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(bio after conclusion)

## THE LOSS OF EFFECTIVE AUTHORITY: A CRISIS OF TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

**“You know that those who rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the servant of all. For the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark, 10:42-45 (Oxford)**

### A. Critical Belonging

Let me begin by thanking Boston College and Fred Lawrence for this invitation. I come here in early May, as the academic year winds down, to speak with you in the spirit of Alexis de Tocqueville. “Human beings will not receive the truth from their enemies. And it is very rarely offered to them by their friends.” My hope today is to speak the truth in the spirit of friendship.

Let us begin with the theme of friendship and then return to the utterance of truth. I am a Catholic Christian. I was raised in a Catholic family, educated in Catholic schools, formed both intellectually and spiritually in Catholic traditions. My Catholic identity is a constitutive part of who I am.

My loyalty to the Catholic Church though profound is also critical. I was raised to think critically by my father and by the Jesuits who taught me at Fairfield Prep. My liberal education at Notre Dame was conducted in the Socratic spirit of relentless questioning. After studying philosophy at Yale and then teaching it for thirty seven years at Vassar College, that Socratic spirit has become my second nature. I believe in unrestricted intellectual liberty, the importance of learned ignorance and the need to combine personal loyalty with critical detachment. To use the idiom of Bernard Häring, my position in the Catholic community is both faithful and free.

At its best the Catholic tradition encourages solidarity with all people, but especially with the estranged and the outcast. The sad chords of estrangement resonate through my remarks today. During the last forty years many of the people whom I love most in the world have become alienated from the Catholic Church, no longer finding within it a spiritual home. I am thinking of my siblings, many of our friends, and especially of our children. For each person, of course, the spiritual quest is unique, and every exit from the church is accompanied by a personal story. But there are common causes to account for this exodus, and legitimate concerns underlying this shared disaffection. Naming some of these causes and concerns, and speaking truthfully about them is a large part of my purpose in this lecture.

Crises of personal faith are inseparable from belief in an invisible God whom no living person has ever seen. Yet most of those I know who have left the Church have not abandoned the teaching of the gospel. Their discouragement is not with Jesus of Nazareth, but with the institutional culture of the Church that claims to speak in his name. In voicing the concerns of the estranged, I am also articulating my own. While I love the gospel and struggle to practice it, I am saddened whenever the conduct of the church violates the compassionate spirit of its founder.

To its honor and credit, the Catholic Church provides a large tent. It is a global community of pilgrims whose common faith is combined with the most remarkable human diversity, personal, cultural and historical. The seed of the gospel can take root in any heart, in any land, in any era. My ancestors brought their Catholic faith to America from Ireland and Germany. From birth to adulthood my parents and teachers nurtured its growth. I have modeled my intellectual life on the example of Catholic thinkers like John Dunne, Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor. They have taught me what it really means to be *Katholou*, to be open to the whole of human experience, to be committed to a lifelong quest for greater understanding.

## B. The Loss of Effective Authority

Crisis and renewal are recurrent episodes in the history of the Church. Since its origin in ancient Palestine, Christianity has had to adapt to the unwelcome and the unexpected. The apostles were demoralized by Jesus' passion and crucifixion; later, their faith and courage were restored through the descent of the spirit on Pentecost. The early Church lived in uneasy coexistence with the Roman Empire, then had to adjust to its newly elevated imperial status. The decline and fall of Rome prompted the rise of the monastic movement. The Latin recovery of Aristotle's writings energized and challenged the medieval universities. The papal scandals of the fourteenth century gave new life to the church's conciliar tradition. Even more radical scandals in the Renaissance papacy prompted powerful movements for reform that ended, unhappily, in schism. In retrospect, the reform was clearly necessary; the schisms deeply regrettable.

In the modern age, Catholic Christianity has struggled with a series of world historical changes: the scientific revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the democratic revolutions in North America and France; the industrial revolution throughout Western Europe; the haunting specter of "the social question," the scandalous co-existence of luxury and misery within supposedly Christian countries and colonies.

The first half of the twentieth century brought virulent anti-Semitism, global depression, total war and the use of atomic weapons. The second half brought the end of colonialism, a rebirth of feminism and the promise and perils of a global economy.

The second Vatican council called by John XXIII was a welcome but belated response to these momentous historical events. Pope John summoned the Catholic Church to *aggiornamento*, to internal reform and renewal, and to an open and respectful dialogue with the nations and peoples of the modern world. Through the conciliar documents of Vatican II, the Church explicitly recognized its historicity. It described itself as the pilgrim people of God in history, moving through time with the aid of the Holy Spirit, and commanded by Christ through its teaching and practice to be *Lumen Gentium*, a light unto all the nations.

The historical crises confronting the Church follow no simple pattern. Some of the challenges arose as the result of laudable human developments: the scientific and democratic revolutions, for example. Some were the result of internal decline within the Church's own house: the Babylonian captivity and the scandals of the Renaissance papacy among others. The rise of monasticism, the creation of the universities, the founding of new religious orders, the recurrence of conciliar movements for reform provide ample evidence that the Church is capable of renewing itself from within. Christians believe rightly that the power of internal reform is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the historical presence of the Spirit within the Church as a whole that offers reason for hope when our common sins of pride, blindness, complacency and inertia become sources of scandal rather than a summons to faith.

In the forty years since the formal close of Vatican II, the Catholic Church in the West has grown increasingly divided. For many faithful Catholics the hopes for reform and renewal raised by the Council have not been fulfilled. For other equally faithful Catholics the opening to the modern world proclaimed in *Gaudium et Spes* was insufficiently critical and discriminating. When the Church opened its windows to the contemporary world both fresh air and pollution came in.

Massive numbers of priests and religious have resigned their ministries. Even larger numbers of lay Catholics have left the Church altogether. The evident crisis in priestly and religious vocations has evoked a strong call for optional celibacy and the ordination of women. The Vatican's response has been staunch opposition and a public effort to silence these mounting calls for change. The more resistant the Vatican appears to open, critical dialogue, the less effective, for many Catholics, its authority becomes. Ironically, the repeated assertion of magisterial authority has only weakened its hold on large sections of the Catholic community.

This decline in effective authority is not easily remediable. For it is rooted in two profound cultural currents moving through the contemporary Church. While the influence of these currents is not universal, in western countries at least it is undeniably strong and deep.

Authority is not based on the possession of power, but on the exercise of legitimate power. Power has its source in human cooperation. Legitimacy is grounded on the reasons for cooperation and on the manner in which power is used. Authentic or effective authority arises through a free and reciprocal agreement

between those who bear leadership and those who accept it. As Joseph Komonchak makes clear, it is rooted in trustworthiness and trust. Are those who exercise authority trustworthy in the way they hold and use power? What are the essential virtues they must acquire and display? What are the institutional and personal vices they must avoid?

Trustworthy authorities must be wise, truthful, open, humble, and charitable. They must recognize the limits of their competence and knowledge; they must be deeply respectful of and responsive to those whom they govern and teach. The vices that turn authority into despotism are several. Despots tend to be arbitrary, repressive, dishonest, evasive, sectarian and self-serving. They are generally unwilling to admit error or to acknowledge the limits of their operative power.

Does trustworthiness always command trust? Not necessarily. Congenital suspicion and skepticism of authority can lead people to reject even its legitimate forms. Inflated images of autonomy can make the very idea of authority repugnant. And those subject to authority can exaggerate their own merits and deny their evident failings and flaws.

The bonds of inherited authority can also weaken over time. As trustworthiness declines, trust is withdrawn. The vices of those who command eclipse their virtues. Their exercise of power seems increasingly arbitrary; the reasons they give to support their decisions lack credibility. To cite Komonchak again: A gap in credibility always creates a crisis in authority.

The present crisis in the Church reflects a serious decline in both trustworthiness and trust. But it also reflects the other powerful current to which I alluded. Educated Catholics are not hostile to authority *per se*, but they increasingly expect legitimate authority to be combined with personal and public liberty. They not only require reciprocal freedom in the constitution of authority; they also expect authentic authority to be collegially shared. They seek meaningful collegiality within the Church's hierarchy and ministry, but they also seek the effective participation of the laity in shaping the Church's character and direction. They refuse to identify the Church with its hierarchy; for them the Church is the global people of God moving through history under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They believe deeply that the Spirit speaks through them as well as through the Church's appointed leadership. They are inherently suspicious of any practice of authority that smacks of paternalism or patriarchy. They have been educated in a culture of political rights; they are at ease with the reasonable criticism of public officials and respectful dissent from public policies. They increasingly expect the Church of Christ to honor what is best in the secular culture in which they live and are at home.

### C. Why Trust Has Declined

The decline of trust in traditional Catholic leadership has many causes. Some of these causes, like the general cultural decline in respect for authority, are outside the Church's control. While the Church is not directly responsible for that deeper cultural dynamic, its own conduct has clearly exacerbated it.

I want to address three distinct areas where serious failures of leadership have contributed to the loss of effective authority. The first, which is particularly painful to the people of Boston, is the pedophile scandal that has gravely wounded the Church throughout the world. The sexual mistreatment of children is a scandalous abuse of clerical authority. Priests are rightly expected to be pastors caring for the needs of their people, particularly the young and the vulnerable. When priests abuse the trust of parents and children they poison parish life and destroy the foundations of their own authority. Pedophilia is the antithesis of the priestly mission.

But the recent scandal was not limited to sexually abusive priests. There was also a shocking failure of episcopal oversight. Pastors and bishops repeatedly failed to protect children and their families from sexual predators. To the abuse of authority by criminal priests was added the further abuse of the lax or indifferent monitoring of their crimes. The distinct impression was created that the priesthood protected its own, that the protection of sinful priests came well before the protection of innocent children.

Since you are already familiar with this disheartening scandal I shall not speak of it further.

The pedophile scandal did not occur in an historical vacuum. Widespread discontent with the Church's leadership already preceded these self-inflicted wounds. In my judgment, the primary source of this discontent is the deepening sense that the agenda of reform begun by Vatican II has been stalled, even

reversed, during the long papacy of John Paul II. Let us briefly examine several critical areas where the expectations of significant reform have been disappointed. The first is the promise of co-responsibility of all the people of God for the Church's mission in history. Has that promise been fulfilled? It does not appear so. The Church has failed to implement authentic collegiality in its internal governance. The centralized rule of Rome and the curia, a form of governance that resembles an imperial monarchy, has been reasserted. The heavy hand of Rome has blunted the independence of regional and national episcopal conferences; the Pope made loyalty to papal authority and his own priorities a dominant criterion in episcopal appointments; the independence of theologians and Catholic universities has been threatened; the promised role for the laity in the regular governance of the Church has failed to materialize. There were many positive aspects of John Paul's leadership that were appropriately celebrated after his death. But in my judgment there were also serious flaws. The Pope emphasized human rights, but limited their expression within the church; he publicly championed freedom, but bridled at internal dissent. He imposed his own judgments, however deeply held, on a global community that often interpreted the gospel message differently. The universal Church he governed became far less collegial than many faithful Catholics had ardently hoped. This discouraging pattern of centralized autocratic control is a major source of distrust in papal authority.

The end of the Vatican Council coincided with a major rethinking of sexuality in the West. It also coincided with the availability of new forms of birth control. For both personal and economic reasons, married women assumed more prominent roles outside the home in business, politics and education. In partial response to these changes, married couples increasingly wanted to limit the size of their families. While these couples accepted procreation as an important purpose of marriage, they also experienced marital union as a source of other essential human goods. Based on their concrete experience, many couples welcomed the new forms of birth control as an acceptable way to avoid undesired or unmanageable pregnancies. In this rapidly changing cultural context Paul VI created an advisory commission to guide him on the issue of responsible family planning.

The appearance of the papal encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, in 1968 was a landmark event in the post Vatican II era. The decision to reassert the Church's traditional teaching on birth control produced shock and disappointment among married Catholics. The encyclical was deeply troubling for three reasons: for the conclusions it reached, for the arguments it gave to support those conclusions, for the fact that it reversed and defied the majority recommendation offered by the advisory commission, a commission that had been expanded to include both husbands and wives. For many Catholics, this was a first major test of genuine collegiality. Were the pope and his advisors really prepared to take the concrete experience and opinions of married couples and the reflective judgments of respected moral theologians seriously? In particular, was the celibate male magisterium prepared to respect the deeply held views of women and men whose lives were directly affected by the papal decisions? Did the personal convictions of Catholic women really count in a male dominated Church?

The aftershocks of *Humanae Vitae* have still not subsided. Through the encyclical itself and the uneven attempt to enforce its teachings, the Church clearly lost effective authority, particularly in the area of sexual morality. In a crass and commercial culture where a wise and mature sexual teaching, rooted in the gospel, in Church traditions, and in the lived experience of contemporary women and men, was desperately needed, the voice of Rome had lost credibility. The Church's leadership seemed unwilling to admit that it could be wrong, that its traditional teaching could be modified, and that the reflective experience of the faithful could carry greater weight than its own unpersuasive arguments.

The most serious failure of the post-conciliar era has been a failure of justice. I am referring to the Vatican's unwillingness to grant women full equality in the Church. The sins of sexism, of course, are not limited to Catholic Christianity. The inherent dignity of women has been denied in every culture influenced by traditional patriarchy. However, during the last forty years as a rising feminist consciousness swept the globe, and women rightfully demanded their political, economic, and cultural rights, the Catholic Church has been scandalously slow to adjust its attitudes and practices. The most contentious issue is the ordination of women to the priesthood. In my judgment, their admission to the priestly ministry is a clear matter of justice and full Christian equality. But a much deeper cultural and institutional change is called for. The experience and talents of women, their insights and judgments, their criticism and faithful dissent, their greater flexibility and compassion, their demonstrated openness to dialogue are desperately needed to

enrich and renew the Church at every level of its being. As a matter of justice the Church must grant full citizenship to its most valuable members. And full citizenship must mean full and equal participation in every aspect of Church ministry and governance from the humblest parish to the Vatican itself.

The Catholic Church has often paid a heavy price for its reluctance to change. Lonergan once said that the Church lost the allegiance of European intellectuals in the 18<sup>th</sup> century because of its entanglement in the Ancien Regime. Then it lost the loyalty of the urban poor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because it passively accepted the scandalous deprivations and inequities caused by industrial capitalism. But an even greater loss of allegiance threatens the Church today. Large numbers of Christian women have already decided that second class citizenship is intolerable. My growing fear is that this threatening trend will become a torrent. That the Church will lose its most faithful and dedicated members; and that by clinging to the injustices of its past, it will forfeit this historic opportunity for reform and renewal.

What must the inner life of the Church be like if it is really to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world? What must the Catholic Church freely become if it is really to reflect the spirit of the gospel. It clearly cannot be a centralized monarchy in a democratic age, nor a sexist institution in an era of global feminism. It cannot credibly be a persuasive voice for justice and peace when its own practices are unfair and repressive. People of good will, inside and outside the Church, will listen more respectfully to its message of freedom when its words begin to align with its deeds. I believe that the public teaching and exhortation of the Church will lack credibility until lost trust is restored through genuine repentance and constructive reform.

In the next sections of this lecture I want to explore several cultural transformations that I believe are necessary if the leadership of the Church is to recover its trustworthiness. Although these transformations are difficult, the positive example of Catholic thinkers and teachers shows that they can be achieved. The first transformation will require the Church to acknowledge its fallibility and sinfulness. The Holy Spirit's presence within the Church does not prevent error and sin. It never has; it never will. Divine grace does not prevent sin, though it can heal the wounds that sin inflicts. The second transformation will require a cultural shift from classicism to historical mindedness. The classicist mentality is essentially static, believing in the normative permanence and unrevisability of inherited institutions and practices. An historically minded culture, by contrast, is critically dynamic, believing that living communities need to combine both change and constancy, tradition and innovation, continuity and systemic reform. The third transformation will require fostering a genuinely ecumenical spirit. How should the Church respond authentically to pluralism and diversity within its own ranks and within the global society to which it belongs? How can it become genuinely catholic, *Katholou*, striving for universality and unity, while respecting the multiple sources of truth, the dynamism of history and the awesome diversity of humanity?

#### D. Intellectual Humility

Humility is an essential Christian virtue. It is a habit of truthfulness about ourselves, our past, our relations with others, our merits and limitations. It is rooted in our gratitude to God for the gifts of creation, and strengthened by our trust in God's mercy and providence. Inspired by faith, Christians believe that our talents are given for the service of the world, and that our sins will be forgiven if we honestly repent and amend our ways.

Intellectual humility means truthfulness about the scope and limits of our knowledge. We are born with an unrestricted desire to know, but our actual achievement of knowledge is always partial and imperfect. The clear evidence of this cognitive gap is that our questions always outpace our answers, and that our answers invariably elicit further questions. As Socrates repeatedly taught us, the acknowledgement of ignorance is the beginning of human wisdom.

Learned ignorance is also the pre-condition of genuine inquiry. Human learning is a self-corrective process of seeking and finding understanding, and then revising and correcting our finite acts of insight and discovery. It is an error-laden process that constantly reminds us of our fallibility. It is also a process that is easily distorted by bias and prejudice. As a result of these enduring limitations, even the truths we discover are inherently provisional. We normally live with minds stocked with half truths and fragmentary insights, but we also live with errors, hearsay, clichés, the conventional wisdom of our gated intellectual communities.

The sin of pride tempts us to deny the inescapable limits of our knowledge. Skeptical suspicion, by contrast, mocks the concerted effort to learn and inquire. Intellectual humility seeks to avoid the temptations of both pride and skepticism. It is deeply committed to the quest for understanding, but acutely conscious of human fallibility and self-deception.

In the modern age, the common practice of inquiry took an unfortunate turn. Many thinkers, following the example of Descartes, embarked on a quest for certainty. They wanted to achieve a level of understanding and articulation that was permanently true and immune from revision. There were important emotional correlates that tended to accompany this quest for epistemic closure: the need for reassurance, anxiety in the face of conflict and disagreement, unease when confronted with alternative perspectives and formulations. The quest for certainty tended to create an apologetic and defensive spirit, an anti-Socratic rigidity, a resistance to critical dissent.

Surrendering the inflated ideal of certainty does not require abandoning the life of inquiry. On the contrary. As my teacher John Dunne taught us at Notre Dame, letting go of certainty often releases a spirit of intellectual openness and exploration; a readiness to accept the light of truth whatever its source. In Dunne's own case, this readiness meant following the example of Gandhi, whom Dunne considered the spiritual exemplar of our time. As Gandhi, a traditional Hindu, had sought to appropriate the religious insights of the gospel and the Koran, so Dunne, a traditional Christian, decided to enter sympathetically into the spiritual perspectives of the world's great religions. He called this process passing over and coming back. Dunne's spiritual journey led him to pass over sympathetically to other lives, other cultures, other religions, other spiritual traditions. But this process of passing over was always completed by a complementary coming back to his own life, his own religion, his own situation as a Holy Cross Priest, teaching and writing in Northern Indiana.

What did Dunne discover through his unrestricted quest for fuller understanding? That the great world religions were based on uncommon insights into very common human experiences; that the discoveries, articulations and practices of other people could deepen our own minds and hearts; that these insights often pointed to undeveloped riches that had been forgotten or neglected in our faith community; that the distorting power of sin and the healing power of grace are at work in every religious tradition. Finally, that the Catholic Church will become more effective and persuasive in communicating the Christian message when it genuinely becomes a learning Church.

What would a genuinely learning Church be like?

The learning Church would be centered in intellectual humility. It would candidly acknowledge its ignorance and its historic errors and sins. It would recognize the importance of mystical experience and the great tradition of negative theology. It would realize that all human efforts to comprehend the divine mysteries are imperfect and provisional. It would expect the deeper meaning of the gospel to continue to reveal itself in time and history. It would be open to the activity of the Holy Spirit wherever and in whomever it appears. It would embrace authentic reform and renewal as constitutive factors of the Church's developing life. It would be thankful that the merciful love of God is granted abundantly to saints and sinners alike.

#### **E. Historical Mindedness and Ecumenical Pluralism**

The Church founded by Jesus of Nazareth is deeply situated in history. As the word became flesh in a particular place at a particular time, so the Church founded on the incarnate word has struggled to balance its universal mission with a full recognition of its historical particularity. The original community inspired by Jesus slowly expanded from a small group of Jewish disciples in Palestine to an often contentious amalgam of Jews and Gentiles. At first a Mediterranean centered community, it eventually became a Church of Northern and Western Europe, then of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Originally a Church of the Greco-Roman era, it later became a Church of medieval and Renaissance Europe. Today, Catholic Christianity is a genuinely global community extending to all peoples, races and cultures.

There is an important distinction to emphasize between being an historically grounded community and recognizing the full implications of our historicity. The Catholic Church has tended to emphasize the permanence and constancy of its mission. It has struggled to be faithful to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and to its hard-won doctrinal teachings and creeds. The Church's institutional and cultural identity were originally shaped in the classical period and then given richer expression in the scholastic

culture of the high Middle Ages. From the outset, Catholic Christianity has struggled with the formative events of modernity: the Protestant Reformation; the scientific revolution; the conquest of the Americas; the advent of democracy, the rise of industrial capitalism; Europe's imperialist adventures in Asia, Africa and the New World; the advent of critical historiography and hermeneutics; the scourge of total war; the universal demand for human rights, especially the rights of women. In the centuries after the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church largely remained aloof from or resistant to these dynamic forces shaping the modern age.

The call to *aggiornamento* in Vatican II began a new phase in the Church's relation to the modern world. But as we have noted, there has been fierce disagreement about the appropriate nature and spirit of that relationship. What did it really mean to open the windows of the Church to the modern era? The modern world, like the Church seeking dialogue with it, is also a tangled knot of greatness and wretchedness. It is a world marked by great achievements in science and technology and equally serious failures in justice and stewardship. How can the Church be respectful and open to the modern world and remain critically aware of its weaknesses and limitations at the same time?

The thought and writing of Bernard Lonergan provide an instructive model of how this essential balance might be achieved. Lonergan's intellectual motto was "vetera novis augere et perficere," to augment and perfect the old with the new. Lonergan himself spent years reaching up to the mind of Thomas Aquinas. This long spiritual apprenticeship inspired him to try to do for our time and place in history what Aquinas had achieved in 13<sup>th</sup> century Paris. Aquinas had integrated into a comprehensive Christian theology the insights of Jews, Greeks, Romans, Patristics, and Muslims. He had risen to the concrete demands of his time in a spirit of openness and charity. He had left to the church and the world a remarkable theological legacy. Lonergan devoted his exceptional talents to a similar effort, in a comparable spirit, in a markedly different cultural setting. For Lonergan the greatest handicap facing the Church in its critical encounter with modernity was the pervasiveness of classicist assumptions. If critical *aggiornamento* were really to succeed, the teachers, leaders and members of the Church had to undergo a painful cultural conversion, a conversion he described as the shift from classicism to historical mindedness. This cultural conversion would be long and difficult because it meant changing traditional ways of understanding science, culture, philosophy, theology and anthropology. It would be especially difficult for Catholic leaders and teachers who prided themselves on their classicist formation.

The classicist mindset emphasizes the results of inquiry; historical consciousness, by contrast, emphasizes the normative process through which those results are discovered and revised. Classicism anticipates permanence in these epistemic discoveries; its historically-minded critics treat existing articulations of insight as provisional and subject to amendment in the light of further experience. Where classicism emphasizes logic as an integrative principle of knowledge, Lonergan emphasizes the different normative methods that keep human inquiry open to change and revision. Where classicism canonizes the institutional culture of a particular era in history, Lonergan accepts the empirical notion of culture as the concrete meanings and values, the underlying beliefs and convictions, informing the common lives of human beings living throughout time and space. Where classicism is wedded to the quest for certainty and finality, Lonergan's historically informed vision is open to the unrestricted quest for understanding and motivated to achieve a deeper, more comprehensive realization of the human good. As Lonergan carefully phrased it, modernity does not confront the church with a new faith or a new gospel, but it does confront Christianity with a new, dynamic, imperfect non-classicist culture. This living culture, our common culture, requires neither scornful rejection nor servile attachment on the part of Christians. What it requires instead is critical appropriation, the humble, patient discovery and articulation of the modern world's merits and limitations.

How would the Catholic Church's understanding and practice of authority change if it abandoned its deep rooted classicist assumptions and really welcomed the pluralism of a global, that is, a catholic society?

We would cease to speak about the Church in idealized terms. The Church is a human community inspired, sustained and corrected by the presence of God within it. It exhibits the same strengths and weaknesses that ancient Israel did, that Jesus' apostles did, that Peter, the original Pope, did. The bracing realism of scripture in describing the followers of God should be a model for our discourse about the Church and its leaders.

A candid review of the historical record of Catholic authority and leadership is sobering. The gospels are frank in describing the sins and weaknesses of Peter and the apostles. The Book of Acts of the Apostles does not conceal the struggle within early Christianity about the proper relationship between Judaism and the followers of Christ. The sins of the papacy, as Garry Wills and Barbara Tuchman remind us, are many and varied; nor do they cease with the reforms of Trent and the counter-reformation. The anti-modernist period stretching between the two Vatican councils was repressive and stifling. Ironically, many of the theologians whose work inspired Vatican II had earlier been silenced or exiled. And candid accounts of the council itself reveal the numerous efforts by the Roman curia to block essential reforms. The inquisitorial courts that condemned Jews and heretics to torture and death have been replaced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. But as Paul Collins has shown, the new guardians of orthodoxy refuse to grant due process and standard legal protections to the accused. This lack of procedural justice continued under the leadership of Cardinal Ratzinger.

My point is not to censure the Church for this uneven record of episcopal leadership. Historical awareness should foster humility, not self-righteous condemnation. For me, realism about the Church's history is not a barrier to faith. After all, our faith is in God and not in the human beings who govern the Church. The lesson I draw from history is that the Church needs to be more modest and self-critical when its leaders claim to speak and act in the name of God. It is important to remember that the friends of Job claimed this power, as did the scribes and Pharisees, as did Saul the Persecutor, as have religious fundamentalists throughout human history.

What reforms in the institutional culture of the Church would make its exercise of authority more legitimate? It is often said that the Church is not a popular democracy; and this claim is evidently true. But what should its internal governance be like? Should it, for example, be anti-democratic as a way of demonstrating its counter cultural integrity, as a way of repudiating the classical adage *vox populi est vox Dei*.

I start from a wise Thomistic principle. Grace perfects and completes human nature; it does not abolish it. Inspired by this principle, Aquinas was able to integrate the insights of Greek philosophy into his theological synthesis. For Aquinas, Aristotle needed to be revised and completed, not overturned.

The insights of history and our knowledge and experience of human institutions teach us that imperial, monarchic, centralized and autocratic forms of governance tend to be despotic rather than just. History also teaches that human beings who hold power are reluctant to surrender it, and that they often justify their power with arguments that are unpersuasive and self-serving. My personal study of politics and history has made me a sober civic republican (lower case). I believe that wise and just government is exceedingly difficult. I think this difficulty is compounded when human institutions have global responsibilities, and when their membership is characterized by profound cultural pluralism. I measure human associations, both secular and religious, by whether they provide liberty and justice for all of their members. There are, of course, higher goods than liberty and justice, but they are the basic minimum of a decent community.

The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally emphasized the exercise of authority from above. The hierarchy claims to receive its authority directly from God and to guide and instruct the faithful in God's name. This model of authority has made it difficult to implement true collegiality within the Church. If command and instruction come solely from above, what is there for other Catholics to do but obey and assent? But, as we have seen, obedience and assent are likely to be withheld when the bonds of trust are weakened or broken.

I believe that the presence of God and the inspiration of the Spirit fill the universal Church, and that the enduring gift of the Spirit is liberty. I don't have a perfect recipe for authentic collegiality, but I know that it will need to combine both authority and liberty, both trustworthiness and trust.

Finally, let me speak about public or political liberty as it applies to the Church and its members. Genuine liberty requires mutual respect, reciprocity, open critical dialogue, a collaborative process of learning and teaching. Institutionally, it requires meaningful participation by Catholics at every level of the Church's life and practice. Tocqueville has shown us that local institutions are the strength of free communities. If they are to enlist and retain the participation of their members they must enjoy real independence and decision-making power. The Church has recognized the important principle of

subsidiarity in its political teaching, but has minimally applied subsidiarity to its own affairs. I believe that this republican principle of freedom, the principle that what can be justly resolved at the local level should be resolved there, has universal application. Subsidiarity is a crucial way of sustaining effective participation, protecting individual rights, respecting cultural pluralism, insuring diverse and balanced representation in episcopal appointments, and making sure that higher levels of authority are really accountable to those whom they lead. It is also a way of limiting bureaucracy, cronyism, a partisan and unrepresentative episcopacy and the despotic centralization of power. The Catholic Church is actually well organized to practice subsidiarity as well as preach it. If viewed from the bottom up, rather than the top down, it has parishes, dioceses, universities, regional and national episcopal conferences, an international college of cardinals, the Vatican and the pope. From the top down, Rome speaks and others are expected to obey. From the bottom up, the experience, reflection, insights, initiatives, and actions of Catholics and Catholic conferences throughout the world fill the Church with vitality, freedom, and the promise of procedural and substantive justice. My point is not that Rome is always wrong and the local communities always right. Not at all. It is rather that if a genuine and authentic dialogue existed in both directions, and clerical authority really respected the public liberty of the laity, and the magisterium was open to learning and correction, and the Vatican abandoned its imperial pretenses, then a Church in the spirit of John XXIII, a Church, perhaps, in the spirit of Christ himself, might gradually emerge.

Let us remember that Jesus of Nazareth did not cling to equality with God but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant even unto death.

As Catholic Christians, the spirit of Christ should be our guide in all things. But Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, came among us in humility, taking human form as a child, living the quiet life at Nazareth, then entering into his public ministry with fishermen, tax collectors and prostitutes. He fasted in the desert, rejected the temptations of earthly power, refused to rely on coercion and the sword, and humbly trusted in the power of his word and example to redeem the world. The Church founded by Christ is called to continue his redemptive work in history. Our broken world still needs redemption, as does our divided Church.

In ending this lecture, I want to emphasize the first person plural. The Catholic Church is our Church, and we are responsible together with our priests and bishops for its future. For the Church is not finally an institutional structure governed by prelates, however well meaning. Rather, it is the entire people of God on every continent, in every age, women and men, old and young, conservative and progressive, all called by Christ and inspired by the Spirit to continue the work of redemption. Ours is a common call of Christian service to be answered with humility, liberty, justice and the spirit of forgiveness. Let us actively respond to that call as wisely and as well as we can. Thank you.

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Michael McCarthy is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and Yale University. His special interests include the history of philosophy, both ancient and modern, ethics, political philosophy, and philosophical anthropology. He has written several books, *The Crisis of Philosophy*, *The Ethics of Lobbying* and *El Pensamiento Político de Hannah Arendt*, and is just completing a major work on the political humanism of Hannah Arendt. Mr. McCarthy is an associate fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center and a member of the Lonergan Institute board at Boston College.

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Michael McCarthy  
Professor of Philosophy

“When I began teaching here in 1968, I was 26 years old and the students were nearly my peers; when I retire at 64, they could easily be my grandchildren,” said Michael McCarthy about the change in his students, or at least his perception of them, since he first came to Vassar. Despite the difference 38 years can make, McCarthy finds his students “no less approachable.”

A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and Yale University, McCarthy joined the philosophy department at Vassar soon after receiving his M. A. In 1969 he became a House Fellow for Davison, which he and his wife Barbara “entered with one daughter and graduated with three.” Having lived on campus during a time of several major transitions, McCarthy said, “Vassar has never seemed as electric or exciting as it did between 1968 and 1973. But the caliber of students at Vassar today is stronger than at any time in my memory.”

McCarthy’s contributions to philosophy stretch far beyond Vassar; he has been an associate fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center in Washington, DC, and a board member of the Lonergan Institute at Boston College. His books include *The Crisis of Philosophy*, *The Ethics of Lobbying*, and *El Pensamiento Politico de Hannah Arendt*, along with a recent publication about Arendt’s political humanism.

He will miss Vassar. “I have deeply enjoyed my years here,” he said. “It has been a very good place to teach, to be married and raise a family, to create enduring friendships, to pursue the life of the mind. I am grateful for all that Vassar has meant to the entire McCarthy family.” So what does a philosophy professor do when he retires? “As long as I have the wits and energy I will continue to think and write on topics philosophical, political, religious, and personal.”