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## Catholic Faith and the Secular Academy

I AM GRATEFUL FOR THIS GATHERING and grateful also for the opportunity to discuss this topic, “The Catholic Faith and the Secular Academy.” It is a subject about which I have thought a great deal and to which I have not yet been able to bring a fully developed personal synthesis; but I hope that we might together come to a better understanding of the relations between the Church’s faith and the secular academy as it exists today.

### *The Distinction Between Faith and the World*

My first observation is that the relation between Catholic faith and the secular academy presupposes a distinction between them—a distinction therefore between faith and the world, the *saeculum*. This difference opens up a realm of discourse in which we ask how they can be related to each other.

The relationship between faith and the world or between faith and culture is at the center of the Church’s debate, conversation, and understanding of her mission in a new way since *Gaudium et Spes* and

*Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council. Some people speak today, following Max Weber, of a disenchanted world, which presupposes that at one time the world was holier or friendlier to faith than the world we inhabit now. There are others who claim that a new sacralization is as much a phenomenon today as secularization; and there are people on all sides of that debate. But the distinction between faith and culture or faith and world, however we draw it, permits us then to examine a worldly or secular academy as a subculture within the world, unrelated, at least institutionally, to the major visible carrier of faith, the Church, and unrelated to many of the carriers of a sacred kind of subculture that are part of the Church.

This obviously secular academy is nonetheless still engaged in a kind of a dialogue with faith because of faith's influence, at least historically, on academic disciplines that find a home in the academy— theology or divinity, philosophy, history, literature, cultural anthropology, psychology. Even a reaction is a kind of influence, for to be the object of rejection can be a way to be present to a discipline. And faith, less obviously but no less really, continues to exercise influence in fields such as physics, cosmology, biology, and the like. This gathering at a distinguished private university is itself evidence of such interrelationships. There is a mutual influence between any academy, including the secular university, and faith.

The distinction then between faith and culture and between faith and the academic subculture that is the secular university allows us to examine the academy not only intellectually but also sociologically as a cultural milieu that has its own relationships, its own divisions, its own hierarchy, economic and ideological. Recently, Gerald Graff wrote in *Beyond the Culture Wars*: "An undergraduate tells of an art history course in which the instructor observed one day, 'As we now know, the idea that knowledge can be objective is a positivist myth that has been exploded by postmodern thought.' It so happens that the student is concurrently enrolled in a political science course, in which the instructor speaks confidently about the objectivity of his

discipline as if objectivity had not been exploded at all. 'What do you do?' the student is asked. 'What else can I do?' he says, 'I trash objectivity in art history and I presuppose objectivity in political science.'"<sup>1</sup>

To some these days, the moral of such stories would be that students have become cynical relativists who care less about convictions than about grades and careers. In fact, if anything is surprising, it is that more students do not behave in this cynical fashion, for the established curriculum encourages it. The disjunction of the curriculum is a far more powerful source of relativism than any doctrine preached by any member of the faculty. The disjunction of the curriculum is made visible in the secular university, but also to a great extent, inasmuch as it too tries to be a research university, in the Catholic university as well. The similar departmental structure of both Catholic and secular universities works against the integration of knowledge and the acceptance of any integrating vision for the university. In recent years, most bishops have given far more consideration to faith in its relationship to Catholic universities, because of the discussion on *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the need to create norms for this country, than we have to Catholic faith and the secular academy.

### *Faith Speaking to the World*

Moving on from the question of the academy as a subculture within the world, let us return to the distinction between faith and *saeculum* as such: what does the faith say to the world? To my mind, it says two things: the world is good, it was created good and therefore we are at home in it, and our faith is at home in it. And, secondly, the world is fallen. Because of sin the world is estranged from God and therefore faith is something that makes us strangers in a strange land. These two questions and these two responses are both true, and people of faith live out their lives in the world in a dialectic between those two moments.

Pope John Paul II, in his address to the New Zealand bishops during their *ad limina* visit in 1998, spoke to the distinction between the Church and the world in this way: “No human culture can fully accommodate the cross of Jesus Christ, which is always there to remind us that the distinction between the Church and the world is *the paradoxically essential premise of the dialogue with culture for which the Council called*”<sup>2</sup> (emphasis in original). There is no dialogue if you conflate the two, for they must remain distinct and in dialectical tension. The roots of this paradox lie deep in the Bible, which elaborates a profound and powerful theology of holiness, divine and human. The Old Testament makes clear that Israel is to be holy as God Himself is holy. This meant that Israel had to be distinct, just as God is infinitely distinct from the world, as the Bible stresses consistently in forging its doctrine of Divine Transcendence. But this otherness of Israel is not otherness for its own sake. It is neither introverted nor defensive. Just as God can make all things good precisely because He is above all things, and not be envious of their otherness or independence, so Israel has to be distinct from other nations for the sake of doing good, for the sake of service. That, of course, is the message of *Gaudium et Spes*. Just as the infinite transcendence of God makes possible the communication of the perfect love that culminates in Christ’s Paschal mystery, so in the Bible’s understanding, the holiness of God’s people involves that critical freedom in relation to surrounding cultures that makes possible real and genuine service to the human family.

The Church, the community of faith, is therefore at home in the world but never collapses into it. This dialogue of immanence and transcendence shapes the life of faith. To examine or to treat faith and world as distinct phenomena, therefore, calls for a certain bracketing. In the classical phenomenological theory elaborated by Edmund Husserl, one can bracket components in order to set aside for the moment their mutual influence so as to focus upon a very limited phenomenon in order to study it, to walk around it,

and to see it on its own terms, if you like, without reference to anything else. Or one can use a method that Karol Wojtyła used in *Person and Act* to work out his own philosophical anthropology where he also employs bracketing. Because he is influenced by phenomenology, one might expect that his will be Husserl's sense of bracketing, but that is not the case. One can also bracket as in a mathematical formula, where an element is carried along through the entire operation but bracketed to show it to be a constant that runs through the mathematical operation. It is thus not isolated but, precisely, related throughout. Therefore the world, the *saeculum*, in theological discourse and in the vision of faith, is bracketed from time to time, but always carried through the discourse so that the faith that serves the world can never forget it but attends to it even in consideration of the most transcendent realities that the faith tells us about: God Himself, grace, the sacraments, and the Church. Obviously, a faith based upon acceptance of an incarnate God cannot ignore the world and cannot intellectually acquiesce in theories that bracket all religious reference or orientation in their vision of the world.

We are at the end of the Church's celebration of the Mystery of the Incarnation where we see what St. John tells us he saw and touched and we celebrate in the liturgy the central truth of our faith: "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son" (John 3:16). At the heart of the Incarnation, therefore, is God's loving embrace, in Christ, of the whole cosmos, that is to say the world of nature and the realm of human culture. The Council of Chalcedon reminds us that the joining of divine and worldly natures takes place without mixing, mingling, division or confusion, therefore without compromising the distinctiveness of God or the distinctiveness of the world. This means that God's presence is never a competitive one. God's proximity, far from threatening or overwhelming the worldly, raises it up and enhances it, bringing it to fullness of expression. In this noncompetitive proximity of God is the ground for the

Catholic love of nature and confidence in cultural expressions and the Church's being at ease in universities.

From the earliest phase of faith, incarnational theologians such as Justin, Origen, Ambrose, and Augustine borrowed liberally from philosophical sources in their articulation of Christian faith. It was Origen who employed the metaphor of the Jews' plundering of Egypt to explain the Christian willingness to take what is true, good, and beautiful in the non-Christian cultures that surrounded them. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, despite the opposition of some of his contemporaries, utilized the science and philosophy of Aristotle, a pagan, the metaphysics of the Muslim thinkers Averroes and Avicenna, and the Jewish mysticism of Moses Maimonides in the presentation of an altogether distinctive Christian theology. Of course, in doing that, he transformed them rather dramatically, but nonetheless he used them because he knew that the *Logos* of Christ did not suppress the *logoi* of the culture. On the contrary, Christian theology can assimilate insights from other sources and bring them to richer expression. It is what *Ad Gentes*, the missionary document from Vatican II, speaks of as the *semina Verbi*, the seeds of the Word, the *Logos*, in every culture, which have to be looked for and respected.

Now how does this incarnational confidence shape our attitudes toward today's world and toward the kind of secularism that may be the regnant ideology in a university? It first compels us to affirm the values of the secular culture, neither demonizing it nor fleeing from it. Christians therefore are the friends of science, literature, philosophy, drama, and song precisely because we are to be bearers of the Word—the divine Word that is present implicitly in all those disciplines. Christians are celebrators of the *saeculum* and the secular, therefore, because God has made it good and has celebrated and redeemed the *saeculum* in Christ Jesus the Lord. Accordingly, there is no retreat behind walls of defensiveness and no exclusion of the secular from the arena of the Church's legitimate concern.

*Theological Dimensions of Faith and Culture:  
From Correlation to Neo-Augustinianism*

To spell out this relation one can take two tacks. I would like to take both a theological and a sociological approach to it. I mentioned at the very beginning that we could look at the university as a place of the disciplines, and look then at the intellectual influence of faith on them, or we could look at it as a particular culture or subculture that has its own way of being human and within that welcomes or does not welcome the Church and the community of faith. Theologians have adapted different methodologies to pursue this question.

On the left is the classical correlation position, with its roots in Schleiermacher and Heidegger and given the fullest expression more recently by Paul Tillich—the correlational position between faith and world, faith and culture. Here philosophy examines the culture and explores the anxious and unresolved questions of being, and theology inspired by the revelation of scripture provides the answers of Being Itself. The theologian's task is then to correlate questions and answers, respecting both sides of the correlation. In the 1960s the World Council of Churches had as one of its slogans to “meet the world's agenda,” without asking whether we meet it on the world's terms or rather have something different to bring to the world's agenda for the sake of the world itself. It was Karl Barth who ruefully commented that such a method would work in Paradise or in Heaven but not in our present sinful human condition: we are so characterized by sin and so fallen in mind that we are incapable of raising and discerning the right questions, and therefore our answers are always skewed. It was not until the coming of Christ that we even knew how to stammer out the right questions of finitude.

A more nuanced critique is offered by Professor David Tracy of the University of Chicago Divinity School. While basically respecting the intuitions of correlation, he nonetheless finds the method “crucially flawed”—those are his words. He thinks it naïve to hold that philosophy and cultural analysis simply raise questions that come

humbly to the court of theology for resolution. It is clear that, from Parmenides on, philosophy has provided plenty of answers to its own questions, at least until our day when it has become almost exclusively a critical discipline or metadiscipline without its own vision. Thus authentic correlation must involve a more subtle play between the questions and answers of the culture on the one hand and the questions and answers of the theological and Biblical tradition on the other. It is here that Father Tracy turns to Gadamer and Ricoeur and their hermeneutic of a "fusion of horizons." The Christian interpreter, the systematic and fundamental theologian, comes to a classic text of Christianity, to a saint, narrative, work of art and the like, and allows the world of that Christian text to mix with the world, questions, and convictions of his or her culture.

The Yale school, led by George Lindbeck and Hans Frei, critiqued even the nuanced correlational approach of a David Tracy. With his roots theologically in Barth and philosophically in Wittgenstein, Professor Lindbeck proposes that the Christian Church is a self-contained and self-regulating community, without relationship to something else necessarily, bound together and organized according to a particular set of linguistic rules or language games, which, of course, are always cultural games as well. The theologian's task is not to attempt a dialogue with the language games of the culture, since that usually results in a distortion or watering-down of the distinctiveness of the Christian way of being in the world. Rather it is to clarify the grammar of Christian discourse, showing how rules of theological speech both flow from and reinforce uniquely Christian praxis.<sup>3</sup>

Most recently, Kathryn Tanner attempts an interesting simultaneous criticism of both correlation and the postliberalism of Lindbeck.<sup>4</sup> Both the correlationists and the followers of Lindbeck share a common assumption that Christianity is a self-contained and easily described totality, much like the tribes and cultures naïvely examined by the early anthropologists of our century: think of Margaret Mead

going off to the South Sea islanders. To be sure, they propose doing very different things with Christianity: the first, putting it into some sort of dialogue with the secular culture; the second, analyzing its linguistic and behavioral distinctiveness. But they come together in overlooking the fact that Christianity has never been and never will be culturally isolated. Tanner argues that Christianity has always formed itself on the border between itself and secularity, usually sharing much of the same content as the secular culture but giving that content a unique spin and orientation. For her it is not so much what Christianity has but how it has it that matters. Thus Paul accepts much of Greek culture, and Augustine embraces much of the Roman world, and Thomas Aquinas takes in Aristotle, but each Christian views the cultural content uniquely and distinctively.

Another departure from both correlation and postliberalism is the Christian phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion. A nostalgic post-modern, as he calls himself, Marion proposes a fundamental theology that is not so much a dialogue with a skeptical culture as a phenomenology of the Christian fact of the holding up of the icon of Jesus. Because he accepts the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics, he does not move to anything more substantive than what phenomenology alone will bear. One can add the substance later on in a roundabout way, as he does in *Dieu sans l'être*.<sup>5</sup> Like Barth, Balthasar and the postliberals, Marion seems to think that the dialogue has led more often than not to a watering down of the alluring power of Christian truth. The Christian fundamental theologian walks around the Christian fact much as the phenomenologist walks around a physical or psychological object, allowing its facets and profiles to emerge and then engaging it in clarifying description. And that is not bad, except one has to walk around it with the world in one's hand, bracketed in that way, or else something very wrong happens.

Moving more boldly to the right, we would find the neo-Augustinianism of John Milbank.<sup>6</sup> In the tradition of Christopher Dawson, Milbank argues that much of modern social theory and philosophy

represents a falling away from an integral Christian vision of the whole. Thus Hegel's philosophy of Spirit is a truncated and secularized account of providence, called Reason; and the myth of progress is a psychologized account of divinization through grace; and Marx's philosophy of history is a politicized version of Christian apocalypticism. That is a well-worked-out thesis by Milbank, but not new. All of modern philosophy can be explained, if you like, in an overarching thesis that would say we have taken all the prerogatives of the divine mind in medieval theology and put them into human reason in philosophy, until this generation. The pathetic mistake of all liberal theology for Milbank is the establishment of dialogues between the satisfying and holistic Christian account of reality and what amount to heretical distortions of that account. In that sense it is easier to dialogue with Aristotle as a pre-Christian than with Hegel. Milbank's view that Christianity itself, with its ontology of creation, its praxis of forgiving love and nonviolence, its theology of a God who graciously pours himself out, constitutes a unique, distinctive way of being in the world, but not of the world. In *The City of God*, Augustine refused a dialogue with what he saw as an essentially corrupt Roman polity. Rather he proposed the fact of Christianity as a rival and an opponent to it. Most Christian theorists from Thomas Aquinas to H. Richard Niebuhr to Gustavo Gutierrez have departed, tragically, according to Milbank, from this Augustinian boldness and have tried to come to terms in various ways with the city of man.

### *The Sociological Dimension: The Crisis of Liberal Catholicism*

We are committed to drawing a relationship between faith and the world in the light of *Gaudium et Spes*. We have drawn it in a particular way theologically and I would like to move now from the theological to the sociological dimension of the distinction between church and world, and between faith and culture. The perspective of *Gaudium et Spes*, I like to say, was foreseen by the people who

wrote the readers that I used in parochial school growing up in Chicago. It was eight years of books for eight grades, but they were all under a series that had as its subtitle, its rubric, "Faith and Freedom," Catholic faith and American culture, American freedom, which is our primary cultural value. The presupposition in those readers, the presupposition I had growing up here in the 1940s and 1950s in grade school was that there would never be a substantial conflict, there would never be a problem of living in faith and in the world, not *this* world anyway. That type of conflict was behind us, and we had come to a kind of synthesis here that enabled us to be truly Catholic and truly free, truly American. There were occasional bumps along the road, but they could be smoothed out because we had the structures in both Church and society to move the dialogue along. That has not happened, which is why the Catholic Common Ground Initiative was put together by Cardinal Bernardin. In fact all the divisions of the culture along secular and conservative lines have now come into the household of the faith. The conservative critique is that the openness to the world that *Gaudium et Spes* says is part of the Gospel has become simply capitulation to the world. The liberal response to that is that the Church is not to be a ghetto, the famous ghetto that was so excoriated in popular Catholic writing in the 1960s.

In a talk to the National Association of the Laity, I said that we are at a turning point in the life of the Church in this country and that liberal Catholicism is an exhausted project. By that I mean the kind of Catholicism that I grew up with in Chicago: very clear in its doctrinal basis, but liberal, if you want to call it that, in its sociological reality. Essentially a critique, even a necessary critique at one point in our history, liberal Catholicism is now a victim of its own success. An exhausted project is not a failed project. The liberal critique has been turned inward; it is not the critique of society so much as the critique of the Church, which is slow in accepting the presuppositions of populist liberalism. After having journeyed so much around

the world visiting missionaries for twelve years, one of the strangest phenomena I found coming back to this country was a resistance to seeing the faith as a source of freedom. In country after country, culture after culture, place after place, the space, if there was any, of freedom and of hope was very often carved out by the Church, usually in very difficult circumstances—sometimes politically oppressive, often economically oppressive in the midst of poverty, sometimes culturally benighted. When I came back to this culture, I realized that the critique that had been part of liberationist thinking in this country was turned primarily internally on the Church herself, as if she were the source of oppression, benightedness, and poverty.

The answer, however, to this exhaustion of liberal Catholicism is not to be found in a type of conservative Catholicism obsessed with particular practices and so sectarian in its outlook that it cannot serve as a sign of unity of all peoples in Christ, which is what the Council called the Church to be: a sacrament of the unity of the human race. The answer, then, is simply Catholicism in all its fullness and depth; the faith able to distinguish itself from any culture, and yet able to engage and transform them all; a faith joyful in all the gifts Christ wants to give us, and open to the whole world He died to save. The Catholic faith shapes a Church with a lot of room for differences in pastoral approach, for discussion and debate, for initiatives as various as the peoples whom God loves. But more profoundly the faith shapes a Church that knows her Lord and knows her own identity, a Church able to distinguish between what fits into the tradition that unites her to Christ and what is a false start or distorting thesis: the Church united here and now because she is always one with the Church throughout the ages and with the saints in heaven.

The difficulty arises, of course, when we say “normative,” which quickly becomes in many people’s minds “control,” intellectually and socially. Many of the priests of my own age, in their fifties and

sixties, found, after the Council in particular, a liberating moment in their own life through secularity. Secularity suddenly opened up horizons that had not been theirs in a Church that, rightly or wrongly, was judged stifling. Oftentimes people get stuck in their liberating moments—it is quite instructive to look at the difference between priests my age and younger priests. Sometimes the difference is regarded as being between the liberal middle-aged and the conservative young. I think that is wrong; I really do not think the difference is so ideological. There is however a clear distinction between people for whom secularity is liberating because faith was too closely confined to a system that no longer gave life, and those who have grown up in a very secular milieu and do not find that secularity liberating at all. They find it a prison; they find it closed in upon itself. There is no openness to transcendence. Gasping for air, they turn to the faith; and sometimes they are told: “Oh, well, you have to be worldly.” An understandable reaction is to establish clarity in sociological terms by appealing to symbols, perhaps especially to symbols based on earlier expressions of the faith; symbols chosen because they are the only symbols available, since a secularized faith does not have any symbols of its own—it just borrows from the culture.

In this kind of stifling secularity, there is room for spirituality certainly—one has only to visit the bookstores and see it all. But such a spirituality is mostly an individual expression of one’s personal quest for a kind of transcendence: in nature, in music, in sports, in yourself. The difficulty with spirituality as a substitute for faith is that it still leaves one trapped in his or her own experience. People who do not believe in anything—those who are open to spiritual reality but not to faith—end up, as G. K. Chesterton said, believing in everything. They often get caught in cults and sometimes in terribly demonic kinds of activities. Faith is resented because it puts a name on one’s spiritual quest, particularly on its goal. More than that, it brings one into contact with historical events through which God

reveals himself—the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection—and with a historical community called the Church, with a very mixed history, but that nonetheless reminds us that God calls us as a people, and not just one by one. The Church of Jesus Christ never brackets history. People bent on an ahistorical spiritual quest disdain the Church and, finally, they disdain an Incarnate God.

### *Faith and the Secular Academy*

To return then to faith and the secular academy. What kind of reciprocity is there, what kind of relationship?

First of all, there is enormous respect for the university, secular or Catholic, on the part of the Church, because it is a place of knowing and of truth, and of seeking for the truth. Pope John Paul II has made that clearer perhaps than any other pontiff, saying that from its very origins and by reason of its institution, the purpose of the university is the acquiring of a scientific knowledge of the truth. The word “scientific” is used in the Aristotelian sense of systematic knowledge of the whole truth, not in the modern sense of experimental science. Thus the university constitutes one of the fundamental means that man has devised to meet his need for knowledge. Since it is in the university that young people experience the high point of their formative education, they should be able to find answers, not only about the legitimacy and finality of science, but also about higher moral and spiritual values, answers that will restore their confidence in the potential of knowledge gained and in the exercise of reason for their own good and for that of society. It becomes necessary therefore on the part of all to recover an awareness of the power of reason and of the primacy of moral values, which are the values of the human person as such. The great task that has to be faced today for the renewal of society, the service that the faith brings to the society, as Israel brought it to its world, is that of recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values.

Pope John Paul's own philosophical anthropology is an attempt to do this, imbued with faith but not relying upon faith in order to make its argument. So the first reciprocity, the first relationship between Catholic faith and the secular academy is one of respect, certainly on the part of the faith.

Secondly, the faith offers a kind of critique. And that is not hard to do. I did it to some extent in an address at Georgetown about Catholic universities.<sup>7</sup> Even Catholic universities, to the extent that they're modeled on nineteenth century German research universities with their distinctive disciplines, can become a collection of separate fiefdoms. Each department guards its own discipline, and the budding scholar has to fight his way and defend her thesis in order to have access to the guild. That way the discipline is protected, as is the search for truth. The end result, however, is that there is little integrating vision for the university itself. It falls back on the kind of humanistic platitudes used by presidents and commencement speakers, but it is often hard-pressed to show this integrating vision in the reality of dialogue among faculty members in the construction of a curriculum. The fragmentation of knowledge, what we called earlier the disjunction of the curriculum, is made visible in departments and in the criteria for promotion. The Church can criticize that disjunction, as it can critique anything that does not come together in some kind of unity, a unity that tells us that we can not only analyze, we can also synthesize. We have an intellectual capacity, an intellect that is in some sense all things, as Aristotle said. There is a critique that comes, clearly, from the Church's understanding of what reason is.

Can there be a more positive contribution? John Paul II in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* talks about a *diakonia* of the truth, a service of the truth. The first service is to inspire a certain confidence in reason. The Pope is an intellectual who knows that reason is capable of more than methodologies that restrict us to quantification. Have confidence in reason, he says, and have confidence in yourself as

someone who thinks; do not be afraid—again and again he tells us this. Have confidence in the ability to face up to history—that is his missionary perspective. Do not be afraid of intimacy—that is the mystic in him talking. Do not be afraid to become very intimate with God and therefore not afraid of being intimate with one another. Do not be afraid that your reason is not up to the task of knowing, in some sense, everything.

Along with this sense of confidence in the ability to know the truth, faith also offers a context. We are in a globalized world. It is increasingly clear that it is more sectarian to be American than it is to be Catholic, or Jewish, or Muslim, or Buddhist. If the great carriers of culture in the next millennium will not be nation-states (and I think that is obviously true in Europe) then the conversation in the next millennium that will create culture has to be one that is carried by great faiths—the global faiths, the world faiths—and the great universities.

In that global context of faith and universities and a changed economic and political and social order, what more might be said? The Church and the faith that the Church makes visible can be accepted even now, I think, as a kind of honest observer. Occasionally a bishop is called in somewhere in the world to see that an election is fair or to adjudicate a dispute. There is a kind of regulative role in which the Church can set limits, can attend to the social or legal process, and can establish boundaries and create negative norms.

But is there a more positive contribution, a common vision, a vision that gets us beyond the good of each individual that is made possible by the economic and political frameworks in which we're privileged to live? There is, and the faith has such a vision. What we do not have is the ability to express it, because we do not have a public vocabulary to set it forth. One of the reasons for postliberalism and postmodernism, with all their plurality and even incommensurability, is that there is no common vocabulary, there is no common narrative: we live in a fragmented world, and finally each individual

is on his or her own. Many attempts have been made to forge a common language. The Church, for example, in engaging the world, has tried to speak a language of natural law, supposing that since nature is common the language of natural law will be common. But of course it is not. Particularly in this kind of culture that is positivist and fundamentalist, the law is an act of will; it is not something that you can understand by reading nature. There are no natures or species accepted in a normative sense. Natural law language is therefore not common language. The National Council of Catholic Bishops has tried to forge a language of public policy in order to influence the creation, the process of legislation, but with only limited success. There is a language of Scripture that, until our generation, was certainly a culturally available language in this country, but is so no longer. You can no longer presuppose, when you are talking to young people, that they know the basic biblical stories and images such as the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Prodigal Son. There is the language of values, coming out of certain anthropological, sociological, and psychological theories. But those are nineteenth-century subjective theories that no longer reach far enough.

The challenge to create a language that speaks of Christ, albeit not always explicitly, is one that we have not yet met. And it is not easy, because on the one hand there are evangelical Christians who are unhappy because the proclamation is not explicit, and there are secularists who are unhappy because they suspect that it is implicit. Between those two, the Catholic faith keeps struggling to create a language, because we know that we live in a worded world, a world that comes from the Word of God. Words are not only a concern of the Church, but also of the academy. That is why exchanges such as this are so important, and I thank you for your attention and your patience.

*Notes*

This article was originally delivered as the keynote address at a symposium sponsored by the Lumen Christi Institute, the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, and the Divinity School of the University of Chicago on January 9, 1999.

1. Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (New York: W. W. Horton, 1992).
2. *L'Osservatore Romano* (weekly edition), 25 November 1998.
3. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster, 1984).
4. Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1997).
5. Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
6. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
7. *Origins* (6 November 1997), 352–58.