

## Talking About Faith to a Skeptical World in a Secular Age

### Bishop Cupich

The church must find “points of contact that will invite people living in this secular age to take a second look at what we have to say and allow them to see that we have something unique to help them untie the knots that are part of all of our human lives,” Bishop Blase J. Cupich of Spokane, Wash., said July 2 in a speech on presenting the faith in a secular age. He delivered the Dom Helder Camara Lecture at Newman College at the University of Melbourne in Australia. Bishop Cupich noted that due to the aggressive nature of the New Atheists, “the cultural warrior approach may seem to some to be” the church’s best response, “but in the end

*“We should aim at witnessing to that kind of beauty in our ministry which comes in sharing the pain of the other.”*

it brings little results other than giving us a temporary feeling of self-satisfaction. But, even more so, it is not the way of the Gospel.” Bishop Cupich gave suggestions about how to engage skeptics in a secular age, including seeing how the Gospel speaks to the deepest longings of the human heart, promoting unity within the church so that it becomes a witness of justice and peace, treating elected officials with respect, witnessing to the social gospel through collaboration in areas in which we share values with people who may not be interested in religion and seriously addressing the role of women in the church. On this last point, he said, “The church must give very serious thought to the peril it will encounter if having lost the workers and the intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries it loses youth and women in the 21st century.” Bishop Cupich’s lecture follows.

I want to begin with a story. Being the grandson of immigrants, I have always been interested in hearing the stories of how people left their homes, security, families to begin a journey into the unknown, to make a new life, a new home.

One day sitting across a kitchen table from an elderly immigrant woman, I asked, “Tell me the story of how you came to America.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she snapped back, which of course made me all the more curious.

So I pressed, “I really would like to know.”

After a bit more coaxing, she began. It was

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The Dom Helder Camara annual lecture series commemorates Archbishop Helder Camara of Olinda and Recife, Brazil, who was famous for his tireless work in assisting and defending the rights of the poor in Brazil and throughout the world.

He also was instrumental in creating the first bishops' conference and the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM). He played a prominent role at the Second Vatican Council.

He was a forceful critic of the military government that ruled Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s, leading to attempts on his life and a government ban on all references to him.

In 1972, *Origins* published a speech by Archbishop Camara on human misery and war. Following are excerpts from that speech:

"Let us get together, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish brothers, and let us try to enlist the support of all those who believe in God, and also those atheist humanists (since, to the extent that they love men, perhaps without realizing it, and even unwillingly, they love the Creator and Father, who made men to his own image and likeness); let's join together, in our effort to make everybody see, ponder and feel the insanity of continuing to prepare for wars which are, and always will be even more so, the synonym of collective suicide for all humanity.

"This will not be an easy campaign. The producers of armaments and wars have colossal interests at stake. They do not believe that war industries can be transformed into peace industries. ...

"Let us not hesitate, for the love of peace, from using our pulpits, if necessary, to denounce war as being ever more absurd and immoral. ...

"There is a song of young Brazilians that says: 'Wars kill many, hunger kills more.'

"And not only kills: Like

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just after World War I. Her mother had died during the war from pneumonia. Six weeks later, her father took a second wife. The problem was the bride was only 22, just four years older than she. Quickly it was clear the daughter and the new "mother" were not going to get along.

The father's solution to the tension was to give his daughter a chore that would get her out of the house for most of the day, that of taking the produce from their farm to market each morning. This meant loading up the wagon pulled by the horse she would ride. The problem was that with the customarily required long dress she had to ride sidesaddle, something she found difficult to do. Every few meters she would fall off the horse, with the result that she never got to market on time.

After a week of coming home with rotting, unsold vegetables, her father called her in and said, "Listen, your brother is in America; go live with him; you're no good to me."

I said to her, "You never told anyone that story before have you."

"No," she said with tears welling in her eyes as though she had heard those shattering words for the first time in all their blunt force. "I didn't want anyone to know that the last thing my father said to me was 'you're no good to me, you're no good to me.'"

But then something quite interesting happened as I encouraged her to see that painful moment and those cutting words from the distant past against the entire rest of her life; how her father's rejection launched her on a journey that would result in quite a happy and secure life, finding a husband, welcoming children and then grand- and great-grandchildren into the world. It was as if a knot had been untied, as she for the first time saw the bigger picture of her life, becoming aware of the hidden work of God over the years.

I tell you this story because this encounter and many others like it have centered me in my approach to ministry. I have learned over nearly 40 years of priesthood that ministry is most often about helping people untie knots, listening to them, sitting with them, helping

them see the larger picture of their lives, especially when they are stuck in trying to make sense of them.

You have asked me to address the topic "talking about faith to skeptics in a secular age." I do so as a pastor, as one who comes at this question not as a scholar versed in the social sciences, a debater, an apologist or an advocate defending belief over skepticism or against outright atheism, nor as a cultural warrior distressed by the seemingly relentless attacks on faith and religion in an aggressively secular world but as one who just tries to help people untie the knots of life, and when they do, to support and encourage them to see how God is acting in their lives.

This of course does not mean being naive about the unique and daunting challenges presented by the skeptic in a secular age, but it does mean keeping before us the unique contribution we can make as pastors in this situation, trusting that God's grace is working in every human being. It also means, just as it did in the case of the immigrant woman, appreciating the bigger picture of how humanity has come to this moment in time and how our response can benefit from understanding historical developments.

With that in mind, I am going to make three points in this presentation:

—We should take the challenge of skepticism seriously, particularly in this era of growing and aggressive secularism. Both Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* and Father Michael Buckley, SJ, in his *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* offer sober descriptions of the challenge before us. But my point will be that while we should be serious, we should not be fearful. Instead we should welcome this moment as an opportunity to embrace more fully our own discipleship and our mission to the world. This is the approach of *Gaudium et Spes*, which portrays the church as interested in discovering "the hidden causes for the denial of God," because we take the questions of others seriously and because we love all people (No. 21).

—While Father Michael Buckley, SJ, and Charles Taylor force believers and believing

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communities to be realistic about the challenges posed by the modern world, they also help us better understand how we got here. They share much in common as they each track for their own research the historical development of skepticism/atheism and secularism. I am convinced that their insights offer us a way forward, provide a language, to talk about faith intelligently and sensitively to a skeptical world in a secular age and thereby open up the possibility of helping people untie some knots.

—Finally, I am going to offer some concrete suggestions for believers to create new opportunities to engage a skeptical world not only on the basis of the insights that come from understanding the situation but also simply from my own pastoral experience of being a priest for nearly 40 years and a bishop for 15.

### **A Serious But Not Fearful Approach**

Talking about the faith to skeptics is not a new challenge, but doing so in this age of secularism is. Paul of Tarsus definitely had his skeptics in the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34), the high court in Athens. But the age could hardly be called secular. Remember, he was brought to this civic court to explain himself for illegally preaching about a foreign deity.

We should not be naive about the new situation we are facing. We are living in a different era. This is how Charles Taylor describes it:

“Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable? ... Belief in God isn't quite the same thing in 1500 and today.”

As Peter Steinfels remarks, in Taylor's view “faith is no longer the air we breathe. ... The believer like the unbeliever must live ‘in a condition of doubt and uncertainty’” (“Modernity and Belief: Charles Taylor's ‘A Secular Age,’” *Commonweal*, May 5, 2008).

Making the challenge all the more unsettling is what Father Michael Buckley, SJ, calls an aggressive and largely theologically illiterate New Atheism, which is not interested in any dialogue. People like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens collapse faith and religion into one, insisting that both are poisons that must be purged as they threaten the common good. Relying on a cartoon version of religion, such writers highlight the faults of the past — anti-Semitism, forced conversions, the Inquisition — and in the present — child abuse and violent fundamentalism.

It is true that serious scholars like Buckley find many of these New Atheists wanting

when it comes to rigorous scholarship. Terry Eagleton's review of *The God Delusion* in the London Review of Books comically un.masks Dawkin's staggeringly unscholarly approach: “Imagine,” he wrote, “someone holding forth on biology whose only knowledge of the subject is the *Book of British Birds*, and you have a rough idea of what it feels like to read Richard Dawkins on theology.”

Nonetheless, we should take these challenges seriously. These writers have become quite influential as media are more than eager to give them a good deal of ink and free coverage.

We should also not be naive about attempts to instrumentalize the role of government in all of this. *Gaudium et Spes* prophetically warned that “when the proponents of atheism gain governmental power they vigorously fight against religion, and promote atheism by using, especially in the education of youth, those means of pressure which public power has at its disposal” (No. 20).

Now all of this could leave us with a sense of being overwhelmed, concluding that the agenda of the skeptics and atheists and the forces of secularism will prevail; it is only a matter of time. In the movie *The Life of Pi*, Pi's father ridicules him for his search for truth in various religions. Religion is a waste of time, in his view, since science will continue to discover more, and there will be less and less need of religion to explain things. This is sometimes referred to as the secularization theory. Secularization is inevitable. Religion in time will be overcome by the unstoppable wave, the tsunami of new data from science and reason.

But giving in to our fears does no good. It leaves us with only two equally bad options — declare war and take a quarrelsome approach to every criticism or question about faith and the church or live in a continual state of low-grade depression, accepting that the day of religion's demise is coming but hoping not in our time.

Blessed Pope John Paul II invited the church in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* to approach this challenge from a different perspective, reminding us that Jesus often used the uncertainty of others to goad his followers to take a further step in their own journey of discipleship, all the while gaining a new awareness of who he is. That is how John Paul reads the scene in Matthew 16 at Caesarea Philippi: “Jesus asks his disciples what ‘people’ think of him, and they answer him: ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’” (Mt 16:14).

All along Jesus is leading the disciples to

*nuclear and bio-chemical wars, it breeds horrible, physical, psychic and moral deformities. Even so, misery is always growing in the world.*

*“Who doesn't know that at the end of the first Development Decade the rich countries are richer and the poor countries are poorer?”*

*“Who ignores that the distance which separates the rich countries from the poor ones is always widening?”*

*“Let's not be misled by the increase in the Gross National Product of some underdeveloped countries. Let's not marvel at the, at times staggering, economic growth which some poor countries succeed in showing.*

*“There is a simple test which explains it all: Just ask what percentage of the population really benefits from these marvelous results. It will be seen that they serve 2 or 3 percent of the population.*

*“We all know that no country rises from misery without huge sacrifices. But why should these sacrifices fall mainly upon the already oppressed?”*

*“Even when in all honesty, governments of poor countries exert efforts to make the people participate in the benefits and services which the economic growth of privileged groups begins to make possible, let's not forget that, in order to achieve true development — of the whole man and of all men — it is useless and misleading to think that a human being is happy to receive paternalistically, the crumbs that are left over from the banquets of the privileged. ...*

*“Beware of the dangerous fallacy that the ills to which we refer are a sad monopoly of poor countries.*

*“No country in the world is free from problem areas, its underdeveloped regions and the presence, in its own way, of poverty and of misery.*

*“Let's take for example, the richest country in the world. The USA talks of surpluses of agricultural products and sends milk, wheat and oil to*



*the whole world. Is it really surplus production? Is it really true that nobody here needs the milk, wheat or oil which your country sends to the whole world, or is it possible that, absurd as it may seem, one can also draw the geography of hunger in the USA?*

*"What really happens is that to send the alleged surplus production to the whole world is doubly advantageous for the USA: first because it avoids the drop in internal price, as a consequence of the disruption of the internal market; and second, because it helps create a form of neo-colonialism, leading one to forget, through aid, the grave losses which result from the injustices of internal trade policies.*

*"Let's get rid of the fear of seeming to neglect the religious field and intruding on the political and technical arenas.*

*"Let's get rid of the fear of appearing to intrude in internal problems of other countries.*

*"Together, let's claim the right and the duty to defend the human being, the human person, the common good. If this be politics, it is non-partisan politics, it is the defense of man, our brother; it is the defense of justice, without which peace is nothing but a nice-sounding word. Together, let's claim the right to deal with the internal problems of all and any country, insofar as these problems are only outwardly internal for, in fact, they end up by having consequences which affect other countries and, at times have repercussions on the whole world.*

*"Jews, Orthodox, Protestant, Catholics, let's try to get together with all those who really dream of a world that is fairer and more human and, with peace in mind, let's denounce:*

*"—In the underdeveloped world, the internal colonialism, the wealth of persons, or groups, within the country, held at the expense of the misery of their fellow coun-*

take "the further step of awareness, ... which he expects from those who are close to him," so that he can ask them, "But who do you say that I am?"

John Paul's point is simply this: We should not hesitate to engage those who do not fully understand or even reject faith, for it provides us a fresh opportunity to take one further step in knowing Christ more deeply, which we need to do if we are going to bring others to him.

Pope Paul VI likewise encouraged newly ordained priests in the Jubilee Year 1975 not to misread rejection or to respond fearfully to the world's unpleasant or even hostile voices but to see it as a moment of grace:

"Know how to accept as an invitation the very reproach which perhaps, and often unjustly, the world hurls against the messenger of the Gospel. Know how to listen to the groan of the poor, the candid voice of the child, the thoughtful cry of youth, the complaint of the tired worker, the sigh of the suffering and the criticism of the thinker. 'Never be afraid.' The Lord has repeated it."

So my first point is simply this: Yes, let's not be naive about the challenge we face in talking about faith to skeptics in a secular age. The situation deserves serious attention but not panic or fear and surely not hostility or a quarrelsome spirit. These emotions should not shape our response. What should shape the church's response is our love of all people, the firm belief that God's grace is working in all of humanity, a resolve to take them seriously and understand them, and an awareness that Jesus often uses such challenging moments to deepen the faith of the disciples to rejuvenate their faith and trust in him. Our approach as pastors should be to help people untie the knots.

### **Try to Understand the Situation**

Michael Buckley tells the story of presenting John Paul II with a copy of *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, his work that concludes that atheism is a theory or school with its own intellectual history and tradition. The Holy Father asked him, "So who was responsible for the development of atheism as a tradition?" Buckley crisply responded, "The theologians."

In fact that is the central claim of his book: The rise of atheism in the 17th and 18th centuries was largely due to Christian theologians who defended the faith not by appealing to the distinctive characteristics of the faith but by appealing to philosophy. Theologians of the 17th century, sensing the increasing influence of atheistic arguments, attempted

to meet the philosophical objections philosophically rather than with a presentation of the revelation of God through Christ. They attempted to respond to the philosophical arguments of the atheists head-on, abandoning the person and experience of Christ in the process. Theologians likewise put greater emphasis on natural law arguments rather than the church's stupendous claims about the supernatural. In effect, we lost control of the debate by not being faithful to our message.

Charles Taylor comes to similar conclusions when he studies the growth of secularism in *A Secular Age*. Taylor argues that the age of modernity is the result of a complex series of shifts in outlook and assumptions about the world, God, the human person, time and morality. Broadly summarized, these shifts began with the Reform in 16th and 17th centuries, what he calls an axial moment, then morphed into deism, which laid the groundwork for secularism.

The Reform, inspired by a genuine desire to return to a pure Christianity based on Scripture, emphasized a religious quest that was more individual and universal than merely tribal. It was marked by a new interiority, a new consciousness of justice and selflessness beyond the practical concerns of factional protection and prosperity. It stressed ethics over ritual or doctrine and the promotion of the dignity of ordinary human life as a way to holiness.

In what may seem today to be ironic, the Reform that eventually led to secularism was originally inspired by a thirst for a mature spirituality, one that takes personal responsibility, has a code of conduct based on reason and aims at combating suffering and injustice. Considered to be an authentic development of the Gospel, the Reform encouraged the individual to live the Gospel in a purer way, liberated from the often violent coercion of conscience which blemished an earlier era and now, unshackled from the control of a few, free to take up the task of building a moral order of mutual good will.

But this newfound freedom came at a cost. God's good for creatures here becomes more about building a moral order for human benefit rather than about their expression of love, praise and worship of the divine. This moral order is to be achieved by reason and human benevolence, not active grace of God. Thus, we see the rise of deism, where God is the divine architect and judge. Praise, grace, mystery, sacrament and transformation are eliminated in the here and now. It is not surprising that God becomes superfluous, a dis-

tant, disengaged individual being who, as Karl Rahner puts it, is simply another “member of the larger household of reality.”

This benevolent Zeus stands on the sidelines of human history, occasionally intervening, and is not the Judeo-Christian God. Deism does borrow from the Christian belief in Providence but only to promote the triumph of reason and benevolence for building the moral order, which in America was translated into the idealism of manifest destiny.

All of this brings us to the rise of secularism, an exclusive humanism of freedom, discipline and beneficent order — all derived from Christianity and striving to deliver at last what Christianity had originally promised. But faith ends up being stripped of much of its significance for social order and became a matter of personal choice and individual identity. Faith is decoupled from collectivity.

We can understand how all of this leads to religion’s ban from society and the marketplace as modernity involves the emancipation of the state, economy, science from religion, each achieving their own internal and lawful autonomy. So religion has to go to its own sphere, no longer over the others. While not being eliminated, it is exiled to the private or personal sphere, losing its influence in the public and political space.

Unfortunately, we are left with the phenomenon of believing and not belonging, vicarious religion — in which one maintains an affectionate identification. “Religion becomes either ‘an ancestral memory’ or a resource for marking rites of passage, especially funerals, or for providing ‘comfort and orientation in the face of some collective disaster’” (Steinfels, *Commonweal*, May 5, 2008).

So, where does this leave us? Where do we go from here? Will a new phase in this trajectory bring even greater challenges to believers? How does laying out this full panorama of the rise of modernity help us better understand the challenges facing people, make us more sensitive to their questions but also more perceptive to new openings as we speak about faith to them?

Before offering some specific suggestions for charting a way forward in dialoguing about faith in this age of secularism, I note that Taylor has some advice to religious leaders. He counsels that we take a humble approach that does not overreach in making claims about religion’s competency in politics, society, economics, law or art. It would be wise, he advises, to recognize that classical understandings of the self, society, physical nature and time are no longer widely shared.

If Buckley were to give advice, it might come from the other direction, namely, quit making the same mistake of competing on the world’s own terms but return to the Gospel. Go back to what you know has worked, go back to your mission, confident that we have something unique to say to others.

### **Suggestions for How to Talk About Faith in a Secular Age**

With those two general pieces of advice as a starting point I want to offer seven suggestions based on my pastoral experience about how to find or create some openings to speak to skeptics in a secular age.

1. Our confidence that the Gospel speaks to the deepest longings of the human heart should give direction to how we speak.

In the scene from *The Life of Pi* I mentioned earlier, after the mother hears the father’s advice to his son to forget religion and adopt reason and science as the means to truth, she says to Pi, “Yes it is true, reason has told us more in 200 years than religion, but reason tells us only what is out there; religion tells us what is in here,” pointing to her heart. She reminds me of something Blaise Pascal wrote, “The heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing.” (*“Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas”* — *Pensées*.)

We have to take seriously our own truth claims, for they will center and be the point of reference to give direction to our response. For instance, we make very specific claims in the Christian Gospel about humanity, human dignity and freedom. What we claim, in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, is that “human dignity lies in our call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of our origin we already are invited to converse with God. For we would not exist were we not created by God’s love and constantly preserved by it; and we cannot live fully according to truth unless we freely acknowledge that love and devote ourselves to our Creator” (No. 19).

Statements like this should remind us that the task of bringing others to that life God intends for all involves untying knots and freeing people to be fully alive. It is not about winning an argument. Fulton J. Sheen used to say, “If you are interested only in winning an argument, you will never win a convert.” Similarly, we also believe in the indwelling of the Spirit and trust that Christ is present and working in the world and in people we are sent to bring to Christ.

2. Promote unity within the church so that it becomes a witness of justice and peace.

Those who study the religious practices of young people, such as Christian Smith, tell us

trymen;

“—In the rich countries, the incredible existence of gray zones, underdeveloped areas, where the proletariat of the affluent countries get bitter and revolt;

“—In the relationship between the rich and the poor countries, the extremely serious injustices concerning which, as a closing to this fraternal talk, I will leave some questions, trusting them to your humanitarian feeling and your religious spirit;

“—Is it wrong to think that we are facing capitalist and socialist superpowers which, according to their own interests, know both how to use their respective antagonisms and also how to walk together, ignoring seemingly unsurmountable barriers?

“—Is it wrong to feel in the air a coming huge meeting of the great, of the right and of the left, for a new division of zones of influence, always at the expense of the poor countries and, this time, embracing space problems, that is, including the division of the stars themselves?

“—Is it wrong to think that when the small countries fight and kill each other, there is always a Big Power behind them, fighting at the expense of the destruction of small countries, for the expansion of their respective empires?

“—Is it wrong to think that the empires divide the small countries, enticing countries showing symptoms of economic improvement, to assume the odious role of regional or continental under-management, thus sparing the headquarters from prejudices and hate?”

Archbishop Camara’s speech can be found in *Origins*, Vol. 1, No. 32, the edition dated Jan. 27, 1972.

that there is no greater turnoff for young people when it comes to religion or politics than to see the adult world squabbling about faith issues. As *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 21, points out, “What most reveals God’s presence is the brotherly charity of the faithful who are united in spirit as they work together for the faith of the Gospel and who prove themselves a sign of unity.”

Unity surely within our own church but also Christian unity can create the conditions to make religion more accessible to people who otherwise are not interested in faith issues and yet are profoundly concerned about the fragmentation and polarization in the modern world and are searching for ways to heal such divisions.

3. Promote harmony and comity within society and treat elected officials with respect.

During the controversy in the United States over Notre Dame’s decision to grant an honorary doctorate to President Obama, Archbishop John R. Quinn urged bishops to look to the approach of the Holy See’s “policy of cordiality” as a guide for remaining faithful to the comprehensive and transcendent mission of the church:

“It proceeds from the conviction that the integrity of Catholic teaching can never be sacrificed. It reflects a deep desire to enshrine comity at the center of public discourse and relations with public officials. It is willing to speak the truth directly to earthly power. Yet the Holy See shows great reluctance to publicly personalize disagreements with public officials on elements of church teaching. And the approach of the Holy See consistently favors engagement over confrontation. As Pope John Paul II put it, ‘The goal of the church is to make of the adversary a brother’” (“The Public Duty of Bishops,” *America*, Aug. 31, 2009).

He concluded with a timely reminder of what the bishops at the council said in *Christus Dominus*, No. 13:

“The church has to be on speaking terms with the human society in which it lives. It is therefore the duty of bishops especially to make an approach to people seeking and promoting dialogue with them. If truth is constantly to be accompanied by charity and understanding by love in such salutary discussions, they should present their

positions in clear language, unaggressively and diplomatically. Likewise they should show prudence combined with confidence, for this is what brings about union of minds by encouraging friendship.”

4. A catechesis that is encounter-based and appreciates the power of the name of Jesus.

We have to remember that for us revelation is not primarily about God’s revelation of the divine will and intention, but about God’s self-gift, communication of self. So it is more accurate to speak of Christianity as an encounter or event. Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* points this out: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

But that encounter actually has to happen within the catechetical event itself by introducing people to the transforming power of the name of Jesus. (I am grateful for Father Gerald O’Collins’ post-lecture comments about the need to frequently use the name of Jesus, but also to recognize that we are often reluctant to utter his name, simply because deep down we know it does have power and it makes demands on us.) When the name of Jesus is used intentionally and repeatedly in catechesis, we convey to students, to young people, that Jesus is indeed alive, active and real for their lives.

This, I believe, is the kind of thing that Father Buckley has in mind when he counsels us to get back to what we are good at when talking about faith to people rather than relying on the language of reason, philosophy or arguing on the terms set by the world. The name of Jesus has its own power and should not be used sparingly.

5. Trust the experience of the people in our communities of faith to inform us. They have enormous resources of wisdom and experience as we face the great moral questions of our time. Not only will this enhance our understanding of the lives of others, but it will also pull us back from the kind of overreaching Taylor warns against.

Outsiders often see church leaders as heavy-handed and capricious in their judgment, asking, “How can you pretend to know so much? How can you judge others?” We have plenty of advice

in our own tradition about consulting with the laity from Augustine to Gregory, Paulinus of Nola to Newman. John Paul II cites Paulinus in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, No. 45, who urged: “Let us listen to what all the faithful say (literally ‘hang on the lips of the faithful’), because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes” (“*De omnium fidelium ore pendeamus, quia in omnem fidelem Spiritus Dei spirat.*”).

6. Witness to the social Gospel through collaboration in areas in which we share values with people who may not be interested in religion, e.g., the ecology. Again, *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 21, urges collaborating with atheists in ways to improve the lot of humanity but also to build bridges with those who question our beliefs. “The church sincerely professes that all people, believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live.” One particularly rich field of collaboration is in care for the environment.

In fact, I believe it would be stunning if Pope Francis’ truly first encyclical took up this topic. Not only would it capture the imagination of and unite humanity on the scale of *Pacem in Terris*, but it would also provide the opportunity to address the spiritual aspects of protecting creation by picking up on something Pope Benedict expressed in his inaugural homily. There he used the metaphor of the desert to link ecological destruction with the moral exploitation and spiritual vacuity of materialism and consumerism. “The external deserts in the world are growing,” he said, “because the internal deserts have become so vast.”

Benedict reminded us that our mistreatment of the environment through wasteful use of finite resources is a moral peril not only because of future threats to human survival, but because of the kinds of people and society that infinite consumption through the wasteful use of energy fosters.

Such an encyclical could address both the moral and spiritual dimensions of caring for the environment and create new openings for dialogue, and untie the knots which frustrate relations between religious and secular people.

7. Women in the church.

We have to address head-on the issue of the role of women in the church.



But it would be a very great mistake to reduce the whole issue of women to the question of ordination. The church must engage the larger issue of women and begin by listening to women themselves.

The failure of the church to attend to the concerns of women themselves is a very serious problem. In many countries today and certainly in the United States, large numbers of women are well educated and hold positions of great responsibility in society and in government. The church must seriously recognize what a destructive effect on the family and on society it will be if increasing numbers of women are drifting away from communion with the Catholic Church, which many of them love but which many of them feel does not care about them.

The church must give very serious thought to the peril it will encounter if having lost the workers and the intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries it loses youth and women in the 21st century. This is a very big knot that needs attention and it will not be untied lecturing women, and it will not be solved unless men in authority in the church clearly and deeply understand that there is a very great difference between the way women approach things and the way men approach things.

These are just some of the things that we could do and the agenda items I believe should occupy our attention if we are serious about taking up in a constructive way the task of talking about faith to a skeptical world. What I continue to look for as a pastor are points of contact that will invite people living in this secular age to take a second look at what we have to say and allow them to see that we have something unique to help them untie the knots that are part of all of our human lives.

The cultural warrior approach may seem to some to be our only option, given the aggressive response to believers and religion, but in the end it brings little results other than giving us a temporary feeling of self-satisfaction. But even more so, it is not the way of the Gospel.

What we need is an approach that is arresting, forcing people to take a second look at the Gospel of Jesus Christ by the way we speak and act. To put a fine point on that, I want to end with an

insight of the late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, as he commented on a passage from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* in his pastoral letter for the Jubilee Year 2000.

The cynical Ippolit Terentiev asks Prince Myshkin, "Is it true, prince, that you once said that the world will be saved by beauty?" and then mockingly adds, "What kind of beauty will save the world?" While the prince does not respond, Cardinal Martini believes that the answer is found in the context of the prince's life, a life of great suffering and torment. "The beauty that will save the world," the cardinal observed, "is the beauty of sharing the pain of the other."

Cardinal Martini's words are striking for their honesty, and they invite curiosity. They model the kind of imaginative way we should speak to people. But they also provide pastors with a reliable gauge to measure our fidelity to the mission of the Lamb who took upon himself the sin and the suffering of the world.

We should aim at witnessing to that kind of beauty in our ministry which comes in sharing the pain of the other. Such witness can come in many ways: by attending to the complaint of the tired worker, the sigh of the suffering and the criticism of the thinker, by engaging the skeptic with respect. It can come through the pastoral sensitivity urged by Pope Benedict XVI in his inaugural homily, thoughtfully recognizing that "so many people are living in the desert ... the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love ... the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life."

Or, it can come by just sitting at a kitchen table, helping an immigrant woman untie a knot that has bound her for too long as she lets go of her father's words, "you're no good to me," and leaving us delighted in the beauty of seeing her set free. ■

## The New Evangelization: Speaking God to Multicultural Secularism

### Archbishop Lacroix

*Catholics must speak to those who have left the church "in a way that rekindles their faith in the Lord, in a language that not only they can understand but that will bring hope and meaning into their life because the word of God will sound true," Archbishop Gérald Cyprien Lacroix of Québec City, Canada, said Aug. 9 in a speech at the annual meeting of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in Nashville, Tenn. He said, "We don't have to travel to foreign countries to encounter different cultures anymore. In our own cities and communities, our fellow citizens have changed their ways of living, of thinking, of believing." Archbishop Lacroix said that "the world we live in has changed dramatically. It has become a huge mosaic of mentalities, a kaleidoscope of ideas and beliefs." He added, "This is the new world, the new culture into which the good news of the Lord must resound. Inculturation is the task we must accomplish to reconcile the world within the plan of God." The primate of Canada noted that many former Catholics in the West "have deserted not only their church but unfortunately all forms of religion. Others have very mixed feelings toward the church and have strayed toward beliefs of their own making or have been attracted to other sects or faiths." The archbishop said that in talking to nonbelievers, the model should be Jesus, whose attitude toward those he met "is unanimously respectful of their human dignity albeit he doesn't always approve of their ideas nor their deeds. His teaching is never doctrinaire or magisterial. He prefers to speak in parables to convey his ideas, never to impose them." The archbishop's speech follows.*

"Religion is a fundamental part of culture, neither as a dogma nor a belief, but as a cry" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty,

French philosopher, 1908-1961).

It's strange to refer to a word that appears in the title of this conference "The New Evangelization — Multicultural and Inculturated" that doesn't even appear in a dictionary either in French or in English. The word *inculturation* is a term used in Christianity, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, referring to the adaptation of the way church teachings are presented to non-Christian cultures and to the influence of these cultures on the evolution of these teachings.

It's also quite odd to introduce my speech by referring to inculturation within the project of "the new evangelization" because we all know that this term is not intended as a priority for people of non-Christian cultures but very well for our own fellow Christians in our own countries, in our own hometowns. Many of them have deserted not only their church but unfortunately all forms of religion.

Others have very mixed feelings toward the church and have strayed toward beliefs of their own making or have been attracted to other sects or faiths. Finally, and most worrying for the church, many have not experienced a close and personal relationship with Christ, they have never had the "encounter with an event, a person which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction," as Pope Benedict XVI writes in *Deus Caritas Est*.

These are, however, our brothers and sisters to whom we must speak in a way that rekindles their faith in the Lord in a language that not only they can understand but that will bring hope and meaning into their life because the word of God will sound true.

We don't have to travel to foreign countries to encounter different cultures anymore. In our own cities and communities, our fellow citizens have changed their ways of living, of thinking, of believing. Culture doesn't refer to racial or social features, to whatever degree of education or interest in artistic, scientific or intellectual domains. The world we live in has changed dramatically. It has become a huge mosaic of mentalities, a kaleidoscope of ideas and beliefs.

This is the new world, the new culture into which the good news of the Lord must resound. Inculturation is the

task we must accomplish to reconcile the world within the plan of God. And as our beloved Pope Francis says:

"Christian life must always be restive and never act as a tranquillizer or even less as a terminal treatment to keep us quiet until we go to heaven. So like St. Paul, we must witness 'to the message of true reconciliation' without being overly concerned with statistics or proselytism. ... Christian peace impels us, and this is the beginning, the root of apostolic zeal" (June 15, 2013, Mass homily).

Thank God we don't start from scratch. We walk in the footsteps of many generations of disciples of Christ, from the apostles, from zealous missionaries and saints such as Paul, and from millions of our brothers and sisters who have witnessed the love of God and shared their faith with all those with whom they lived in their time and age. They have passed down this wonderful gift of the love of God for this world as a living testimony of the relevance of the presence of his Spirit in our church, in our life such as it is today.

#### **Spreading the Word in New France: An Original Process of Inculturation**

As they sailed down the St. Lawrence River after parting from their beloved France, the European settlers set their eyes on a country they had never dreamed of, so beautiful yet so strange. But what was their surprise to discover that this New World was also inhabited with peoples that had been living there for thousands of years. So they settled as though they were in their own right and slowly discovered that they would have to deal with and understand these aboriginal peoples in order to live in peace and to accomplish a work of civilization and evangelization that they thought was their duty to accomplish. This was the beginning of a process of new evangelization within the context of inculturation in our homeland.

Not only did the explorers discover new territories and push back frontiers, a huge project of evangelization was also being put into place with the arrival of the Récollets in 1615 and the Jesuits some 10 years later. These missionaries soon realized that they had landed in a different world. The aboriginal peoples, as well as the Europeans who had ventured into this new country, needed to hear the word of God in a way that

suit their culture and responded to their needs.

Bishop François de Laval soon set up a seminary in order to form priests and train them to respond to these expectations. I am proud to recall that the Séminaire de Québec was established 350 years ago in Québec City, on March 26, 1663. The anniversary was greeted with wide celebrations.

Plans are now being made for another great event, that of the foundation of Notre-Dame de Québec Parish. The importance of this celebration is in part due to the fact that Notre-Dame de Québec, founded on Sept. 15, 1664, by Bishop de Laval, is the "mother parish" of all Catholic parishes of Canada and the United States. We all pray that this event will also be a way of igniting the faith in our people as it is wished by our beloved Pope Francis.

Along with these priests, religious congregations of men and women daringly joined the effort of evangelization in the New World. One of the great women who helped to establish the church in North America was the Ursuline nun Blessed Marie de l'Incarnation. Early in her life, she had heard the Lord's voice calling her and saying, "I want you to go to Canada and build a house to Jesus and Mary." She answered, "I travel the world in spirit in order to find all the souls who have been saved by the most precious blood of Jesus, my Divine Spouse" (Reference: Premonitory Dreams, Ursulines-uc.com).

Mother Marie de l'Incarnation soon set up a school that educated native as well as French girls. This audacious woman learned and mastered four aboriginal languages, composed the first dictionaries comparing French with aboriginal dialects and wrote instructive letters describing the life in the colony.

Another great figure of that time, Mother Marie-Catherine de Saint-Augustin, with her Augustinian Hospital Sisters, took care of the sick and looked after the needy in the new Hôtel-Dieu they set up in the city. The work of charity and dedication of both Marie de l'Incarnation and Marie-Catherine de Saint-Augustin was so impressive and edifying that the church has recently beatified them both. Their bodies, along with Blessed Bishop François de Laval, rest in our city of Québec consequently



nicknamed “The City of Saints.”

In 1658, a mere 50 years after the foundation of Québec, the Apostolic Vicariate of New France was created. It became a diocese in 1674, headed by its first bishop, Monseigneur François de Laval, who had arrived in the colony in 1659. By 1712, this new diocese covered most of the territory of North America. Only the six British colonies of New England and the Spanish possessions of Florida, Mexico, California and Texas were not part of it. Had we been living in those times, I would have been the archbishop of this city! Happily, times have changed!

What makes the work of all these men and women so innovative is that they will have gone to great pains to respond to the needs of bodies and souls in order to pave the way to a better understanding of the word of the Lord. They learned the languages spoken by the indigenous peoples and made efforts to adapt the liturgy to make it more accessible to them. For example, the hymn “Iesus Ahatonnia” (Jesus Is Born), composed for the Hurons by the Jesuit priest Jean de Brébeuf, one of the eight North American martyrs, is still sung today in many of our churches on Christmas Day in its French version.

Their zeal to evangelize was accomplished in the spirit of inculturation as they felt they witnessed the Lord’s promise that “truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). They overcame incredible obstacles in order to reach the peoples in remote territories, the “fringes,” where they lived, to understand their customs and their beliefs. Their main goal was to unveil to them the greatness of the love of God for all his children. Many of them underwent martyrdom in the most atrocious manner for this reason.

This process of inculturation continued for decades and flourished in a new environment after the French defeat and the passing of the colony to the British Empire in 1763. This political change brought about the arrival of soldiers and peoples, mainly from England, Scotland and Germany, who were in most part Anglican and Protestant, therefore forging a new brand of cultural and religious environment, notwithstanding that the dominant language became English.

Other sociological and political changes occurred in the following centuries, Québec being known as a land open to immigration and a beacon of liberty. Nevertheless, the province remained French-speaking and Catholic, mostly as the result of a fascinating and dynamic process of evangelization within a context of inculturation pursued by our church.

These days however, our people don’t demonstrate the same determination regarding its faith and its religious culture. Our communities, like so many others in the Western world, have been overwhelmed with secularism and huge sociological changes. We must now admit that the need for a new evangelization has become imperative in the light of this prevailing culture.

How can the word of God, the good news taught by Jesus, now be proclaimed in order that we all “put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph 4:24)?

#### **Where Must We Proclaim Today the Good News?**

“For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God” (Rom 8:19).

Allow me to draw up a few figures to give you an overview of our society in Québec today. The latest statistics taken from the Canadian census of 2011, although it was not compulsory for citizens to answer, reveal that in the province of Québec, 75 percent of the total 8.4 million inhabitants declared themselves as Catholics. They had been 83 percent in the previous obligatory census in 2001. If we look back at an earlier census in 1991, 86 percent of the people had answered that they were Catholics.

The figures show a steady decline in the number of citizens ready to declare themselves of this faith. This is a phenomenon that can be easily observed in the regular attendance at Sunday Mass, in the request for sacraments, in the number of churches that are being closed, sold or demolished, in the scarcity of new candidates entering our seminaries and religious orders.

Only a few decades ago Québec was a training ground for young priests, who flocked into rectories, parish schools and Catholic organizations to answer to the call of their faithful duty. Hardly

50 years ago, Québec was a nursery for hundreds of missionaries, both men and women, who were sent all over the planet in order to proclaim the word of God and serve as missionaries in sister churches. I was one of those who happily experienced this missionary work when I spent nine years in Colombia, South America.

Statistics further reveal another aspect of our society, this one relating to age. As mentioned earlier, the total population of the province is today a little more than 8 million people. However, the tendency is showing that our citizens are very rapidly getting older. The majority of the population ranks in the age group of those who are 20 to 64 years old. Only 1.8 million people are less than 20 years old. Useless to describe the many problems that arise in social security and health systems, just to mention those.

But for the church and our proper ministry, this situation must be addressed very seriously. For we all know that every age group has a particular code of values made of ways of thinking, of relating to life. Each generation has its own culture. In consequence, how do we evangelize children, teenagers, boys and girls, the elders, men and women, citizens of recent immigration in order to reach their hearts and minds?

How do we become witnesses for those who see in our way of living an example for their own life, a decisive argument to turn toward Christ in a manner described by Pope Paul VI, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Oct. 2 1974, address to Pontifical Council for the Laity)?

The world we live in is deeply secularized and hedonistic. We are well aware of the fact that secularism has crept into many domains of our daily life. Everyone can see how the media, notably, play a powerful role in forging public opinion in subjects that level any diverging ideas. What is written in the newspapers often becomes solemn truth. What the reporter on television is convinced of becomes the way of defining one’s own opinion in order to be in style with what is commonly admitted as proper to think and to do.

It is sad to see how so many people deny the fact that God may be relevant

in this day and age. Such an attitude leads unfortunately to cultural ignorance and laxity in moral and spiritual values. Therefore, it becomes more and more difficult to connect our fellow citizens to Jesus and to help them walk the paths he invites us to follow so that we may live according to his word. This is the land where new ideas are germinating and challenging our moral beliefs and ethical values.

John Paul II reminded us in his letter for the third millennium that this is the land in which “we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings. ... This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with the sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in which the Christian message must be planted, in such a way that particular values of each people will not be rejected but purified and brought to their fullness” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40).

We recall the missionary mandate that Jesus left us, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). “It is necessary, then, to keep a watchful eye on this our world, with its problems and values, its unrests and hopes, its defeats and triumphs. ... *This*, then, is the vineyard; *this* is the field in which the faithful are called to fulfill this mission” (Blessed John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 3).

Although the term *new evangelization* now seems to be widespread, at least in the vocabulary of the church, we owe the true meaning of the expression and its main objectives to Blessed Pope John Paul II. Not only did he define the terminology, but he made it an objective to be pursued throughout Christendom.

Most enlightening for the understanding of his teaching is Chapter 34 of his postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. It is a jewel of perfection regarding what is expected in order to bring this project to a successful end. I know of no finer words to describe what we are expected to achieve regarding new evangelization:

“Without doubt, a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about, what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesiastical community itself present in these countries and nations. ... This vital synthesis will be achieved when the

lay faithful know how to put the Gospel and their duties of life into a shining and convincing testimony, where the loving pursuit of Christ and adherence to him will be the factors determining how a person is to live and grow, and these will lead to new ways of living more in conformity with human dignity.”

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI carried on this project last October when he convened the Synod of Bishops on new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith. I was truly blessed to be part of this gathering, along with some 400 cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, lay men and women as well as experts from all over the world. Together, we shared our views, our hopes and our experiences. We sought to bring about recommendations in words that would speak directly to the hearts and minds of people in our modern, globalized and secular societies.

The synod reminded us how important it has become to rely on new technologies people are familiar with such as modern lines of communications, marketing and the media. The synod fathers emphasized the importance of a high-quality spiritual life in order to succeed in evangelizing as best and solidly as possible. They recalled the importance of the laity and the high value of their particular ministry in the church, as these brothers and sisters are true witnesses of the hope, the love and the joy that result from living in Christ.

Furthermore, the synod fathers underlined the importance of parishes as the birthplace of the true faith, for the nurturing of community life in solidarity and love. They recalled the importance of priesthood and the necessity for us to form cohorts of well-trained ministers.

Proposition 50 speaks highly of communities of consecrated life:

“The consecrated life, of both men and women, has made a very important contribution to the church’s work of evangelization throughout history. In this moment of new evangelization, the synod asks all men and women, religious and members of secular institutes, to live their identity as consecrated persons radically and with joy. The witness of a life which manifests the primacy of God and which, by means of the common life, expresses the humanizing force of the Gospel is a powerful

proclamation of the reign of God.

“Consecrated life, fully evangelical and evangelizing, in profound communion with the pastors of the church and in co-responsibility with the laity, faithful to the respective charisms, will offer a significant contribution to the new evangelization. The synod asks religious orders and congregations to be fully available to go to the geographical, social and cultural frontiers of evangelization. The synod invites religious to move toward the new aeropathi of mission.”

Many of these objectives have become guidelines for our work of new evangelization in the Diocese of Québec, and we have been making progress in complying with them.

I pay tribute to my two immediate predecessors, Archbishop Maurice Couture and Cardinal Marc Ouellet, for having in their time appraised the situation in our diocese and our parish communities. They drafted helpful guidelines for the years to come, those in which we have now arrived. So I am carrying on with this work together with pastoral associates, the clergy, dedicated lay faithful and many religious and groups who agree wholeheartedly to assume responsibilities in different fields.

Only last year, for example, we held over 100 meetings with parishioners in order to hear their opinions, to understand their needs and to set up the best ways of responding with the resources we have at our disposal. This huge process of spiritual discernment has now led to a regrouping of parishes known as “communion of communities.”

The work is progressing well under the slogan “Together for the Mission” with results that happily bear fruit. We focus on the need for new evangelization of our society, bearing in mind that this can only be achieved if we all comply with a process of conversion in our own hearts. We also strive to adapt our ways of spreading the faith in order to experience, for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters, a close and personal encounter with Christ.

Useless to describe certain obstacles that may arise from the fact that such a process of conversion often clashes with the cultural differences I mentioned earlier. Some will say even within our own communities that we go too far, too

fast. On the other hand, some consider that the church isn't audacious enough. Nevertheless, I feel our church is marching on toward a better way of becoming more faithful to the Gospel and better missionaries.

One very big step that is truly helping our diocese to face the challenges of new evangelization is the place that we have given to the word of God in our daily lives. Hundreds of small groups that share the Gospel in their homes, in their apostolic groups as they begin the meetings of parish councils, meetings of priests, are blossoming all over the diocese. I find that sharing the Gospel has brought us closer to one another, has renewed our apostolic zeal and helps us embrace the missionary mandate entrusted to us by the Lord.

I don't know how it is in the region where you live, but in Québec I find that we have a very long road to travel before Catholics decide seriously to open their hearts to the living word of God. But I do think we are on the right track, and those who are beginning to share the Gospel are fascinated with the good news they are discovering. It is one thing to know about Jesus, to recall some of the stories you learned when you were young at catechism classes, and it is something very different to encounter Jesus in the Gospel as good news for your life today.

To undertake this new mission, we are fortunate enough to count on thousands of devoted people and numerous organizations whose work breathes a new life into our communities. I often refer to them as being driven by a GPS, not as you may think a Global Positioning System, but the Great Prophetic Spirit who guides us toward Jesus Christ, as written by the Prophet Ezekiel: "I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my ways" (Ez 36:26-27).

They are the ones who devote themselves in one or another of the 216 pastoral movements and services which are listed in our diocesan directory of 2013. They are the 700 priests in our diocesan clergy and members of religious orders; the 93 permanent deacons; the 100 or so men and women who are properly mandated as pastoral agents; the members of 22 religious orders and institutes of consecrated life for men and 35 for women, for a total of close to 2,000 consecrated men and women. These num-

bers demonstrate how much the Spirit of the Lord is at work in our diocese as well as in our Catholic Church and in our world.

I take comfort in the promise: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of age" (Mt 28:20). Although most of our consecrated men and women are aging, some of the older communities are receiving young vocations, and we are also seeing new communities arise and become very active in the church. Most of these new groups are very much involved in new evangelization.

There are many reasons to rejoice and to hope that our church will bravely undertake this mission of speaking God to a multicultural and secular world. One of these is the impetuosity of our youth. There are hundreds to witness their faith in Christ among their peers in words and gestures that ring true and clear in their particular culture.

Only a few days ago, some 110 young people from our diocese attended the World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro. With hundreds of thousands of young men and women from some 190 countries, assembled around Pope Francis as the Good Shepherd gathering his flock, they praised the Lord in their joyful fashion. They prayed for the world and prepared their hearts to share their faith, their hope and their enthusiasm. They stirred up their energy to help build a church they are proud to live in and that will be attractive to men and women of these times.

Hundreds of other boys and girls, adolescents and young adults have joined up in some of the youth movements that are active in the diocese. They have committed themselves to follow the path that will lead some to baptism, others to confirmation and to the Eucharist. Others are involved in their schools, parishes or local youth movements where they deepen their faith and dare speak of God in terms that sound true to their peers. They are real missionaries of a new evangelization in a world where generations belonging to a different culture need to hear such good news.

#### **No More Sublime Model Than the Incarnation**

"Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in human likeness and in human appearance he

humbled himself becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8).

When entering our world, the Son of God not only was made man among men. By giving up his life for us on the cross and rising from the dead, he redeemed us and made us his people. Our response to this gift of love is to have faith in his Word and to believe that he is truly "the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6).

As we approach the end of this Year of the Faith, it is good news to hear our beloved Pope Francis outline the relevance of faith in our world: "There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim" (*Lumen Fidei*, 4).

If to *evangelize* is to transmit the hope, the love and the grace of salvation by Jesus Christ to every human being, there is no better model to follow than the Lord Jesus himself. Hence the importance of being able to answer his question: "But who do you say I am?" (Lk 9:8-24).

No other form of evangelization can be more perfectly fit to our life than this personal relationship to Christ. "For through faith you are all children of God in Jesus Christ. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ ... you are all one in Jesus Christ" (Gal 3:26-28).

It is therefore most important to convert oneself to the love of Christ if we are to pursue this mission, even more if we are to evangelize those of our brothers and sisters who stand on the threshold of a faith that bears little relevance in their life. As Blessed John Paul II reminded us: "Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves. They must proclaim him" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40).

Israel, the land where Jesus of Nazareth was born, lies at the crossroads of many civilizations. Remember the enumeration of peoples to whom Peter addressed his speech on the morning of Pentecost: "Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem" (Acts 2:5). Undoubtedly, Jesus frequently met women and men who lived differently and had beliefs that were foreign to his own religion, to his native language and to his particular



cultural background.

The Gospels depict many of his encounters with some of these people: Romans, Samaritans, Canaanites and others. Within his own homeland: Pharisees and scribes, kings and high priests, men and women of all trades and conditions. His attitude toward them is unanimously respectful of their human dignity albeit he doesn't always approve of their ideas nor their deeds.

His teaching is never doctrinaire or magisterial. He prefers to speak in parables to convey his ideas, never to impose them. He rather lets his listeners find the answer to his words that will lead them to a conversion of their heart. The way Our Lord chose to evangelize in the multicultural context of his country is in many ways still relevant in ours today. A fine example lies in the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well near the town of Sychar (cf. Jn 4:5-42).

The meeting takes place in Samaria. It is known that the Jews have nothing in common with Samaritans; in fact they despise them. The person drawing water from the well is a woman. Moreover, she is a sinner since she lives with another man out of wedlock. Nor does she seem to practice any form of religion. The meeting appears most unusual as the disciples themselves seem "amazed to find him talking to a woman." However, the manner in which the Lord leads the conversation gives us a mighty lesson about evangelizing within a context of inculturation.

First he greets the woman with respect and engages her in conversation with a subject relating to a chore of her daily life, showing how precious a gift is the water she is about to draw to quench his thirst. About her marital life, Jesus receives her explanations as true. Then he respectfully adds a few questions until she reveals that she is in fact living with a man that isn't her husband. As to her lack of religious practice, since the temple built on Mount Garizim had long been destroyed, Jesus doesn't hold it against her.

He rather takes advantage of the fact to reveal the true nature of adoration to which she and all mankind from then onward will be conveyed: "The hour is coming and is now here when worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23). The impact of the

encounter is such that Jesus is invited by the Samaritans to stay with them for two more days, and the result is that "many more began to believe in him because of his word" (Jn 4:41).

The Lord succeeds in dismissing all forms of social prejudice, of religious and sexual preconceptions. He respects the dignity of the Samaritan woman and shows consideration for her culture and her openness to his discourse. He sympathizes with her suffering. He forgives her failures after she has agreed to admit living in a state of adultery. He is patient yet straightforward in his language in bringing about the truth in her life. He is compassionate and understanding; he has touched her heart.

I have always admired how Jesus can always speak the truth in love and love in truth. Love and truth are made to go together; it's a perfect marriage! There should never be any divorce between these two very important realities of Christian living. I truly believe we need to learn from Jesus how to better conjugate these two words together: truth and love.

We are sometimes tempted to mellow down the truth as not to hurt anyone. Other times, we are willing to tell someone all the truth but without love. In both situations we are not faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He shows us we can love and live in the truth at all times. It can be done if we follow his example. The French philosopher Jacques Maritain once said: "Truth without love is too hard to take. Love without truth is too soft!"

We are so used to low-calorie, low-carbohydrate foods that we have gotten into the habit of low-calorie Christian living. That takes all the vitamins, the energy and the radicality out of it. No wonder so many people look at us and think our life is boring and senseless. We may be too-watered-down disciples of Jesus Christ and have lost much of our Christian flavor!

Getting back to the page of John's Gospel, Jesus' attitude and way of entering into a relationship led to the conversion of the Samaritan woman and of her compatriots. The narration further shows how the Lord brought light into the life of whoever was open to hear his word. This is exactly the manner Pope Francis teaches us how to evangelize. "Our people like to hear the Gospel

preached with 'unction.' They like it when the Gospel we preach touches their daily lives ... when it brings lights to moments of extreme darkness, to the 'outskirts' where people of faith are most exposed to the onslaught of those who want to tear down the faith. ... We need to 'go out' then to the 'outskirts' where there is suffering, bloodshed, blindness that longs for sight and prisoners in thrall to many evil masters. ... This I ask you: Be shepherds. ... Make it real as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men ... until the nets that overflow with fish are those cast solely in the name of the One in whom we have put our trust: Jesus" (March 28, 2013, Chrism Mass, Rome).

### **The Lord's Prayer**

"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also be in us" (Jn 17:19-20).

The Lord's Prayer is a perfect act of "inculturation" considering that the dialogue thus established with his Father is the highest degree possible of an entwined understanding and loving of their individual Self, as written in John: "that I am in the Father and the Father in me" (14:11).

Jesus draws from this intense interpersonal relationship with his Father the love he then shares with mankind, the stamina needed to spread his message despite the lack of understanding of those who boast their wisdom with pride and refuse to open their hearts plagued with prejudice. In prayer he finds comfort after suffering from the treachery of friends and the betrayal of one of his own disciples.

In prayer he asks the Father to grant him the courage to obey his will at all times, all the way to the cross. He prays the Father to bestow on him the power to heal human misery and illness. He implores him to fill his heart with the compassion he will need to listen, to understand and to love all those who need him, who clutch to his robes, in order that "the works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works I perform to testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me" (Jn 5:36).

When the disciples, filled with awe by his filial devotion, asked him how to pray, the Lord Jesus taught them to say

“Our Father.” This prayer is now ours to recite with the same gratitude, the same fervor and the same humility as was that of Our Lord. Prayer is just as imperative for us now as it was for Jesus.

Prayer will give us the strength and the courage to embark on the heavy seas of the world we live in despite the fact we find it hazardous, feverous and rough. Despite the high winds, the Lord summons us to “cast the nets.” Prayer will stir up our faith and enlighten our hope that, with the help of the Spirit, we may never surrender to despair but always rely on his grace to help our brothers and sisters find happiness and a true meaning to their life in the message of Christ.

Prayer will brighten and support our missionary work. It will guide us toward the fringes of the church where our brothers and sisters await to hear words that ring true and help them regain the fervor of their faith. It will lead us to the fringes of society where our fellow citizens long for truth, hope and happiness, where they will only find a satisfying answer in a message that they understand and that gives meaning to their life.

We will find the courage to go to the fringes of the world and obey the last will of our Lord: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).

The church needs the dedication and the participation of all its members for new evangelization to happen in our multicultural and secularized world. And it needs to happen now. We’ve done enough talking, reflecting and strategic studies. It’s time we become even more committed in our daily lives to sharing our faith through witness, through our actions and words. We have nothing to impose on anyone, whether they be Catholics, Christians, Jews, Muslims, of other faiths or without faith. But we have someone wonderful to present to our brothers and sisters, someone who can change their lives and give them abundant life and eternal life: Jesus Christ.

You, members of communities of consecrated life, religious men who belong to a great variety of orders, are key players in this great mission. The charisms and mission of your commu-

nities are a gift to the church to better accomplish its mission in the midst of the world. May the Lord give you the perseverance and the courage to continue responding with generosity and faithfulness to your call to holiness.

I would like to close with these words from the first encyclical of Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*:

“If truth is a truth of love, if it is a truth disclosed in personal encounter with the Other and with others, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good. As a truth of love, it is not one that can be imposed by force; it is not a truth that stifles the individual. Since it is born of love, it can penetrate to the heart, to the personal core of each man and woman. Clearly, then, faith is not intransigent but grows in respectful coexistence with others. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it enables witness and dialogue with all” (No. 34).

Thank you very much for inviting me to share these thoughts with you. ■

## Speech at Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Assembly

### Bishop Madden

*Citing the words of Pope Francis, the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs called for a “culture of encounter” among Catholics and Lutherans during the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s churchwide assembly in Pittsburgh. Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden of Baltimore told the assembly Aug. 13 that the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 offers an opportunity to “point the way toward Christian unity” rather than focusing on what keeps the two faith communities divided. “Let the 500th anniversary of the Reformation be not a celebration of our historical and doctrinal divisions but a celebration of our dialogue even within our differences, of our unity, our mutual*

*respect and love for each other,” Bishop Madden said. The bishop pointed to the positive relations and greater understanding that have resulted from the ongoing dialogue between U.S. Catholic and Lutheran leaders that began in 1965. “This has allowed us to see more clearly that what we have in common vastly outweighs our differences,” he said. While the differences are important to acknowledge, the bishop continued, it is through discussion and working together that Catholics and Lutherans “are able to begin that blessed journey of mutual discovery, leading to greater respect and love.” He noted, “We experience as new, debates around ethics or human sexuality, which emerge on the global stage and within our own congregations. At times our interpretations of these themes, using the same Scriptures, can be quite diverse,” he explained. “But we cannot let our differences win the day,” the bishop added. “We must push forward, even when the course ahead presents itself as more rocky than we had first imagined.” During the assembly, the ELCA elected its first woman to be presiding bishop. Women’s ordination is a practice that all three of the churches that formed the ELCA in 1988 had adopted in the 1970s. In 2009, the ELCA approved a resolution to allow those in “publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships” to serve as clergy. The same year it also said pastors may preside over same-sex marriages where they are not prohibited by civil law. Bishop Madden’s speech follows.*

Let me say how delighted and honored I am to be with you this day. I currently serve as an auxiliary bishop to the Archdiocese of Baltimore and as the chairman for the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, a responsibility which I value and enjoy greatly.

The theme of your churchwide assembly this week, “Always Being Made New,” is indeed a fitting theme under which I have been invited to offer greetings. Your theme speaks to the creative and renewing power of the Holy Spirit, alive and active in our communities, drawing all things toward him and his divine plan for the salvation of all and “working,” as St. Paul says, “all things toward the good of those who love God.”

Today I bring with me a deep desire

for unity and for more communication so that all might know and be encouraged by our basic agreements and the unity we already share.

My own experience of unity with the Lutheran Church goes back to my early days growing up in Bronx, New York, where I was active in the local Lutheran church youth group near our house and had a great love and respect for the pastor of that church — which I have to say was at times worrisome to my own Catholic pastor. During the nine years I worked in the Holy Land I worked very closely with the Lutheran World Federation at Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives and with Bishop Yunan, that great pastor to the whole Palestinian community.

More recently it has been a distinct blessing to enjoy the friendship with Bishop Mark Hansen and with Bishop Wolfgang Hertz in Maryland.

On a national level, our two communities have been engaged in an official dialogue since 1965. Together we have explored such topics as interpretations of the Nicene Creed, the Reformation, baptism, the Eucharist, eternal life, ecclesial structure and ministry, the saints and Mary, the papacy, and Scripture and tradition.

Perhaps the most famous fruit of our ongoing dialogue was the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which was received officially by the Catholic Church and member churches of the Lutheran World Federation on Oct. 31, 1999, and received global attention. After years of working together, our two communities were able to come to a better understanding of one another's teachings surrounding the question of faith and works, and what in those teachings we hold in common, thus beginning to heal a centuries-old division over interpretations of this tenet of our Christian belief.

Most recently, our two communities published a common statement titled "The Hope of Eternal Life,"<sup>1</sup> under the leadership of Rev. Lowell G. Almen and Bishop Richard Sklba, in which we explored our common understanding of the promise of eternal life won for us through the sacrifice and merit of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In the preface, summarizing the success of 50 years of dialogue between our communities it is stated that "the agreements emerg-

ing (from) the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue contribute to the ongoing ecumenical journey of our churches. This dialogue has been described by Pope Benedict XVI and others as a very productive one. Indeed, the U.S. dialogue has produced substantive results since it was inaugurated on March 16, 1965, less than four months after the publication of the Decree on Ecumenism during Vatican II."<sup>2</sup>

### **The Culture of Encounter and the Fruits of Charity**

Beyond the mutual exploration of theological topics important to both of our communities, the half-century of dialogue has produced, perhaps in some ways even more important, bonds of genuine friendship, admiration, esteem and respect. We have come to understand one another in "new ways" and have learned not to view one another through the lens of what divides but through a far better one of what we share in common.

This has allowed us to see more clearly that what we have in common vastly outweighs our differences. We share a common faith in the triune God, a common hope in his living grace in our lives and his promise of eternal life, and a common call to Christian charity giving us that blessed opportunity to manifest in the world God's immeasurable goodness.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that our differences do not matter. They do. In ecumenical and interreligious dialogue we are never called to give up who we are. We do not come to the table to make our interlocutor more like ourselves as though winning a debate. This is not dialogue. Nor are we called to come to the table and only acknowledge what we have in common while ignoring our differences or trying to make them silently disappear. Were we to do this we would be untrue to ourselves.

In dialogue we encounter one another exactly as we are and in this way are able to begin that blessed journey of mutual discovery leading to greater respect and love. To come to understand the other as they understand themselves, to set aside our prejudices, to value virtue wherever it finds its home, to recognize good in all its forms: This is the work and the fruit of dialogue. Yes and to peacefully acknowledge our dif-

ferences as well.

Our Lord Jesus Christ pleaded to his Father, "Father, let them be one as you and I are one." This prayer and desire of our Lord is our joint desire and responsibility. This kind of unity can always begin from a foundation of mutual respect and fraternal charity even when we do not possess a unity of dogmas.

Dialogue is essentially built on love. Love of Christ and all he said, and love of one another. Both loves are not always easy. Love, while it is the most powerful force in the universe and contagious, is surely not for the fainthearted.

Dialogue demands a mindfulness of our past history in the light of the present while looking toward the future. There is much that can be learned from the past, but our gaze cannot be so fixed on the past that it paralyzes us here and now. In dialogue we learn how to ask forgiveness, how to forgive and how to receive forgiveness.

Often I have found that the relationships that required years of work, patience and perseverance in order to rebuild genuine trust after difficult histories can blossom into the closest and most valued of all relationships, precisely because of the mutual ability to forgive and receive forgiveness.

Having made great strides forward in our relationship it's not surprising to experience new bumps along the path of our mutual encounter which bring unexpected challenges. We experience as new, debates around ethics or human sexuality, which emerge on the global stage and within our own congregations. At times our interpretations of these themes, using the very same Scriptures, can be quite diverse. And we can sense the temptation to distance ourselves once again from the "other" who sees the world from a lens different than our own while proclaiming faith in the same God.

But we cannot let our differences win the day. We must push forward even when the course ahead presents itself as more rocky than we had first imagined. We owe it to one another and to our love for the Lord to go out and meet the other on the path and to continue to reinforce our commonalities while accepting our disagreements.

One of the major themes that has already emerged from the young papacy of Pope Francis is the theme of a



“culture of encounter.” From the ecumenical and interreligious tone of his inaugural address and installation Mass to his regular Wednesday audiences, his impromptu statements on atheists, homosexuality and women, his approach to confronting global poverty and constructing social justice, Pope Francis is continually calling us to take up this task of building a “culture of encounter.”

In his homily during a Mass on May 22, which attracted international attention, the pope affirmed:

“The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! ... Even atheists. ... And this blood makes us children of God of the first class! And we all have a duty to do good. And this commandment for everyone to do good, I think, is a beautiful path toward peace. If we, each doing our own part, if we do good to others, if we meet there, doing good, and we go slowly, gently, little by little, we will develop that culture of encounter that we need so much. We need to meet one another doing good.”<sup>4</sup>

And just a few weeks ago while addressing 3.7 million young people at the final Mass of World Youth Day on Copacabana beach the pope motivated them in their interactions with other Christian churches and religions to “foster a culture of encounter throughout the world.”<sup>5</sup>

A culture in which we take the Gospel out onto the street, not with the arrogance of coming first to convert the other, but coming first to encounter the

other. To meet them along the path of life which we share in common. To alleviate their suffering, to serve them, to listen and learn, to discuss and reflect, to share without expecting anything for ourselves in return.<sup>6</sup> This is the path of true Christian love. For Pope Francis this culture of encounter seems to embody what our two communities have been engaged in together for the last 50 years.

### How Do We Walk Together Toward the Reformation Anniversary?

2017 is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. How do we walk toward this historical landmark together? Should we not be doing something to mark this important occasion and to point the way toward Christian unity, which Our Lord prayed that we might have?

My suggestion would be for our two communities to approach this anniversary in a way that would be the most pleasing to the Lord. Perhaps we could do this by both of us committing ourselves unreservedly to building together a culture of encounter. We might begin this building by considering the ecumenical imperatives of the June 2013 Lutheran World Federation/Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity document “From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017.”

Let the 500th anniversary of the Reformation be not a celebration of our historical and doctrinal divisions but a celebration of our dialogue even within

our differences, of our unity, our mutual respect and love for each other. In this way we can say we are collaborators in the work of the Lord, who is always and ever “making all things new.”

Let me thank you for your kind hospitality today. It is wonderful to be with you. Let me encourage you in your work and ministry, which is truly a work aimed at “making all things new” (Rv 21:5). We know that Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to guide us. We all need to rely on this guidance always. Despite our difficulties and occasional discouragements, let us continue in faith to work that “all may be one” (Jn 17:21).

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011.
- <sup>2</sup> Page 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, www.vatican.va.
- <sup>4</sup> www.theatlantic.com/international/print/2013/05/no-the-pope-didnt-just-say-all-atheists-go-to-heaven.
- <sup>5</sup> www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-calls-faithful-to-deeper-encounters-with-others.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, address to the youth, World Youth Day, Brazil 2013. ■

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## Sept. 14-16

Catholic Charities USA Annual Gathering. Theme: "Building Bridges to Opportunity." Hilton San Francisco Union Square. San Francisco, Calif. [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org)

## Sept. 16-20

National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors Annual Convention. Theme: "I Have Called You Friends." Dallas Hyatt Regency. Dallas, Texas. [www.ncdvd.org](http://www.ncdvd.org)

## Sept. 20-22

Conference: "In the Logos of Love: Promise and Predicament of Catholic Intellectual Life Today." Sponsors: University of Dayton and University of Southern California Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies. University of Dayton River Campus. Dayton, Ohio. [www.ifacs.com/logos](http://www.ifacs.com/logos)

## Sept. 22-25

International Catholic Stewardship Council Annual Conference. Theme: "Called, Transformed, Sent to Serve." Hilton Anatole Dallas. Dallas, Texas. [www.catholicstewardship.org](http://www.catholicstewardship.org)

## Sept. 25-28

National Council of Catholic Women Annual Convention. Theme: "The Voice of Catholic Women." Marriott Harbor Beach Resort and Spa. Fort Lauderdale, Fla. [www.nccw.org](http://www.nccw.org)

## \*Sept. 27-28

Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Annual Convention. Theme: "Freedom and the Moral Law." Crowne Plaza West. Philadelphia, Pa. [www.catholicsscholars.org](http://www.catholicsscholars.org)

## Sept. 27-29

North American Academy of Ecumenists Annual Meeting. Theme: "The Emerging Face of Being One." Churchwide Office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Chicago, Ill. [www.naae.net](http://www.naae.net)

## \*Sept. 30-Oct. 3

Asociación Nacional de Sacerdotes Hispanos Annual Convention. Theme: "Pastores Dabo Vobis: Temas Esenciales Para la Continua Formación del Sacerdote Hispano." DoubleTree by Hilton Newark Airport. Newark, N.J. [www.ansh.org](http://www.ansh.org)

\*signifies new entry

## On File

Syrian-born Melkite Catholic Patriarch Gregoire III Laham warned against armed intervention in his country, saying, "It has brought us to the tragedy we are now living in Syria." Speaking to Catholic News Service by phone Aug. 27 from the patriarchal summer residence in Ain Traz, Lebanon, the patriarch said such a step "would be a tragedy, a tragedy, a tragedy — for the whole country and the whole Middle East." He said, "Enough with the intervention. It is fueling hatred, fueling criminality, fueling inhumanity, fueling fundamentalism, terrorism." The patriarch lamented the U.S. decision to postpone again a meeting with Russia aimed at preparing for a peace conference on Syria. "The Holy Father was very clear on Aug. 25," the patriarch said, referring to Pope Francis' call for peace in Syria during the Sunday Angelus, when the pontiff said, "It is not clashes, but an ability to meet and to dialogue that offers prospects for a hope of resolving the problems." Patriarch Laham said external intervention "is destroying the whole sense of community, of friendship of love between peoples, of conviviality, of living together, Christians and Muslims."

The United States should work with the international community to help Egyptians end violence, restore the rule of law and build an inclusive democracy in their country, said the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace. In an

Aug. 23 letter to Secretary of State John Kerry, Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, urged a path of dialogue and reconciliation that promotes peace, human rights and religious freedom in Egypt. Bishop Pates said, "Extremists have scapegoated Christians, blaming them for the current state of affairs, and viciously attacked Christian churches, institutions and communities, destroying property and terrorizing people. The destruction of Christian churches and the targeting of Christians are unacceptable." He echoed the words of Coptic Catholic Patriarch Ibrahim Isaac Sedrak, who commended the Muslims in Egypt who stood with Christians and defended their churches and institutions.

To emphasize that the sacrament of baptism formally brings a person into the church of God and not just into a local Christian community, the Vatican has ordered a slight change of wording in the baptismal rite. At the beginning of the rite, instead of saying, "the Christian community welcomes you with great joy," the officiating minister will say, "the church of God welcomes you with great joy." Baptism "is the sacrament of faith in which people are incorporated into the one church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him," said the decree from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.