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SYMPOSIUM
ON
“RECLAIMING THE CHURCH FOR THE CATHOLIC IMAGINATION”

POPE FRANCIS,
FRESH PERSPECTIVES ON RENEWAL,
AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

by

His Eminence
Cardinal Donald Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington

Thank you, Archbishop Allen Vigneron, for your kind words of introduction. I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to Dr. John Cavadini, Director for the University’s Institute for Church Life, and to you, Archbishop, as Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Doctrine, for your gracious invitation to speak at this important assembly.

One purpose of this Conference is to focus on some of the intellectual, spiritual and pastoral resources to help pastors, in the context of the New Evangelization, to address the loss of Catholic identity.

PREFACE

By way of a preface, I want to turn our attention to the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization and its call for a reawakening of the need in the Church to return to a clear and inviting proclamation of the faith. The synod spoke of announcing the kerygma and doing so in a way that it presents an invitation to encounter the Resurrection and the person of the Risen Christ.

In the course of that three-week long examination of how we better offer an invitation to faith in Christ in the context of our heavily secular world, there was a continuous highlighting of the

need to make the invitation to the faith more engaging and the presentation of what we believe more accessible.

An example of the early kerygma is Saint Peter on Pentecost announcing the basic elements of the faith and to what people are being invited to experience and embrace. Saint Paul in his letters to the Corinthians does the same. The mantra, Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ is with us, has the power to evoke allegiance – a spiritual adherence to the Lord Jesus – the Risen Lord. This is what inspired the first disciples, the ancient Church, the witnesses and martyrs to live and to die for Christ.

This embrace of Christ was not the acceptance of an abstraction or a moral code but rather a living reality. As Pope Benedict XVI underlined, “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” (*Deus caritas est*, 1).

Too often our Catholic faith has been perceived as an abstract moral system primarily expressed in “negatives.” Before we can call people to a whole set of moral obligations and ethical standards regarding contraceptives, sterilization, sexual activity outside of marriage, the care of the poor, the immigrant and the disenfranchised, we have to help people encounter and experience the embrace of Jesus, his love, his mercy, his way. Only then can we evoke from them a level of allegiance that would encourage them to accept our teaching and follow it. What is missing is allegiance.

The huge, positive response to Pope Francis seems to affirm the effectiveness of preaching the loving, merciful face of God as a starting point for ongoing conversion. This desired response should follow on our own personal witness to Jesus and his way. The apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* issued March 19, 2016 by our Holy Father, Pope Francis, shows a loving openness to pastoral ministry attuned to the needs of an increasingly broken world. At the same time, the exhortation is a statement of consensus that came out of the October 2014 and October 2015 Synods of Bishops on the family.

Pope Francis approaches his teaching ministry and encourages us to do the same first and foremost as a pastor of souls. This can be a challenge and an incentive for all of us who seek to do the same thing. There is always the temptation simply to announce doctrinal points as if this is the same as engaging in pastoral ministry with a person who is discerning how they can appropriate this teaching.

The pastoral ministry of accompanying the discerners benefits over the years from pastoral experience. We hear that voice of experience in this exhortation where, in many places, one recognizes the voice of a pastor speaking directly to members of his flock, sharing his own experience and wisdom formed from many years of service to God’s people.

As Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reminded us, “Modern man listens more to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (41).

This is not to say that we are not called to announce moral values and sexual ethics. But they cannot be the starting point or primary concern of a Church that is today struggling to help people even minimally experience the person of the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

It has been a great privilege for me to serve, in some capacity since 1980, with the National Catholic Bioethics Center. In all of this time, I have witnessed extraordinarily competent ethicists and moralists work to present a moral frame of reference rooted in our Catholic faith. Yet, one thing was apparent. There has to be some prior allegiance to the Church and recognition of its value before her voice is heard and appropriated.

A moral theology with well-reasoned conclusions that rely on a robustly developed understanding of grace, virtue and teleology has its own inner dynamic and logic. Yet, for many, even faith-filled practicing Catholics, there is a disconnect between Jesus' words, example and message and the checklist of moral consequences that is too often presented as our Catholic message and way.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, at the beginning of his pontificate, was criticized by some because he so strongly emphasized God's mercy and Catholic social teaching and did not concentrate, in their opinion, strongly and loudly enough on life and sexual morality issues.

Yet, the very credibility of our Holy Father, so widely recognized and accepted today, is in no small part because without changing any of the teaching he finds a way to say it so that it evokes a positive response from people. It is precisely the credibility of Pope Francis that is lending credibility to the Church's position on so many significant social, cultural and human life issues.

Our challenge today is to invite a new generation of disciples – and others who have fallen away – to encounter Christ and his Church as life giving fountains of spiritual renewal. The Year of Mercy is the context of this invitation. Pope Francis calls us to go out, encounter, accompany and, in so doing, draw more closely to Jesus, the face of the God's mercy.

One way to express the pastoral mission of the Church today and our own pastoral ministry is to attend to the lived expression of mercy and love that can be found in four principal activities: listening, accompanying, discerning and evangelizing.

Amoris Laetitia is itself the fruit of very intensive LISTENING on the part of Pope Francis. The two synods on family were preceded by consultation of local churches throughout the world on the lived situation of families, their challenges, and their experience. The extraordinary synod of 2014 reflected on the challenges to marriage and family and, thus, prepared the agenda for the 2015 ordinary assembly.

The second activity on which the document focuses is ACCOMPANYING, the pastoral accompaniment of families by the community of the Church. In many ways this is an extension of listening and of the synodality to which it gives rise. The journeying together of all of the members of the Church implies this accompaniment. But it also calls for a change in pastoral style and intensity.

Pope Francis calls pastors to do more than teach the Church's doctrine—though they clearly must do that. Pastors must “take on the ‘smell of the sheep’” whom they serve so that “the sheep are willing to hear their voice” (EG, no. 24). This requires a more careful and intensive formation of all who minister to families—lay ministers, catechists, seminarians, priests, and families themselves (cf. AL, nos. 200 - 204).

In chapter 6 he also draws attention to stages of life where this pastoral accompaniment of families is particularly important: in preparing for marriage, in the first years after marriage, during times of crisis, in cases of marital breakdown, and when families are touched by death.

The Church's pastoral ministry to families is intended to help them to grow in the art of DISCERNING. A key part of discernment is the formation of conscience. The Holy Father insists that the Church's pastors must "make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them" (AL, no. 37).

Even in the midst of their challenges and imperfections, families are called to respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings. Admittedly, this individual process of discernment may not be easy. A person may know full well Church teaching, Pope Francis notes, yet have great difficulty in either understanding its inherent positive value, or in being able to fully embrace it right away because of circumstances (AL, no. 301). Yet, the underlying moral principle which should inform both that personal discernment and the priest's ministry is that a person whose situation in life is objectively contrary to moral teaching can still love and grow in the faith, and he or she can still take steps in the right direction and benefit from God's mercy and grace while receiving the assistance of the Church (AL, no. 305).

Amoris Laetitia is not a list of answers to each individual human issue. Nor is it directed solely to the question of the reception of the Eucharist. The apostolic exhortation calls for a compassionate pastoral approach to many people – married, single, and divorced – who are struggling to face issues in life, the teaching of the Church, and their own desire to reconcile all of this. The exhortation is a call to compassionate accompaniment in helping all to experience Christ's love and mercy.

To the extent that our ministry includes listening, accompanying and discerning it is also an EVANGELIZING action. As we recall the challenge to go out, to encounter, and to accompany, we also recognize that this is at its heart an act of the evangelizing disciple.

The dynamic of the ministry of Pope Francis seems so in line with the words of Jesus to the Apostles as he prepared to return to his Father in glory, "You will be my witnesses."

In approaching our task, we also need to recognize two basic realities that evangelizing disciples experience today.

1. Many people simply do not know much about their Catholic faith.

In talking with young adults – just about anybody under 40 years old – it is not surprising to learn that most of what they understand about the Church and the Catholic faith is what they have heard through media and a lot of it is negative and caricature. We can perhaps describe their faith as residual identification without personal loyalty.

2. Active membership in the Church has to be result of a personal, intentional decision. It is no longer the result of cultural identification.

Under that second heading, it is fair to note that in many parts of the world from whence came our ancestors, maybe even as late as a generation ago, there was some sense of permeation of the culture with Catholic faith or at least Catholic faith symbols and points of identification. That is no longer the widespread situation and it is certainly not the case for people growing up in the pluralistic and heavily secular society of our country, and increasingly throughout the world.

I base my observations on what was said, over and over again, at the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization. In the context of that three week gathering of bishops from all over the world, reference was made to the “tsunami of secularism” that has washed across so much of our cultures, taking with it so many of the foundational elements such as appreciation of marriage, family, basic right and wrong and a sense of community.

At the beginning of that Synod, I was prepared to accept that the much lamented secularism was primarily a First World issue. Yet, one after another, bishops from all around the world spoke about the encroachment of secularism in the lands where they serve.

The word secularism does not refer to the legitimate separation of Church and State which is sometimes phrased as a welcome recognition of the role of the laity. Rather, the secularism referred to in the synod and by Popes Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis is the separation of any recognition of the spiritual, the divine, the transcendent in the affairs of the human community and its organizational expression in the form of the State.

It is against this background – a diminished appreciation of the faith – that the Pope calls all of us to a Year of Mercy and the New Evangelization.

What the Church Offers

The starting point is our own recognition that we have something unique to bring to the world. We have a specific message, even in the context of a pluralistic culture and, as we sometimes see, an increasingly secular society.

A number of years ago I was invited to speak at the Catholic Center at Harvard University. The designated theme was “The Role of Faith in a Pluralistic Society.” At the conclusion of my presentation, a man who self-identified as an atheist and who taught in the law school was the first to present a question. He asked, “What do you people think you bring to our society?” The reference to “you people” was to the front row of the audience that was made up of representatives of a variety of religious traditions all of whom were in their appropriate identifiable robes.

Since he was a lawyer, I asked if he would mind if I answered his question with a question of my own. When he nodded in agreement, I asked: “What do you think the world would be like if it were not for the voices of all of those religious traditions represented in the hall? What would it be like if we did not hear voices in the midst of the community saying, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness?”

What would our culture be like had we not heard religious imperatives such as love your neighbor as yourself, do unto others as you would have them do to you? How much more harsh

would our land be if we did not grow up hearing, blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers? What would the world be like had we never been reminded that someday we will have to answer to God for our actions?"

To his credit, the man who asked the question smiled broadly and said, "It would be a mess!" The Church brings what it has always brought: an invitation to faith; an encounter with Christ, and a whole way of living.

The New Evangelization is a term that has become very familiar in the Church today. Saint John Paul II began, more than three decades ago, to speak of the need for a new period of evangelization. He described it as announcement of the Good News about Jesus that is "new in ardor, method and expression" (Address to the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM), March 9, 1983). "Ardor" refers to energy, desire and commitment. We must not only know what the Church proclaims but we must share it with enthusiasm. "Method" speaks to utilizing the best that is available to us, technologically and culturally. "Expression" turns our attention to Saint John XXIII, who Saint John Paul II assures us, saw the need to change the focus of our presentation from condemnation and judgement to invitation modeling the care of Mother – the loving, forgiving embrace of the Church. "The Council was not first of all to condemn the errors of the time, but above all to strive calmly to show the strength and beauty of the doctrine of the faith" (*Fidei Depositum*, 1). Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that the discernment of "the new demands of evangelization" is a "prophetic" task of the Supreme Pontiff (*Caritas in veritate*, 12). He emphasized that "the entire activity of the Church is an expression of love" that seeks to evangelize the world (*Deus caritas est*, 19).

Likewise, in continuity with his predecessors, Pope Francis calls us to the work of the New Evangelization. A hallmark in this papacy is the emphasis that the Church "go out" into the world, to not stay wrapped up within herself, but to go out to give to people the beauty of the Gospel, the amazement of the encounter with Jesus.

If we are going to have, as we move forward, a time of blessing, a time of renewal, of the New Evangelization it will require of all of us a renewed commitment to that pastoral outreach so evident in the ministry of Pope Francis.

We are historically in a new and engaging place. Immediately following the Council in the late 60s and a greater part of the 70s, there emerged both pathways of renewal and development totally consistent with the direction of the Council and, on the other hand, ways that diverged dramatically from what the Council said and the received tradition of the Church. This was particularly evident in area of liturgy and catechesis where the "spirit" of the Council was invoked to override the actual words in the texts of the Council and the tradition of the Church which provided both the context and the continuity for understanding the Council and its future impetus.

What emerged was a new hermeneutic often invoked to support liturgical aberration and catechetical misrepresentation. The "hermeneutic of discontinuity" was also used to justify new theological directions that disengaged from the received tradition and were barely recognizable as part of the Catholic heritage.

It was Pope Benedict XVI who began explicitly to point out the failings and unacceptability of the hermeneutic of discontinuity which he contrasted with the true hermeneutic of renewal or reform.

From the days of the Council until today, the Church has been greatly blessed by a series of pontiffs, Successors to Saint Peter who have so well served the Church.

In March 2013, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Cardinals of the Church choose Jorge Mario Bergoglio, to fill the Chair of Peter. He took the name Francis.

His ministry – following on the stability reestablished by Pope John Paul II, and the theological depth of Pope Benedict XVI – now calls us to “do” what the Council began and what we now sense so strongly in the Church. Pope Francis calls us to go, encounter and accompany.

Precisely in order to understand what it is that Jesus is revealing to us, we turn to his Church and the continuous apostolic tradition in the Body of Christ to clarify, reaffirm and assure us of what it is Jesus says to us.

An instrument that all four, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI, and now Francis used to try to refocus the direction of the Church and emphasis its correct governance, structure and leadership was and remains the Synod of Bishops.

Here we see an effort to engage the bishops – with Peter – in the overall care of the Church Universal.

On September 15, 1965, Pope Paul VI, with the document *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, brought into being this gathering of bishops and provided its constitution. The document notes that the aims of the Synod are: to encourage close union and valued assistance between the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops of the entire world; to ensure that direct and real information is provided on the questions involving the internal action of the Church and its necessary action in the world today; and to facilitate agreement on essential points of doctrine and on methods of procedure in the life of the Church.

Ecclesiologically what Pope Francis has done is to refocus, once again, on the ministry of the College of Bishops as was the case in the Second Vatican Council in the document *Lumen Gentium*.

However, most visibly present in the ministry of Pope Francis is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.

It is precisely in this document that calls the Church to look outward in her mission and ministry that we see the foundation and reflection of much of Pope Francis’ ministry.

Each of us have stories of people who have come to us refreshed in hope by the simple and clear message of Pope Francis.

Once at the Rome airport as I was waiting at the carousel for my bag to come up, a woman approached me and told me she had been on that flight and that she was from my home

Archdiocese of Washington. She then went on to confide in me that she had drifted away from the Church and had not been to Mass for some time. Then came her confession that she has started going back to Church. She identified herself as a “fallen away Catholic.” But she said that Pope Francis makes her feel welcome and that it is not “all my fault.” I could not help but think of Saint Paul’s reflection on the fall, “We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold into slavery to sin. What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate” (Romans 7:14-15).

The woman told me that she has since started back to Church and is trying to walk with the Church. As she started to leave to get her bags that had just come up on the carousel, I said to her, “Perhaps the next time you introduce yourself you might say that you a former fallen away Catholic.”

In the mantra of Pope Francis we hear, go out, encounter people and accompany them on the journey that we all hope brings them and us closer to the Lord Jesus.

Admittedly, this individual process of discernment may not be easy. A person may know full well Church teaching, Pope Francis notes, yet have great difficulty in either understanding its inherent positive value, or in being able to fully embrace it right away because of circumstances (*Amoris Laetitia*, 301). Yet, the underlying moral principle which should inform both that personal discernment and the priest’s ministry is that a person whose situation in life is objectively contrary to moral teaching can still love and grow in the faith, he or she can still take steps in the right direction and benefit from God’s mercy and grace while receiving the assistance of the Church (*Amoris Laetitia*, 305).

In the action of going, encountering, sharing and accompanying, we also recognize that in the journey we, ourselves, are also drawing closer to the Lord. In all of our action of evangelizing, teaching, catechizing, counseling, admonishing, instructing, we also remember both God’s liberating truth and saving mercy. None of us can claim yet to be perfect as is our heavenly Father. But we can grow closer to the Lord who will by his grace heal us so that we can have the life he wants for us.

One reason, I believe, so many priests have greeted this apostolic exhortation with joy and satisfaction is that we are grateful for this guidance as we do what we have always tried to do – walk with our people as shepherds guiding the flock as we all try to come closer to Jesus – the Good Shepherd and our Risen Lord.

Because we seek to increase people’s understanding of the faith and renew their appreciation of what the Church offers, its theological foundations are very important. These foundation blocks are all the more significant today because of the need to bring back into equilibrium the balance between the proper understanding of the individual and the correct appreciation of the obligations to the common good in civil terms and ecclesial communion in spiritual terms.

As we look to the issues of our day and seek precisely as teachers to prepare others to better understand the uniqueness of our proclamation, there are a number of theological foundation blocks that we need to be aware of as we try to build up the Body of Christ. Among the most significant theological foundation blocks today, precisely because they are so challenged, would

include: the Anthropological, the Christological, the Ecclesiological and the Soteriological foundations.

Here I would like very briefly to touch on all four of them.

(1) Anthropological Foundation of the New Evangelization

Human beings, made male and female, are by their nature social beings, created in the image and likeness of the Triune God who is Love and Truth. Thus, we are made to live in relationship and community.

The New Evangelization must point to the dignity of the human person, whose inherent nature is not to exist in solitude, as merely individuals, closed-in on themselves, but in solidarity with others. In short, we call for an *authentic humanism*, for us to be true to our nature, which is to love and be loved in truth.

The fact that each person is created in the image and likeness of God forms the basis for declaring, for example, the universality of human rights and the harmony that should exist among peoples. We must speak with conviction to a doubting civil society about the truth and integrity of realities such as marriage, family, the natural moral order, and objective right and wrong.

(2) Christological Foundation of the New Evangelization

“Who do you say that I am?” asked Jesus. Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13-16). The New Evangelization is the re-introduction, the re-proposing, of Christ, the center of our faith – who Christ is, his relationship to the Father, his divinity and humanity, the reality of his death and Resurrection, and his sending of the Holy Spirit. We are summoned to stand as one with Peter and, like him, profess that Jesus is Lord.

(3) The Ecclesiological Foundation of the New Evangelization

The New Evangelization must also clearly explain the necessity of the Church for salvation. The Church is not just one way among many to reach God, all of them equally valid. While the Lord does wish all to be saved, he specifically established the Church to continue his living and saving presence. The Church, a people gathered into the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, as a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all people (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1). Our salvation is intimately related to our participation in this great sacrament that is the Church, through which we hope both to manifest now the kingdom of God coming to be and realize our part in the kingdom in glory.

(4) Soteriological Foundations of the New Evangelization

Intrinsic to understanding God’s presence with us today is understanding what we mean by his kingdom. The kingdom of God is manifest in his Church, but will reach its final fullness only in glory at the end of time. Thus, even though it is unfashionable to do so, we must speak the truth regarding sin and judgment after death, with the possibility of hell, but we also speak the truth of

heaven through redemption in Christ, that God sent his Son into this world to offer us forgiveness of sin and new life.

Our Qualities

It is in the light of this understanding of who we are that Pope Francis invites us to Jubilee of Mercy where we can encounter the graciousness of God's love and forgiveness. At the conclusion of the 2015 Synod on the Family, one of the priest delegates invited by Pope Francis gave a beautiful intervention with this memorable reminder: When the love of God that brought all things into being encounters the human condition that we have created, the love of God becomes the mercy of God.

As we talk about bringing renewed energy and pastoral emphasis to our ministry, particularly in the light of the example and focus of Pope Francis, I think it is worthwhile concluding with a description of some of qualities of the evangelizing disciple.

The evangelizing disciple has to have a number of unique characteristics. I would list here four that stand out: boldness or courage, connectedness to the Church, a sense of urgency, and joy.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the word that describes the Apostles after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is "bold." Peter boldly stands up and preaches the Good News of the Resurrection. Paul boldly announces the Word in frenetic movement around the world. Today, the New Evangelization must show a similar boldness born of confidence in Christ. We cannot be lukewarm, but must be on fire with the Spirit.

The evangelizing disciples also need a connectedness with the one Church, her one Gospel and her pastoral presence. The authentication of our message of everlasting life depends on our communion with the Church and solidarity with her pastors.

Another needed quality is a sense of urgency, as we see in Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth. The Gospel recounts how Mary set off in haste on a long and difficult journey. There is no time to be lost because the mission is so important.

Finally, when we look around and see the vast field waiting for us to sow seeds of new life, we must do so with joy. Our message should be one that inspires others to follow us along the path to the kingdom of God. Ours is a message to *Rejoice! Christ is risen, Christ is with us!*

Conclusion

This is a new moment in the life of the Church, a new Pentecost. We must always be open to the gift of the Spirit. It is the movement of the Spirit that has led us along this path, it is the nudging of the Spirit that brings us to this moment and it is in the outpouring of the Spirit that we will continue to walk united with Christ at the service of his Bride the Church.

It is our turn in the long history of the Church simply to profess and proclaim: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Thank you.