that **our will has to become a filial will. When it does, then we can see**" (pp. 342-343).

I AM

"Israel came to recognize that its God was simply 'God' without any qualification. And so the 'I am' of the burning bush found its true meaning once more: This God simply is. When he says 'I am,' he is presenting himself precisely as the one who is, in his utter oneness..." (p. 348).

"When Jesus says 'I am he,' he...is not placing himself *alongside* the 'I' of the Father, but is pointing to the Father. And yet precisely by doing so, he is also speaking of himself. At issue here is the inseparability of Father and Son. Because he is the Son, he has every right to utter with his own lips the Father's self-designation.... And conversely: Because this is truly so, Jesus is entitled to speak the words of the Father's self-revelation in his own name as Son.... The 'I am' is situated completely in the relatedness between Father and Son" (p. 349).

“In Jesus’ origin we see the perfect fulfillment of the mystery of Israel.... Once again, the simple ‘I am’ stands before us in all its mystery, now defined in contrast to Abraham’s ‘coming into existence.’ Jesus’ ‘I am’ stands in contrast to the world of birth and death, the world of coming into being and passing away.... What is involved here is a fundamental distinction of nature. We have here a clear statement of Jesus’ claim to a totally unique mode of being that transcends human categories” (p. 350).

“And so we now realize what ultimately lies behind all the Johannine images: **Jesus gives us ‘life’ because he gives us God. He can give God because he himself is one with God, because he is the Son. He himself is the gift—he is ‘life.’** For precisely this reason, his whole being consists in communicating, in ‘pro-existence.’ **This is exactly what we see in the Cross, which is his true exaltation**” (p. 354).ⁱⁱ

ST. AUGUSTINE IN THE THOUGHT OF RATZINGER/BENEDICT

Quotations from the great Roman Doctor occur repeatedly in his writings. What does Ratzinger/Benedict find so appealing, so compelling about Augustine?

Recently (April 2007) he made a pilgrimage to St. Augustine’s tomb in Pavia, Italy and gave two important discourses. These provide a convenient summary of the Augustinian element in his thought. (Italics are supplied.)

Discourse in the Basilica of San Pietro in Ciel d’Oro, 4/22/07

Pope Benedict has “personal devotion and gratitude to the one who played such an important part” in his life “as a theologian and a Pastor” and “even more as a man and a priest.”

“Encounter of the Word of God and the personal experience of the great Bishop of Hippo” brings us a “significant message for the Church’s progress.” “St. Augustine fixed his gaze” on the mystery of the Redemption “and in it found the Truth he was so ardently seeking: Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, the Sacrificed and Risen Lamb, is the Face of God-Love for every human being on his journey along the paths of time towards eternity.”

The light of God’s love for man “opened Augustine’s eyes and led him to encounter the ‘beauty so old and so new’ in which alone the human heart finds peace.” “Deus caritas est.” “This encyclical, especially Part One, is deeply indebted to the thought of St. Augustine, who was in love with the Love of God and sang of it, meditated upon it, preached it in all his writings and above all witnessed to it in his pastoral ministry.”

“I am convinced that humanity today stands in need of this essential message, incarnate in Jesus Christ: God is love. Everything must start from here and everything must lead to here, every pastoral action, every theological treatise.... All charisms lose their meaning and value without love, thanks to which instead, all compete to build the Mystical Body of Christ.

“Here, then, is the message that still today St. Augustine repeats to the whole Church...: Love is the soul of the Church’s life and of her pastoral action.... Only those who live a personal experience of the Lord’s love are able to exercise the task of guiding and accompanying others on the way of following Christ. At the school of St. Augustine, I repeat this truth for you as Bishop of Rome, while as a Christian I welcome it with you with ever new joy.

“Only in Him, the Word spoken for us by the Father, is found that combination of truth and love that contains the full meaning of life. Augustine lived in the first person and explored to their depths the questions that man carries in his heart, and investigated his capacity to open himself to the infinity of God.”

The Church “is a community where one is taught to love, and this education happens not despite but through the events of life. This is how it was for Peter, for Augustine and for all the saints. So it is for us.”

Discourse in the Theresian Courtyard, University of Pavia, 4/22/07

“Augustine’s existential and intellectual development witnesses to the fertile interaction between faith and culture. St. Augustine was a man driven by a tireless desire to find the truth, to find out what life is, to know how to live, to know man, and precisely because of his passion for the human being, he necessarily sought God, because it is only in the light of God that the greatness of the human being and the beauty of the adventure of being human can fully appear.

“At first, this God appeared very remote to him. Then Augustine found Him; this great and inaccessible God made Himself close, one of us. The great God is our God; He is a God with a human face. Thus, his faith in Christ did not have its ultimate end in his philosophy or in his intellectual daring, but on the contrary, impelled him further to seek the depths of the human being and to help others to live well, to find life, the art of living.

“This was his philosophy: to know how to live with all the reason and all the depths of our thought, of our will, and to allow ourselves to be guided on the path of truth, which is a path of courage, humility, and permanent purification.

“Faith in Christ brought all of Augustine’s seeking to fulfillment, but fulfillment in the sense that he always remained on the way. Indeed, he tells us: Even in eternity our seeking will not be completed; it will be an eternal adventure, the discovery of new greatness, new beauty. He interpreted the words of the Psalm, ‘Seek His Face continually,’ and said:

This is true for eternity, and the beauty of eternity is that it is not a static reality but immense progress in the immense beauty of God.

“Thus he could discover God as the founding Reason, but also as Love that embraces us, guides us, and gives meaning to history and to our personal lives.... This love for Christ shaped his personal commitment. From a life patterned on seeking, he moved on to a life given totally to Christ and thus to a life for others. He discovered—that this was his second conversion—that being converted to Christ means not living for oneself but truly being at the service of all.

“May St. Augustine be for us and also for the academic world a model of dialogue between reason and faith, a model of a broad dialogue that alone can seek truth, hence also peace.” As Pope John Paul II put it, “The Bishop of Hippo succeeded in producing the first great synthesis of philosophy and theology, embracing currents of thought both Greek and Latin; in him too the great unity of knowledge, grounded in the thought of the Bible, was both confirmed and sustained by a depth of speculative thinking.”

EPISTLE TO THE AMERICANS

BENEDICT XVI

April 16-20, 2008¹

The Pope’s Mission:

My trip has two primary objectives: first, the pastoral-religious (and inter-religious, ecumenical) visit to the Church in the United States of America (on the 200th anniversary of the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the dioceses of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Bardstown, now Louisville) to reflect on the past and above all on how to

¹ This digest of the Pope’s words was excerpted and arranged by John Gueguen.

respond in the future to the great challenges of our time; second, the diplomatic-cultural visit to the United Nations Organization (on the 60th anniversary of its Universal Declaration of Human Rights) to confirm and to actualize as much as possible the fundamental idea of a common basis of values that are expressed as rights to be observed by everyone.²

The Church's Mission:

I trust that my presence will be a source of renewal and hope for the Church in the United States, and that it will strengthen the resolve of Catholics to contribute ever more responsibly to the life of this nation, of which they are proud to be citizens. The Church 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.³

In an age saturated with *information*, the importance of providing sound *formation* in the faith cannot be overstated. By ensuring that the Gospel is clearly heard, you not only form the people of your own community, but also help to spread the message of Christian hope throughout the world. The Catholic community, under your guidance, needs to offer a clear and united witness on matters of moral concern, but even more important is the gradual opening of the minds and hearts of the wider community to moral truth. Here much remains to be done. Crucial in this regard is the role of the lay faithful to act as 'leaven' in society. It falls to you to ensure that the moral formation provided at every level of ecclesial life reflects the authentic teaching of the Gospel of life. We need to reassess urgently the values underpinning society, so that a sound moral formation can be offered to young people and adults.

A serious commitment to evangelization presupposes a profound diagnosis of the real challenges the Gospel encounters in contemporary American culture. In a word, the Gospel has to be preached and taught as an integral way of life, offering an attractive and true answer, intellectually and practically, to real human problems. I believe that the Church in America, at this point in her history, is faced with the challenge of recapturing the Catholic vision of reality and presenting it, in an engaging and imaginative way. One of the great challenges facing the Church in this country is that of cultivating a Catholic identity that is based not so much on externals as on a way of thinking and acting grounded in the Gospel and enriched by the Church's living tradition.

Let us go to the heart of the matter: faith cannot survive unless it is nourished, unless it is 'formed by charity.' Do people today find it difficult to encounter God in our churches? Has our preaching lost its salt? Might it be that many people have forgotten, or never really learned, how to pray in and with the Church? What is needed above all, at this time in the history of the Church in America, is a renewal of that apostolic zeal that inspires her shepherds to seek out the lost, to bind up those who have been wounded, and to bring strength to those who are languishing.⁴

The challenges confronting us call for cultivating a mindset, an intellectual 'culture' that is genuinely Catholic, confident in the profound harmony of faith and reason. May the Church in America embrace ever more fully the way of conversion and fidelity to the demands of the Gospel. May all Catholics experience the consolation of hope and

² Press Conference aboard the Papal Flight, 4/15/08; hereafter, PC.

³ Address at the White House, 4/16/08; hereafter, WH.

⁴ Address to the Bishops of the United States, 4/16/08; hereafter, B.

the Spirit's gifts of joy and strength. Those who have hope must live different lives! By your prayers, by the witness of your faith, by the fruitfulness of your charity, may you point the way toward that vast horizon of hope that God is even now opening up to His Church, and indeed to all humanity: the vision of a world reconciled and renewed in Christ Jesus, our Savior.⁵

The Church's mission 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.⁶

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. As 'a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit,' the Church is called to proclaim the gift of life, to serve life, and to promote a culture of life. The proclamation of life, life in abundance, must be the heart of the new evangelization. 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.

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. 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. Is not an 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?

May Our Lord Jesus Christ grant to 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. 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 He is even now raising up in the midst of our world.

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 the Spirit has given you, a work that others began, a legacy that one day you, too, must pass on to a new generation. 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. For there God is even now preparing for all people a banquet of unending joy and life.⁷

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 convic-

⁵ Homily at Nationals Stadium, 4/17/08; hereafter, NS.

⁶ Address to Catholic Educators, 4/17/08; hereafter, CE.

⁷ Homily in St. Patrick's Cathedral (to clergy and religious) 4/19/08.

tions 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.

The Lord's own words, 'Thy Kingdom come,' need to bear fruit in the way you lead your lives and in the way you build up your families and your communities. Praying fervently for the coming of the Kingdom means facing present and future challenges with confidence in Christ's victory, 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, and working to enrich American society and culture with the beauty and truth of the Gospel.

May you find the courage to proclaim Christ, 'the same yesterday, today, and forever' and the unchanging truths that have their foundation in Him. These are the truths that set us free! They alone can guarantee respect for the inalienable dignity and rights of every man, woman, and child in the world—including the most defenseless of all human beings, the unborn child in the mother's womb.⁸

The Christian Mission:

Of grave concern is the spread of a secularist ideology that undermines or even rejects transcendent truth. 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. The very possibility of divine revelation, and therefore of Christian faith, is often called 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.

The power of the *kerygma* [preached message] has lost none of its internal dynamism. But we must ask ourselves whether its full force has not been attenuated by a relativistic approach to Christian doctrine similar to what is found in secular ideologies: in alleging that science alone is 'objective,' that the 'knowable' is limited to the empirically verifiable, religion is relegated entirely to the subjective sphere of individual feeling, 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 the individual's tastes. The result is to minimize the importance of doctrinal content for Christian living.

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 that indeed underlies the inspired word of God and sustains the sacramental life of Christians today. Only by 'holding fast' to sound teaching will we be able to give unambiguous testimony to the truth of the Gospel and its moral teaching. This is the message 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 good will

⁸ Homily in Yankee Stadium, 4/20/08; hereafter YS.

may be opened to see that God has shown us His face and granted us access to His divine life through Jesus Christ. He alone is our hope!⁹

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. His unconditional love, which bathes every human being, points to a meaning and purpose for all of life. Through His Cross, Jesus draws us into His saving love, and in so doing shows us the way ahead—the way of hope that transfigures us all, so that we, too become bearers of that hope and charity for others.¹⁰

America's Mission:

As this 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. Democracy can only flourish, as your founding fathers realized, when political leaders and those 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.¹¹

Let us thank God that many young people are able to enjoy today the liberties that 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. The power to destroy, however, does remain. To pretend otherwise would be to fool ourselves. But it never triumphs; it is defeated. This is the essence of the hope that defines us as Christians. It is Jesus who is the true teacher of life.¹²

To a great extent, the renewal of the Church in America depends on the renewal of the practice of Penance and the growth in holiness that Sacrament both inspires and accomplishes.¹³

The World's Mission:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 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. It is evident that the rights recognized and expounded in the Declaration apply to everyone by virtue of the common origin of the person, who remains the highpoint 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. The great variety of cultural, political, social, and even religious 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.

⁹ Address at Ecumenical Prayer Service, 4/18/08.

¹⁰ Address to Disabled Children, 4/19/08; hereafter, D.

¹¹ WH.

¹² Address to Seminarians and Young People, 4/19/08; hereafter, SY.

¹³ NS.

When presented purely in terms of legality, rights risk becoming weak propositions divorced from the ethical and rational dimension that is their foundation and their goal. The Declaration 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 is overlooked when the attempt is made to deprive rights of their true function as 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.

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. In this context 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. 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. Rediscovery of the authentic image of creation 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. 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. 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.¹⁴

Pastoral-religious themes:

Education: No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the souls of a nation. 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? 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, works 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.

Yet we all know, and observe with concern, the difficulty or reluctance many people have today in entrusting themselves to God. 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. In this way our institutions make a vital contribution to the mission of the Church and truly serve society.

How might Christian educators respond? These harmful developments point to the particular urgency of what we might call 'intellectual charity.' In practice it upholds the essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation that ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth. It guides the young toward the deep satisfaction of exer-

¹⁴ Address to the United Nations, 4/18/08; hereafter, UN.

cising freedom in relation to truth. 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. Religious education is a challenging apostolate, yet here 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.¹⁵

Youth: I think in particular of our need to speak to the hearts of young people, who, despite their constant exposure to messages contrary to the Gospel, continue to thirst for authenticity, goodness, and truth. Much remains to be done, particularly on the level of preaching and catechesis in parishes and schools, if the new evangelization is to bear fruit for the renewal of ecclesial life in America.¹⁶

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 His way of forgiveness, reconciliation, humility, joy, and peace. 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.

The hope that never disappoints is Jesus Christ. The saints show us the selfless love of His way. Their example invites us, then, to consider four essential aspects of the treasure of our faith: personal prayer in silence, liturgical prayer in communion, charity in action, and the vocational call.

Prayer: 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. St. Paul reminds us that we can and should 'pray constantly.' In this way we turn to God and through Him to each other, including the marginalized and those following ways other than God's path. 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. 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 words shape your journey as an unfolding of holiness.

Liturgy: In the liturgy we find the whole Church at prayer. Through the liturgy, the 'work of Jesus'—His Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension—is continually brought into contact with history and 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 the Sacraments, Jesus is at work. Through the Holy Spirit He draws us to Himself, into His sacrificial love of the Father, which becomes love for all. Your faithful participation is an active hope that helps to keep the world—saints and sinners alike—open to God.

Charity: The saints show us that the life of faith and hope is also a life of charity. Contemplating Jesus on the Cross we begin to imagine the path of love along which we must move. Are you ready to give all as He did for truth and justice? We must listen deeply. We must respond with renewed social action that stems from the universal love

¹⁵ CE.

¹⁶ B.

that knows no bounds. In this way, we ensure that our works of mercy and justice become hope in action for others.

Vocation: Finally, a word about vocations: Friends, again I ask you: what about today? What are you seeking? What is God whispering to you? First of all my thoughts go to your parents, grandparents and godparents. They have been your primary educators in the faith. 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. Nourished by personal prayer, prompted in silence, shaped by the Church’s liturgy, committed to help those who are most in need through works of charity, you will discover the particular vocation God has for you. Embrace it with joy. You are Christ’s disciples today. Show the world the reason for the hope that resonates within you. Tell others about the truth that sets you free. You are called to continue this chain of friends of Christ who found in His love the great treasure of their lives.¹⁷

To the extent that we teach young people to pray, and pray well, we will be cooperating with God’s call. The discernment of a vocation is above all the fruit of an intimate dialogue between the Lord and His disciples. Young people, if they know how to pray, can be trusted to know what to do with God’s call.¹⁸

Priesthood: Bishops and seminary directors will do all that is possible to have a strong, strong discernment because it is more important to have good priests than to have many priests. Only sound persons can be admitted to the priesthood, only persons with a deep personal life in Christ and a deep sacramental life.¹⁹

If you yourselves live in a manner closely configured to Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep, you will inspire your brother priests to rededicate themselves to the service of their flocks with Christ-like generosity. Indeed, a clearer focus on the imitation of Christ in holiness of life is exactly what is needed if we are to move forward. We need to rediscover the joy of living a Christ-centered life, cultivating the virtues and immersing ourselves in prayer. When the faithful know that their pastor is a man who prays and who dedicates his life to serving them, they respond with warmth and affection that nourishes and sustains the life of the whole community. This radical configuration to Christ lies at the heart of our pastoral ministry, and if we open ourselves through prayer to the power of the Spirit, He will give us the gifts we need to carry out our daunting task.²⁰

Marriage: It is your task to 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. This message should resonate with people today for it is essentially an unconditional and unreserved ‘yes’ to life, a ‘yes’ to love, and a ‘yes’ to the aspirations at the heart of our common humanity.²¹

¹⁷ SY

¹⁸ B.

¹⁹ PC.

²⁰ B.

²¹ B.

Social-cultural themes:

Secularity: The state is intentionally and decidedly secular precisely because of a religious will, a love for religion in its authenticity, which can be lived only with liberty. Secular institutions live with a moral consensus among the citizens.²² Secularity challenges the Church to reaffirm and pursue more actively her mission in and to the world. The lay faithful have a particular responsibility in this regard. I am convinced that what is needed is a greater sense of the intrinsic relationship between the gospel and the natural law, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the pursuit of authentic human good, as embodied in civil law and in personal moral decisions.²³

Secularism: People today need to be reminded of the ultimate purpose of their lives. They need to recognize that implanted within them is a deep thirst for God. They need to be given opportunities to drink from the wells of His infinite love. Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted. Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel. In Christianity there can be no room for purely private religion. We cannot separate our love for the Savior of the world from our commitment to the building up of the Church and the extension of His Kingdom. To the extent that religion becomes a purely private affair, it loses its very soul.²⁴

It is inconceivable 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 exercise one's rights. The 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.²⁵

Individualism: 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. If this seems counter-cultural, that is simply further evidence of the urgent need for a renewed evangelization of culture. A growing separation of faith from life is aggravated by an individualistic and eclectic approach to faith and religion: far from a Catholic approach to 'thinking with the Church,' each person believes he or she has a right to pick and choose, maintaining external social bonds but without an integral, interior conversion to the law of Christ. Consequently, rather than being transformed and renewed in mind, Christians are easily tempted to conform to the spirit of this age. We have seen this emerge in an acute way in the scandal given by Catholics who promote an alleged right to abortion. As we know, Christian faith is essentially ecclesial, and without a living bond to the community, the individual's faith will never mature.²⁶

This places upon educators a responsibility and offers an opportunity. Within 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

²² PC.

²³ B.

²⁴ B.

²⁵ UN.

²⁶ B.

and mistakes. 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.²⁷

Freedom; Truth: Freedom is not only a gift, but also a summons to personal responsibility. Its preservation calls for the cultivation of virtue, self-discipline, sacrifice for the common good, and a sense of responsibility toward the less fortunate. In a word, freedom is ever new, a challenge to each generation; it must be constantly won over for the cause of good.²⁸ The ‘dictatorship of relativism’ is nothing less than a threat to genuine human freedom, which matures only in generosity and fidelity to the truth.²⁹

True freedom, God’s gift to His children, enables us to live in conformity with His will. Young people need to be helped to discern the path that leads to true freedom: the path of a sincere and generous imitation of Christ, the path of commitment to justice and peace.³⁰

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 you and your colleagues is to evoke among the young a 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 that is given us in the Church.

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. 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.³¹

The fundamental importance of freedom must be rigorously safeguarded. It is no surprise that numerous individuals and groups loudly claim their freedom in the public forum. But freedom is a delicate value. It can be misunderstood or misused so as to lead not to the happiness we all expect of it, 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. This manipulation of truth distorts our perception of reality and tarnishes our imagination and our aspirations.

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²⁸ WH.

²⁹ B.

³⁰ NS.

³¹ CE.

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, even 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 that claims to assure freedom and to liberate conscience by giving value to everything indiscriminately. This we call relativism. But what purpose has a 'freedom' that by disregarding truth pursues what is false or wrong?

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 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 being for others. How, then, can we as believers help others walk the path of a freedom that brings fulfillment and lasting happiness? Let us turn to the saints. How did their witness truly free others from darkness of heart and mind? The answer is found in the kernel of their faith—the kernel of our faith.³²

The Gospel teaches us that true freedom, the freedom of the children of God, is found only in the self-surrender that is part of the mystery of love. Only by losing ourselves do we truly find ourselves. 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. Real freedom, then, is God's gracious gift, the fruit of conversion to His truth, the truth that makes us free. And this freedom in truth brings in its wake a new and liberating way of seeing reality. We become the light of the world, the salt of the earth, 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. 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.³³

Departing Words:

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!³⁴

At this moment I can only thank you for your love of the Church and Our Lord, and for the love you show to this poor successor of St. Peter. With all my spiritual poverty, I can be for this time, in virtue of the Lord's grace, the successor of Peter, who was also a man with faults and sins, but remained in the end the rock for the Church. It is also your prayers and your love that give me the certainty that the Lord will help me in this ministry. I am deeply grateful for your love and for your prayers. My response for all that you have given to me during this visit is my blessing, which I impart to you.³⁵

³² SY.

³³ YS.

³⁴ D.

³⁵ YS.

**Benedict XVI's Address to US Bishops
"The People of This Country Are Known for Their Great Vi-
tality and Creativity"**

WASHINGTON, D.C., APRIL 16, 2008 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Address Benedict XVI gave to the bishops of the United States at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. At the end he answered three questions.

Dear Brother Bishops,

It gives me great joy to greet you today, at the start of my visit to this country, and I thank Cardinal George for the gracious words he has addressed to me on your behalf. I want to thank all of you, especially the Officers of the Episcopal Conference, for the hard work that has gone into the preparation of this visit. My grateful appreciation goes also to the staff and volunteers of the National Shrine, who have welcomed us here this evening. American Catholics are noted for their loyal devotion to the see of Peter. My pastoral visit here is an opportunity to strengthen further the bonds of communion that unite us. We began by celebrating Evening Prayer in this Basilica dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a shrine of special significance to American Catholics, right in the heart of your capital city. Gathered in prayer with Mary, Mother of Jesus, we lovingly commend to our heavenly Father the people of God in every part of the United States.

For the Catholic communities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Louisville, this is a year of particular celebration, as it marks the bicentenary of the establishment of these local Churches as Dioceses. I join you in giving thanks for the many graces granted to the Church there in these two centuries. As this year also marks the bicentenary of the elevation of the founding see of Baltimore to Archdiocese, it gives me an opportunity to recall with admiration and gratitude the life and ministry of John Carroll, first Bishop of Baltimore - a worthy leader of the Catholic community in your newly independent nation. His tireless efforts to spread the Gospel in the vast territory under his care laid the foundations for the ecclesial life of your country and enabled the Church in America to grow to maturity. Today the Catholic community you serve is one of the largest in the world, and one of the most influential. How important it is, then, to let your light shine before your fellow citizens and the world, "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

Many of the people to whom John Carroll and his fellow Bishops were ministering two centuries ago had travelled from distant lands. The diversity of their origins is reflected in the rich variety of ecclesial life in

present-day America. Brother Bishops, I want to encourage you and your communities to continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrows and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home. This, indeed, is what your fellow countrymen have done for generations. From the beginning, they have opened their doors to the tired, the poor, the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free" (cf. Sonnet inscribed on the Statue of Liberty). These are the people whom America has made her own.

Of those who came to build a new life here, many were able to make good use of the resources and opportunities that they found, and to attain a high level of prosperity. Indeed, the people of this country are known for their great vitality and creativity. They are also known for their generosity. After the attack on the Twin Towers in September 2001, and again after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Americans displayed their readiness to come to the aid of their brothers and sisters in need. On the international level, the contribution made by the people of America to relief and rescue operations after the tsunami of December 2004 is a further illustration of this compassion. Let me express my particular appreciation for the many forms of humanitarian assistance provided by American Catholics through Catholic Charities and other agencies. Their generosity has borne fruit in the care shown to the poor and needy, and in the energy that has gone into building the nationwide network of Catholic parishes, hospitals, schools and universities. All of this gives great cause for thanksgiving.

America is also a land of great faith. Your people are remarkable for their religious fervor and they take pride in belonging to a worshipping community. They have confidence in God, and they do not hesitate to bring moral arguments rooted in biblical faith into their public discourse. Respect for freedom of religion is deeply ingrained in the American consciousness - a fact which has contributed to this country's attraction for generations of immigrants, seeking a home where they can worship freely in accordance with their beliefs.

In this connection, I happily acknowledge the presence of Bishops from all the venerable Eastern Churches in communion with the Successor of Peter, whom I greet with special joy. Dear Brothers, I ask you to assure your communities of my deep affection and my continued prayers, both for them and for the many brothers and sisters who remain in their land of origin. Your presence here is a reminder of the courageous witness to Christ of so many members of your communities, often amid suffering, in their respective homelands. It is also a great enrichment of the ecclesial life of America, giving vivid expression to the Church's catholicity and the variety of her liturgical and spiritual traditions.

It is in this fertile soil, nourished from so many sources, that all of you, Brother Bishops, are called to sow the seeds of the Gospel today. This leads me to ask how, in the twenty-first century, a bishop can best fulfill the call to "make all things new in Christ, our hope"? How can he lead his people to "an encounter with the living God", the source of that life-transforming hope of which the Gospel speaks (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4)? Perhaps he needs to begin by clearing away some of the barriers to such an encounter. While it is true that this country is marked by a genuinely religious spirit, the subtle influence of secularism can nevertheless color the way people allow their faith to influence their behavior. Is it consistent 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 the marginalized, to promote sexual behavior contrary to Catholic moral teaching, or to adopt positions that contradict the right to life of every human being from conception to natural death? Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted. Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel.

For an affluent society, a further obstacle to an encounter with the living God lies in the subtle influence of materialism, which can all too easily focus the attention on the hundredfold, which God promises now in this time, at the expense of the eternal life which he promises in the age to

come (cf. Mk 10:30). People today need to be reminded of the ultimate purpose of their lives. They need to recognize that implanted within them is a deep thirst for God. They need to be given opportunities to drink from the wells of his infinite love. It is easy to be entranced by the almost unlimited possibilities that science and technology place before us; it is easy to make the mistake of thinking we can obtain by our own efforts the fulfillment of our deepest needs. This is an illusion. Without God, who alone bestows upon us what we by ourselves cannot attain (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 31), our lives are ultimately empty. People need to be constantly reminded to cultivate a relationship with him who came that we might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10). The goal of all our pastoral and catechetical work, the object of our preaching, and the focus of our sacramental ministry should be to help people establish and nurture that living relationship with "Christ Jesus, our hope" (1 Tim 1:1).

In a society which values personal freedom and autonomy, it is easy to lose sight of our dependence on others as well as the responsibilities that we bear towards them. This emphasis on individualism has even affected the Church (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 13-15), giving 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. Yet from the beginning, God saw that "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). We were created as social beings who find fulfillment only in love - for God and for our neighbor. 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 (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 14). If this seems counter-cultural, that is simply further evidence of the urgent need for a renewed evangelization of culture.

Here in America, you are blessed with a Catholic laity of considerable cultural diversity, who place their wide-ranging gifts at the service of the Church and of society at large. They look to you to offer them encouragement, leadership and direction. In an age that is saturated with information, the importance of providing sound formation in the faith cannot be overstated. American Catholics have traditionally placed a high value on religious education, both in schools and in the context of adult

formation programs. These need to be maintained and expanded. The many generous men and women who devote themselves to charitable activity need to be helped to renew their dedication through a "formation of the heart": an "encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others" (Deus Caritas Est, 31). At a time when advances in medical science bring new hope to many, they also give rise to previously unimagined ethical challenges. This makes it more important than ever to offer thorough formation in the Church's moral teaching to Catholics engaged in health care. Wise guidance is needed in all these apostolates, so that they may bear abundant fruit; if they are truly to promote the integral good of the human person, they too need to be made new in Christ our hope.

As preachers of the Gospel and leaders of the Catholic community, you are also called to participate in the exchange of ideas in the public square, helping to shape cultural attitudes. In a context where free speech is valued, and where vigorous and honest debate is encouraged, yours is a respected voice that has much to offer in the discussion of pressing social and moral questions of the day. By ensuring that the Gospel is clearly heard, you not only form the people of your own community, but in view of the global reach of mass communication, you help to spread the message of Christian hope throughout the world.

Clearly, the Church's influence on public debate takes place on many different levels. In the United States, as elsewhere, there is much current and proposed legislation that gives cause for concern from the point of view of morality, and the Catholic community, under your guidance, needs to offer a clear and united witness on such matters. Even more important, though, is the gradual opening of the minds and hearts of the wider community to moral truth. Here much remains to be done. Crucial in this regard is the role of the lay faithful to act as a "leaven" in society. Yet it cannot be assumed that all Catholic citizens think in harmony with the Church's teaching on today's key ethical questions. Once again, it falls to you to ensure that the moral formation provided at every level of ecclesial life reflects the authentic teaching of the Gospel of life.

In this regard, a matter of deep concern to us all is the state of the family within society. Indeed, Cardinal George mentioned earlier that you have included the strengthening of marriage and family life among the priorities for your attention over the next few years. In this year's World Day of Peace Message I spoke of the essential contribution that healthy family life makes to peace within and between nations. In the family home we experience "some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them" (no. 3). The family is also the primary place for evangelization, for passing on the faith, for helping young people to appreciate the importance of religious practice and Sunday observance. How can we not be dismayed as we observe the sharp decline of the family as a basic element of Church and society? Divorce and infidelity have increased, and many young men and women are choosing to postpone marriage or to forego it altogether. To some young Catholics, the sacramental bond of marriage seems scarcely distinguishable from a civil bond, or even a purely informal and open-ended arrangement to live with another person. Hence we have an alarming decrease in the number of Catholic marriages in the United States together with an increase in cohabitation, in which the Christ-like mutual self-giving of spouses, sealed by a public promise to live out the demands of an indissoluble lifelong commitment, is simply absent. In such circumstances, children are denied the secure environment that they need in order truly to flourish as human beings, and society is denied the stable building blocks which it requires if the cohesion and moral focus of the community are to be maintained.

As my predecessor, Pope John Paul II taught, "The person principally responsible in the Diocese for the pastoral care of the family is the Bishop ... he must devote to it personal interest, care, time, personnel and resources, but above all personal support for the families and for all those who ... assist him in the pastoral care of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*).

tio, 73). It is your task to 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. This message should resonate with people today, for it is essentially an unconditional and unreserved "yes" to life, a "yes" to love, and a "yes" to the aspirations at the heart of our common humanity, as we strive to fulfill our deep yearning for intimacy with others and with the Lord.

Among the countersigns to the Gospel of life found in America and elsewhere is one that causes deep shame: the sexual abuse of minors. Many of you have spoken to me of the enormous pain that your communities have suffered when clerics have betrayed their priestly obligations and duties by such gravely immoral behavior. As you strive to eliminate this evil wherever it occurs, you may be assured of the prayerful support of God's people throughout the world. Rightly, you attach priority to showing compassion and care to the victims. It is your God-given responsibility as pastors to bind up the wounds caused by every breach of trust, to foster healing, to promote reconciliation and to reach out with loving concern to those so seriously wronged.

Responding to this situation has not been easy and, as the President of your Episcopal Conference has indicated, it was "sometimes very badly handled". Now that the scale and gravity of the problem is more clearly understood, you have been able to adopt more focused remedial and disciplinary measures and to promote a safe environment that gives greater protection to young people. While it must be remembered that the overwhelming majority of clergy and religious in America do outstanding work in bringing the liberating message of the Gospel to the people entrusted to their care, it is vitally important that the vulnerable always be shielded from those who would cause harm. In this regard, your efforts to heal and protect are bearing great fruit not only for those directly under your pastoral care, but for all of society.

If they are to achieve their full purpose, however, the policies and programs you have adopted need to be placed in a wider context. Children

deserve to grow up with a healthy understanding of sexuality and its proper place in human relationships. They should be spared the degrading manifestations and the crude manipulation of sexuality so prevalent today. They have a right to be educated in authentic moral values rooted in the dignity of the human person. This brings us back to our consideration of the centrality of the family and the need to promote the Gospel of life. What does it mean to speak of child protection when pornography and violence can be viewed in so many homes through media widely available today? We need to reassess urgently the values underpinning society, so that a sound moral formation can be offered to young people and adults alike. All have a part to play in this task - not only parents, religious leaders, teachers and catechists, but the media and entertainment industries as well. Indeed, every member of society can contribute to this moral renewal and benefit from it. Truly caring about young people and the future of our civilization means recognizing our responsibility to promote and live by the authentic moral values which alone enable the human person to flourish. It falls to you, as pastors modelled upon Christ, the Good Shepherd, to proclaim this message loud and clear, and thus to address the sin of abuse within the wider context of sexual mores. Moreover, by acknowledging and confronting the problem when it occurs in an ecclesial setting, you can give a lead to others, since this scourge is found not only within your Dioceses, but in every sector of society. It calls for a determined, collective response.

Priests, too, need your guidance and closeness during this difficult time. They have experienced shame over what has occurred, and there are those who feel they have lost some of the trust and esteem they once enjoyed. Not a few are experiencing a closeness to Christ in his Passion as they struggle to come to terms with the consequences of the crisis. The Bishop, as father, brother and friend of his priests, can help them to draw spiritual fruit from this union with Christ by making them aware of the Lord's consoling presence in the midst of their suffering, and by encouraging them to walk with the Lord along the path of hope (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 39). As Pope John Paul II observed six years ago, "we must be confident that this time of trial will bring a purification of the entire Catholic

community", leading to "a holier priesthood, a holier episcopate and a holier Church" (Address to the Cardinals of the United States, 23 April 2002, 4). There are many signs that, during the intervening period, such purification has indeed been taking place. Christ's abiding presence in the midst of our suffering is gradually transforming our darkness into light: all things are indeed being made new in Christ Jesus our hope.

At this stage a vital part of your task is to strengthen relationships with your clergy, especially in those cases where tension has arisen between priests and their bishops in the wake of the crisis. It is important that you continue to show them your concern, to support them, and to lead by example. In this way you will surely help them to encounter the living God, and point them towards the life-transforming hope of which the Gospel speaks. If you yourselves live in a manner closely configured to Christ, the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep, you will inspire your brother priests to rededicate themselves to the service of their flocks with Christ-like generosity. Indeed a clearer focus upon the imitation of Christ in holiness of life is exactly what is needed in order for us to move forward. We need to rediscover the joy of living a Christ-centred life, cultivating the virtues, and immersing ourselves in prayer. When the faithful know that their pastor is a man who prays and who dedicates his life to serving them, they respond with warmth and affection which nourishes and sustains the life of the whole community.

Time spent in prayer is never wasted, however urgent the duties that press upon us from every side. Adoration of Christ our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament prolongs and intensifies the union with him that is established through the Eucharistic celebration (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 66). Contemplation of the mysteries of the Rosary releases all their saving power and it conforms, unites and consecrates us to Jesus Christ (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 11, 15). Fidelity to the Liturgy of the Hours ensures that the whole of our day is sanctified and it continually reminds us of the need to remain focused on doing God's work, however many pressures and distractions may arise from the task at hand. Thus our devotion helps us to speak and act in persona Christi, to teach, govern

and sanctify the faithful in the name of Jesus, to bring his reconciliation, his healing and his love to all his beloved brothers and sisters. This radical configuration to Christ, the Good Shepherd, lies at the heart of our pastoral ministry, and if we open ourselves through prayer to the power of the Spirit, he will give us the gifts we need to carry out our daunting task, so that we need never "be anxious how to speak or what to say" (Mt 10:19).

As I conclude my words to you this evening, I commend the Church in your country most particularly to the maternal care and intercession of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of the United States. May she who carried in her womb the hope of all nations intercede for the people of this country, so that all may be made new in Jesus Christ her Son. My dear Brother Bishops, I assure each of you here present of my deep friendship and my participation in your pastoral concerns. To all of you and your clergy, religious, and lay faithful, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Risen Lord.

1. The Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau asked the Holy Father to assess the challenge of secularism in public life and relativism in intellectual life; how to confront these challenges pastorally and evangelize more effectively?

I touched upon this theme briefly in my address. It strikes me as significant that here in America, unlike many places in Europe, the secular mentality has not been intrinsically opposed to religion. Within the context of the separation of Church and State, American society has always been marked by a fundamental respect for religion and its public role, and, if polls are to be believed, the American people are deeply religious. But it is not enough to count on this traditional religiosity and go about business as usual, even as its foundations are being slowly undermined. A serious commitment to evangelization cannot prescind from a profound diagnosis of the real challenges the Gospel encounters in contemporary American culture.

Of course, what is essential is a correct understanding of the just autonomy of the secular order, an autonomy that cannot be divorced

from God the Creator and his saving plan (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 36). Perhaps America's brand of secularity poses a particular problem: it allows for professing belief in God, and respects the public role of religion and the Churches, but at the same time it can subtly reduce religious belief to a lowest common denominator. Faith becomes a passive acceptance that certain things "out there" are true, but without practical relevance for everyday life. The result is a growing separation of faith from life: living "as if God did not exist". This is aggravated by an individualistic and eclectic approach to faith and religion: far from a Catholic approach to "thinking with the Church", each person believes he or she has a right to pick and choose, maintaining external social bonds but without an integral, interior conversion to the law of Christ. Consequently, rather than being transformed and renewed in mind, Christians are easily tempted to conform to the spirit of this age (cf. *Rom 12:3*). We have seen this emerge in an acute way in the scandal given by Catholics who promote an alleged right to abortion.

On a deeper level, secularity challenges the Church to reaffirm and to pursue more actively her mission in and to the world. As the Council made clear, the lay faithful have a particular responsibility in this regard. What is needed, I am convinced, is a greater sense of the intrinsic relationship between the Gospel and the natural law on the one hand, and, on the other, the pursuit of authentic human good, as embodied in civil law and in personal moral decisions. In a society that rightly values personal liberty, the Church needs to promote at every level of her teaching - in catechesis, preaching, seminary and university instruction - an apologetics that affirms the truth of Christian revelation, the harmony of faith and reason, and a sound understanding of freedom, seen in positive terms as a liberation both from the limitations of sin and for an authentic and fulfilling life. In a word, the Gospel has to be preached and taught as an integral way of life, offering an attractive and true answer, intellectually and practically, to real human problems. The "dictatorship of relativism", in the end, is nothing less than a threat to genuine human freedom, which only matures in generosity and fidelity to the truth.

Much more, of course, could be said on this subject: let me conclude,

though, by saying that I believe that the Church in America, at this point in her history, is faced with the challenge of recapturing the Catholic vision of reality and presenting it, in an engaging and imaginative way, to a society which markets any number of recipes for human fulfillment. I think in particular of our need to speak to the hearts of young people, who, despite their constant exposure to messages contrary to the Gospel, continue to thirst for authenticity, goodness and truth. Much remains to be done, particularly on the level of preaching and catechesis in parishes and schools, if the new evangelization is to bear fruit for the renewal of ecclesial life in America.

2. The archbishop of Cincinnati asked the Holy Father about "a certain quiet attrition" by which Catholics are abandoning the practice of the faith, sometimes by an explicit decision, but often by distancing themselves quietly and gradually from attendance at Mass and identification with the Church.

Certainly, much of this has to do with the passing away of a religious culture, sometimes disparagingly referred to as a "ghetto", which reinforced participation and identification with the Church. As I just mentioned, one of the great challenges facing the Church in this country is that of cultivating a Catholic identity which is based not so much on externals as on a way of thinking and acting grounded in the Gospel and enriched by the Church's living tradition.

The issue clearly involves factors such as religious individualism and scandal. Let us go to the heart of the matter: faith cannot survive unless it is nourished, unless it is "formed by charity" (cf. Gal 5:6). Do people today find it difficult to encounter God in our Churches? Has our preaching lost its salt? Might it be that many people have forgotten, or never really learned, how to pray in and with the Church?

Here I am not speaking of people who leave the Church in search of subjective religious "experiences"; this is a pastoral issue which must be addressed on its own terms. I think we are speaking about people who have fallen by the wayside without consciously having rejected their faith in Christ, but, for whatever reason, have not drawn life from the liturgy, the sacraments, preaching. Yet Christian faith, as we know, is essentially

ecclesial, and without a living bond to the community, the individual's faith will never grow to maturity. Indeed, to return to the question I just discussed, the result can be a quiet apostasy.

So let me make two brief observations on the problem of "attrition", which I hope will stimulate further reflection.

First, as you know, it is becoming more and more difficult, in our Western societies, to speak in a meaningful way of "salvation". Yet salvation - deliverance from the reality of evil, and the gift of new life and freedom in Christ - is at the heart of the Gospel. We need to discover, as I have suggested, new and engaging ways of proclaiming this message and awakening a thirst for the fulfillment which only Christ can bring. It is in the Church's liturgy, and above all in the sacrament of the Eucharist, that these realities are most powerfully expressed and lived in the life of believers; perhaps we still have much to do in realizing the Council's vision of the liturgy as the exercise of the common priesthood and the impetus for a fruitful apostolate in the world.

Second, we need to acknowledge with concern the almost complete eclipse of an eschatological sense in many of our traditionally Christian societies. As you know, I have pointed to this problem in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*. Suffice it to say that faith and hope are not limited to this world: as theological virtues, they unite us with the Lord and draw us toward the fulfillment not only of our personal destiny but also that of all creation. Faith and hope are the inspiration and basis of our efforts to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God. In Christianity, there can be no room for purely private religion: Christ is the Savior of the world, and, as members of his Body and sharers in his prophetic, priestly and royal munera, we cannot separate our love for him from our commitment to the building up of the Church and the extension of his Kingdom. To the extent that religion becomes a purely private affair, it loses its very soul.

Let me conclude by stating the obvious. The fields are still ripe for harvesting (cf. Jn 4:35); God continues to give the growth (cf. 1 Cor 3:6). We can and must believe, with the late Pope John Paul II, that God is preparing a new springtime for Christianity (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 86). What is needed above all, at this time in the history of the Church in

America, is a renewal of that apostolic zeal which inspires her shepherds actively to seek out the lost, to bind up those who have been wounded, and to bring strength to those who are languishing (cf. Ez 34:16). And this, as I have said, calls for new ways of thinking based on a sound diagnosis of today's challenges and a commitment to unity in the service of the Church's mission to the present generation.

3. The Holy Father is asked to comment on the decline of vocations despite the growing Catholic population, and on reasons for hope offered by the personal qualities and thirst for holiness that characterize the candidates who do come forward.

Let us be quite frank: the ability to cultivate vocations to the priesthood and the religious life is a sure sign of the health of a local Church. There is no room for complacency in this regard. God continues to call young people; it is up to all of us to encourage a generous and free response to that call. On the other hand, none of us can take this grace for granted.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send workers. He even admits that the workers are few in comparison with the abundance of the harvest (cf. Mt 9:37-38). Strange to say, I often think that prayer - the *unum necessarium* - is the one aspect of vocations work which we tend to forget or to undervalue!

Nor am I speaking only of prayer for vocations. Prayer itself, born in Catholic families, nurtured by programs of Christian formation, strengthened by the grace of the sacraments, is the first means by which we come to know the Lord's will for our lives. To the extent that we teach young people to pray, and to pray well, we will be cooperating with God's call. Programs, plans and projects have their place; but the discernment of a vocation is above all the fruit of an intimate dialogue between the Lord and his disciples. Young people, if they know how to pray, can be trusted to know what to do with God's call.

It has been noted that there is a growing thirst for holiness in many young people today, and that, although fewer in number, those who come forward show great idealism and much promise. It is important to

listen to them, to understand their experiences, and to encourage them to help their peers to see the need for committed priests and religious, as well as the beauty of a life of sacrificial service to the Lord and his Church. To my mind, much is demanded of vocation directors and formators: candidates today, as much as ever, need to be given a sound intellectual and human formation which will enable them not only to respond to the real questions and needs of their contemporaries, but also to mature in their own conversion and to persevere in life-long commitment to their vocation. As Bishops, you are conscious of the sacrifice demanded when you are asked to release one of your finest priests for seminary work. I urge you to respond with generosity, for the good of the whole Church.

Finally, I think you know from experience that most of your brother priests are happy in their vocation. What I said in my address about the importance of unity and cooperation within the presbyterate applies here too. There is a need for all of us to move beyond sterile divisions, disagreements and preconceptions, and to listen together to the voice of the Spirit who is guiding the Church into a future of hope. Each of us knows how important priestly fraternity has been in our lives. That fraternity is not only a precious possession, but also an immense resource for the renewal of the priesthood and the raising up of new vocations. I would close by encouraging you to foster opportunities for ever greater dialogue and fraternal encounter among your priests, and especially the younger priests. I am convinced that this will bear great fruit for their own enrichment, for the increase of their love for the priesthood and the Church, and for the effectiveness of their apostolate.

Dear Brother Bishops. With these few observations, I again encourage you all in your ministry to the faithful entrusted to your pastoral care, and I commend you to the loving intercession of Mary Immaculate, Mother of the Church.

Before leaving, I pause to acknowledge the immense suffering endured by the people of God in the Archdiocese of New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina, as well as their courage in the challenging work of rebuild-

ing. I wish to present Archbishop Alfred Hughes with a chalice, which I hope will be accepted as a sign of my prayerful solidarity with the faithful of the Archdiocese, and my personal gratitude for the tireless devotion he and Archbishops Philip Hannan and Francis Schulte showed toward the flock entrusted to their care.

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Benedict XVI's Address to Catholic Educators "Freedom Is Not an Opting out, it Is an Opting In"

WASHINGTON, D.C., APRIL 17, 2008 (Zenit.org).- Here is the address Benedict XVI gave today to a meeting of more than 400 Catholic educators at the 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 pro-

found 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 edu-

cation 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.

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ⁱ Cf. Charles Péguy, *Portal of the Mystery of Hope* (Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 67-70.

ⁱⁱ Following are among “the most important recent books on Jesus”:

Joachim Guilka, *Jesus von Nazareth: Botschaft und Geschichte* (Herder, Freiburg, 1990).

Klaus Berger, *Jesus* (Pattloch, Munich, 2004)—a dialogue concerning present questions.

Heinz Schürmann, *Jesus. Gestalt und Geheimnis*; ed. Klaus Scholtissek (Bonifatius, Paderborn, 1994).

John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (Doubleday, New York, 1991-2001)—multivolume historical-critical exegesis. (See review by Jacob Neusner, “Who Needs the Historical Jesus?” *Chronicles*, July 1991, 32-34.)

Thomas Södeng, *Der Gottessohn aus Nazareth. Des Menschsein Jesu im Neuen Testament* (Herder, Freiburg, 2006)—faith testimony.

Rudolf Schackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Westminster, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1995).

Rudolf Schackenburg, *Freundschaft mit Jesus* (Freiburg, 1995)—Jesus’ impact on people.

The most reliable guides to the exegesis of the Gospels:

Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament—multivolume work in progress.

La Storia di Gesù (Rizzoli, Milan, 1983-85)—6 volumes.

For the historical context of Biblical and Conciliar Christology:

Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: Vol. I. From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, trans. John Bowden (New York, 1965).
