



**“Only Something Infinite Will Suffice”
A discussion on the teachings of
Pope Benedict XVI and
their relevance to American culture**

Opening Remarks:
Abp. Celestino MIGLIORE
Permanent Observer of the
Holy See to the UN

Speakers:
Mr. Carl ANDERSON
Supreme Knight of the
Knights of Columbus

Fr. Richard NEUHAUS
Editor-in-Chief,
First Things

Dr. David SCHINDLER
Dean of John Paul II Institute
Editor-in-Chief of *Communio*

Panel moderated by:
Msgr. Lorenzo ALBACETE
Theologian, Author, Columnist

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Simmonds: Good evening, and welcome on behalf of Crossroads Cultural Center and a special thanks to Columbia Campus Ministry who helped us to organize this event. It is a pleasure to be here tonight with such a distinguished panel of guests as we get ready to welcome the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, when he comes to New York next week. First, to introduce our speakers, I would like to present to you the Chairman of the Crossroads Advisory Board, Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete. Msgr. Albacete, a columnist for *the New York Times*, is a physicist by training. He holds the degree in Space Science and Applied Physics as well as a Master’s Degree in Sacred Theology from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He holds a doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Rome. He is the Responsible of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in the United States and Canada. Msgr...

Albacete: Thank you. This event reflects a desire on our part to prepare as seriously as we can for the Pope's visit, not just by having an intellectual discussion on the ideas that are shaping this pontificate, but more importantly by becoming more aware of the fact that this visit is a unique event that asks for our attention and challenges our freedom. We want to help each other to face this event with our eyes wide open, because the successor of Peter is for us a witness that Christianity is not a theory but a present human reality, something that keeps happening in front of our eyes, and is always new and unpredictable.

An attitude of openness in front of this event is especially important because it is very easy to fall into the temptation of framing a papal visit within the narrow bounds of our concerns and expectations, thus becoming unable to look with an open mind at what will actually happen. During the last few weeks this temptation has been on full display in the secular press, which has been busy interpreting the visit in political terms, especially by trying to predict how the Pope will intervene into the intra-Catholic squabbles in the US (both real and imaginary). We have all read newspaper stories discussing whether the Pope will “crack down” on this or that group or institution, and whether he will take one side or the other in whatever controversy has been going on in the American Church, and so on and so forth. Needless to say, we all know what prejudices affect the mainstream media in their coverage of the life of the Church in the US. However, the temptation to reduce the Pope's visit to pre-defined categories must not be confined to the journalists; it touches us all. Indeed, the press seems to have no trouble finding Catholic scholars, priests and other “experts” who are willing to offer commentary precisely along the “political” lines that the media expect.

In light of these considerations, tonight we would like to explore certain questions that we suspect have been neglected in many of the discussions on the upcoming visit. For instance, instead of asking how the Pope fits into the American scene, we would like to understand better where America and American culture fit into the Pope's vision of the challenges that face the universal Church today. Instead of trying to guess who the Pope is going to discipline or reward, we would like to be well prepared to listen to whatever he will propose to us, by being more aware of the general context of this pontificate, and of how it relates to the American cultural situation. To help us in this work, we have here three of the most lucid observers of the life of the Church today, both in the US and in the world.

Now, to begin, we are honored to have with us His Excellency Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations for some opening remarks.

Migliore: Tonight you will have to put up with my very hoarse voice. I will be very brief. I don't know if this is just for health reasons or if it is a sign because when the Pope is in town, his representative has to keep silent. I think that I am in the best position to do that.

Thank you, Monsignor, for inviting me to open this timely discussion on the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI and their relevance to American culture. Immersed as I am in many details to prepare for this Papal visit, I confess that I enjoyed the title of the theme for this evening: “Only Something Infinite Will Suffice.” It puts everything in perspective, just like the words in the Gospel: “There is need of only one thing.” (Luke 10:42) Thank you for convening us tonight around this one thing that is truly needed.

For some time now, I've been besieged by reporters eager to know what Benedict XVI will say at the UN. This is the same question I'm getting every day from colleagues there. Even Crossroads asked me this same question, that I offer you a broad view of the main themes that the Holy Father will address

during his visit to the UN.

Though it's quite obvious that I don't intend to anticipate or explain the Pope before he takes the floor, I don't feel bothered at all by this question. On the contrary, it means that his word, his reading of the world situation, his wisdom and reflections do matter.

It also proves that Pope Benedict XVI is awaited as a leader vested with great moral authority. Never as today, in a general climate of cultural fragmentation and of political drift, do people turn to moral authority to find reasons for hope and trust.

Just recall the experience seen by all of us on the occasion of the death and at the funeral of the late John Paul II. The Heads of Nations, people from every social class and especially young people gathered round him in Rome. The whole world looked to him with trust. To many it seemed that this intense participation, amplified by the media, was like a unanimous appeal for help addressed to the Pope by today's humanity which, upset by uncertainties and fears, was questioning itself and its future.

Pope Benedict won't necessarily touch upon specific crises in the world. Unfortunately, they are too many to be dealt with in a few minutes. But, for sure, coming to the UN as a pilgrim of peace he will say: We can't base our future on the notion that might makes right. We can't base our future on a simple balance of power. No, our future must be based on respect for universal truths and our common humanity.

The most sensitive minds appreciate that from the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI has been able to capture and express the challenge or crisis of the twenty-first century, the relationship between faith and reason, and is working tirelessly to create awareness on this point and at the same time find solutions to all the reverberations that this crisis has on peaceful international coexistence on the vision and the implementation of human rights, on the conduct of politics and social life in every nation.

One of the Holy See's priorities at the United Nations is precisely the encounter and dialogue between people of different cultures, civilizations, traditions and religions—a dialogue that involves the premise of every meeting, namely the acceptance and respect of the equal dignity of every person and human group. In fact, it is not just a premise. It requires a minimum common denominator in the vision that one has of man, of human life, and therefore of human rights, of democracy, of freedom, and of coexistence among peoples.

Among other things, this year we are appropriately celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Holy See recognizes the many merits of it—one in many, that to have put together all the philosophical traditions, moral and religious, in which to recognize the equal dignity of human beings, and to have identified rights so fundamental that can be neither negotiated nor denied to anyone anywhere in the world. Unfortunately, one observes that there is not only one of these rights that goes exempt from violations or negligence everywhere. And this is due to the persistent conviction that states and governments are to concede these rights and determine their content and extension, rather than admit that they are inscribed in human nature.

Max Weber said that society is essentially composed of two key figures: the kings and the prophets. The kings are those who have to make decisions, however complex and inconvenient they may be at times; the prophets, for their part, keep alive in the consciences of kings and people those values

without which society would crumble. The Papacy, making use of the modalities of participation that it enjoys in the international community, works at the UN together with kings, highlighting, above all, essential values and virtues.

What I can anticipate is that Pope Benedict, next week, will do the same. That is, he will bring the message of hope to the world, hope for peace, for justice, and for freedom, in obedience to that law which is written on our hearts. Thank you.

Albacete: Thank you very much, Your Excellency. We appreciate your coming in spite of this problem. We hope you're well when the Pope pops in.

Our first speaker on the panel is Father Richard Neuhaus. Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, of course. He has been proclaimed, and he has agreed, as one of the foremost authorities on the role of religion in the contemporary world. It's really true. Well, you know, we shouldn't repeat it too frequently. He is President of The Institute on Religion and Public Life, a nonpartisan inter-religious research and education institute here in New York City. You all know him as editor-in-chief of the Institute's publication, *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life*. Among his best known books are *Freedom for Ministry*, the famous *Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, *The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World*, and, with Rabbi Leon Klenicki, *Believing Today: Jew and Christian in Conversation*. His most recent book is *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy, and the Splendor of Truth*. He has been the recipient of numerous honors from universities and other institutions, including the John Paul II Award for Religious Freedom. *Time* magazine, in a 2005 cover story, named Fr. Neuhaus one of the 25 most influential religious leaders in America, and here he is...

Neuhaus: Thank you so much, Fr. Lorenzo, my dear friend, Fr. Lorenzo.

Now you realize when the Holy Father comes next week he's going to be staying with Archbishop Migliore at the UN residence there. And if, come Thursday, the Pope catches a bug and loses his voice, you're going to have a lot to answer for, Your Excellency! Keep it in mind.

It's a pleasure always to work with the Dominicans here at the Campus Ministry at Columbia. I'm privileged to do that on a regular basis, and with Communion and Liberation. Ah, one tries to discern the charism of this remarkable movement. One time Fr. Lorenzo here explained it to me very simply, and I thought I'd had it. He said, "Communion and Liberation is Opus Dei for bad Catholics." And having observed Fr. Lorenzo over the years in the friendship that I cherish, I think that definition has a certain credibility.

But be that as it may, I've been asked to offer some reflections on Pope Benedict and what we ought to be prepared for and how it is that we come to understand him, and the simple answer is that the way to understand him is to listen very carefully and to be open to a way of presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is marked by the fact that Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is an Augustinian Christian. Let me say a little about that. Within the Catholic intellectual tradition, surely the two greatest luminaries are Saint Augustine, the 5th Century bishop, theologian, philosopher, poet, and the 13th Century St. Thomas Aquinas. Most theologians within the Catholic world gravitate to schools of thought more or less approximating one or the other. Now there are, of course, Augustinian Thomists, and there are Thomist Augustinians, and there is Ratzinger/Benedict. An evangelical protestant friend of mine says, "Benedict is just enough of a Thomist to be recognized as a Catholic theologian." That I think goes

altogether too far. On the other hand, many of my Thomist friends of the strict observance who believe that Thomism is the hardware that will run any software, also tend to be too voracious in their appetite to subsume everything into the undoubtedly luminous systematic thought of St. Thomas. To put it altogether too roughly, because it is a huge subject obviously of great complexity, whether one is a Thomist or an Augustinian or more one than the other, or some kind of mix in which one is dominant, it is not a matter, obviously, of theological disagreement, and certainly not doctrinal disagreement, and it's often not a matter of substance in terms of philosophical presuppositions; it is to a significant extent a matter of a sensibility, a matter of being caught up on the Thomist side in the unchanging ideas and principles, ordered systematically in a comprehensive account of reality that is capable of being communicated to all rational persons.

On the Augustinian side, an awareness that the Christian intellectual construction is based upon an emphatically historical understanding, and a personal understanding, and even what in the modern world we would call a psychological understanding of the complexity of human experience aspiring to the transcendent, ultimately aspiring to God. Undoubtedly the best-known words of St. Augustine, "You have made us for Yourself, Oh Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." The aspiration toward the Infinite—"Only something infinite will suffice." And that infinite is God, the transcendentals are the good and the true and the beauty encountered personally in what Benedict likes to call "the human face of God, Jesus Christ."

Last Sunday when I was preaching, as I do here at St. Paul's Chapel, I said, "Listen next week and you will hear somewhere I'll bet you (I'm not a betting man) Benedict use the phrase 'the human face of God'." And sure enough, two days ago in his preliminary message to the American Catholics about this visit, there it was, "the human face of God."

Benedict summed up much of what I'm suggesting precisely at the funeral of Fr. Giussani, the founding spirit of Communion and Liberation. Benedict put it this way, "Christianity is not an intellectual system; it is not a collection of dogmas or a moral system; Christianity is an encounter, a love story, an event, a person, Jesus Christ." That's the intellectual and spiritual framework that has shaped Joseph Ratzinger from his early years to the present. I've been privileged, as many others have, to have known him now for twenty-some years and spent much time with him, and especially during those years he was depicted as you well know as the harsh, inquisitorial, doctrinal enforcer, the Rottweiler of the JP II pontificate. And anybody who has known Ratzinger, knows that this is a caricature of bizarre distortion. Rather a man of great gentleness, of great intellectual intensity, and of great intellectual curiosity, but most of all, of a palpably serene inner tranquility about the joy of being part of the mystery of the unfolding of God's redemptive purposes through Christ and His Church. It is this that I would suggest to you I am confident, it is this that Benedict wants to propose and will be trying to propose in all of his encounters during his pastoral visit.

There is a marvelous phrase in one of the great encyclicals of John Paul II, whom we rightly call "John Paul the Great" in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, The Mission of the Redeemer. And in this encyclical, which as you know deals with evangelization, John Paul says, "I am aware that in our time many people feel that the very idea of evangelization is illegitimate, that it assumes that somehow you have a truth that other people need to address, and they say to you, 'Do not impose your religion upon me.'" And then John Paul has a statement in which I happen to know Ratzinger had a strong hand, a beautiful statement, "The Church imposes nothing; she only proposes." But what she proposes, she believes to be the truth, and human beings are hard-wired for the truth. The Church proposes, like a lover to the beloved, She proposes again and again, persistently, persuasively, wincingly, tirelessly. She

proposes “a more excellent way,” that marvelous phrase of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12, in which, as you know, he’s dealing with all of the problems of the Church in Corinth. And did they have problems! People say, “Let’s go back to the purity of the early Church.” Yeah, right, read Corinthians. They were at one another; there were factions, rivalries, jealousies, off and on. And St. Paul writes, please don’t do this. Please do it the other way, and so forth. And then he gets to the end of Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, and he says, “Let me show you a more excellent way.” And then, of course, follows Chapter 13, the unsurpassable hymn to love: “Though I speak with the tongue of men and angels, and have not love...faith, hope, love, these three abide, and the greatest of these is love.”

That is what Benedict is here to do next week. That is what Benedict has been doing all his life as a Catholic, as a priest, as a bishop, and now as Pope, proposing “a more excellent way,” a more excellent human way. This is an emphatically Christian humanism that he’s proposing. It is the alternative, as he understands it, to the dead-ended, exhausted project of the secular enlightenment which for understandable reasons thought it had to throw off and rebel against every form of authority construed as authoritarianism including the ecclesiastical authoritarians. In order for, as Benedict tells the story, the immeasurable values of human freedom and the values of reason to be established. In that sense, the Enlightenment was necessary. Yes, even the militant and secular enlightenment. Yes, even the emphatically anti-Christian and most emphatically anti-Catholic enlightenment.

But now, these 300-plus years later, says Benedict, it is time to put the whole back together again. There is, contrary to the militantly secular enlightenment, there is no conflict between religion and science, between faith and reason, between rational calculation and the aspiration toward the transcendent, toward the Infinite.

This is his proposal. He is proposing a new humanism. His Eminence, Avery Dulles, (who is not well and for whom I ask all of you to keep him very much in your prayers) wrote in summary fashion of John Paul the Great and asked himself: what phrase would one use to capture John Paul, the person and the message? And Avery Dulles struck on the phrase I think is exactly right: “prophetic humanism.” He is a prophetic humanist proposing a more excellent way for human beings at this point in history. After all we’ve been through, to bring together again faith and reason, the immanent and the transcendent, the finite and the infinite. It is a radical proposal, and in that sense it’s prophetic. It runs against the grain of so much of our culture. But it is also such an invitation, such an invitation to think again about the Christian proposition, the Christian proposal. Not, as he said at the funeral of Luigi Giussani, as an intellectual system, although God knows it is the richest intellectual tradition that human beings have ever known—Christian tradition. And not simply as a system of morality, although God knows it shows the way to love and the truth and the way to life. But rather, as he says, “an encounter,” a love story, an event, an inexhaustible adventure into living a life in response to the human face of God in Jesus Christ, of living a life that is life in its entirety as love in response to love. Thank you.

Albacete: That’s pretty good. To quote Johnny Carson, “Good stuff.”

Our next speaker is Mr. Carl A. Anderson. Mr. Anderson is the Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, the world’s largest organization of Catholic laymen with more than 1.7 million members. He has worked more closely with the Vatican and with Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI than nearly any other layman in the United States. (But let him remember forever that his first visit to the Vatican was with me when he was a mere teenager. He’s come a long way since then.) His Vatican-related expertise includes his appointment by Pope Benedict XVI as a member of the Pontifical Council for the Family and as consulter to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. In 1988,

Mr. Anderson became the founding vice president and first dean of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington, D.C. He has also served in various positions of the Executive Office of the President of the United States, including special assistant to the president and acting director of the White House Office of Public Liaison. A frequent guest on national TV and radio networks, although never “Dancing with the Stars,” Carl Anderson serves on the editorial boards of several international publications. And something I recommend very enthusiastically, he has just published the book *A Civilization of Love: What Every Catholic Can Do to Transform the World*. And that is a great book. Please, let us welcome him.

Anderson: Thank you very much. My goodness. Msgr. Albacete and I and actually my wife first went to visit Pope Paul VI in 1971, so Msgr. Albacete’s been a very great influence for me for many years.

Thinking about John Paul II as we were approaching the millennium, the year 2000, we heard him so often speak of a new springtime of the Gospel as we cross that threshold into a new millennium. And I suggest to you tonight that we are in that new springtime of the Gospel. Now that we have crossed the threshold into a new millennium we might ask, what kind of Pope do we now have to lead us into this new springtime? And I think, as Fr. Neuhaus said, we see a very remarkable man. We see someone who is consistently described, as Fr. Neuhaus has, in terms of his simplicity, his spirituality, his humility, his kindness, his gentleness, his joy.

Indeed, the more we learn about Benedict, the more we are apt to recall the Beatitudes Christ preached during his Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5:3-12): Blessed are the poor in spirit, the lowly, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers. And, finally, “Rejoice and be glad.” Is it too much to think that we have been given a “Pope of the Beatitudes” to lead the Church in this new springtime of the Gospel?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that the Beatitudes are “at the heart” of the teaching of Jesus, that they reveal to us his “countenance” and his charity, and that they form the basis for Christian hope (1717). It should come as no surprise that Benedict’s first two encyclicals, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) and *Spe Salvi* (On Christian Hope), explore our understanding of God through the themes of love, charity, faith and hope.

The Beatitudes present us also with a profound moral declaration, which at the time of Jesus could only be understood as the repudiation of conventional values related to wealth, status, power, personal fulfillment and happiness. Here we can see reflected in Benedict’s pontificate a concern for the dehumanizing effects of our modern secular culture of consumerism and material progress, that we all know only too well.

Nearly four decades before becoming Pope, Father Joseph Ratzinger said the following during a retreat he preached to university students in Germany: “What really torments us today, what bothers us much more (than even the theoretical question of whether God exists) is the inefficacy of Christianity: After 2,000 years of Christian history, we can see nothing that might be a new reality in the world; rather, we find it sunk in the same old horrors, the same despair and the same hopes as ever. And in our own lives, too, we inevitably experience time and again how Christian reality is powerless against all the other forces that influence us and make demands on us.”

The future Pope presented clearly and concisely the concerns of those students struggling with the ultimate questions of God and Christian revelation. These are concerns that Benedict and every priest

in Western society confront on a daily basis and that the Pope has sought to answer directly in his encyclicals.

These concerns are further complicated by the oppressive weight of secularization pressing down upon Western society. However, a more subtle and powerful pressure is constantly at work in the shift of meaning we give to language. The recovery of an authentic Christian meaning to our language is one of the fundamental objectives of Benedict's papacy. His encyclicals make a great effort to explain why, for example, Christian hope differs from our ordinary understanding of optimism or the secular idea of progress, and why Christian charity differs from government welfare or other social services.

Secularization affects not only the presence of Nativity scenes at Christmas and the words "under God" in the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance. It also drains meaning from Christian life by secularizing the way Christians think and how they live. In this way, secularization diminishes the ways in which Christians are capable of presenting through their lives "a new reality in the world."

"We are not permitted neutrality when faced with the question of God," Cardinal Ratzinger once said while giving a retreat. "We can only say yes or no, and this with all the consequences extending right down to the smallest details of life." What then does it mean to say yes to the God who is love? What are the consequences of this yes down to the smallest details of our life? This is the fundamental question posed by Benedict in *Deus Caritas Est*. It can only be answered if we understand at the outset that the revelation of divine love does not contradict the highest human aspirations, but lifts them beyond what man can do for himself unaided. As Fr. Neuhaus said, "an authentic Christian humanism."

In *Deus Caritas Est*, we read: "Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable; they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a 'commandment' imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love that by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is 'divine' because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a 'we' which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is 'all in all'" (18).

It seems to me that these words are written by someone who is living this mystery. Recently, the Knights of Columbus commissioned Marist College Institute for Public Opinion to research the attitudes of the American public regarding Pope Benedict's upcoming visit. The survey found that nearly three-fourths of Americans hope to hear Benedict speak to them on how spiritual values can play a greater role in their lives and the lives of American society. But the spiritual values that Benedict will bring to the United States will not be the civil religion Robert Bellah spoke about decades ago. It will be about an authentically profound expression of Christianity.

Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy of America* wrote a very brief chapter about Catholicism in America, and at the end of the chapter de Tocqueville predicted, as unlikely as it seemed at his time, and I think as unlikely as it seems today in our time, that someday America will either lose entirely the Christian faith, or America will become a Catholic nation. It's an interesting prediction for us to contemplate. I think it's a more interesting prediction, for those of us who are Catholic, to work toward, and to work toward by a personal witness, a personal example of the power and goodness and joy of Christianity. This will be our best argument against secularism, and I believe it is an argument that Benedict will make for us through his personal witness when he is with us in America. Thank you very much.

Albacete: Good stuff again.

For our next speaker, I would cover my face with a veil, but I forgot mine and they were not renting them outside, so I'll have to do it with great care. A dear, dear friend, a brilliant mind, but most of all, one of the most intimate friends of the Trinity in the United States and in the world. I speak, of course, of Professor David Schindler. Prof. Schindler is the Provost/Dean of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. He taught for thirteen years at the University of Notre Dame and before that at Mount St. Mary's College. Since 1982 he has been editor-in-chief of the North American edition of *Communio: International Catholic Review*, a federation of journals founded in 1972 by Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), not to mention Henri de Lubac, and other European theologians. Prof. Schindler serves as editor of the series "*Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought*" with Eerdmans Publishing Company. Professor Schindler is author of *Heart of the World, Center of the Church*, published by T&T Clark and Eerdmans. Pope John Paul II appointed Professor Schindler a consultant for the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 2002. He's a beautiful, beautiful man, and I'm proud to introduce him.

Schindler: Thank you very much.

For Pope Benedict XVI the main issue of our time, as it has been for all the saints and doctors of the Church down through the ages, is the memory of God and his centrality in our lives. Thus he asserts that all the problems of the West can finally be traced to a forgetfulness of God. It is this question of God, of his presence or absence, that lies at the heart of the faith-reason problematic on which I have been asked to comment.

My question is this: how does Benedict understand the task, as he puts it, of "keeping the world awake to God," and what does his understanding imply for America?

(1) Regarding God in America the principal phenomena are two. On the one hand, as the public opinion polls attest, God does not seem to be absent: the great majority of Americans continue to believe in God and indeed to give him an important place in their lives. And there is no need to doubt the sincerity of what people have recorded in these polls. In America the thesis that modernity brings with it secularism, or the death of God, therefore seems to be contradicted.

At the same time, equally pervasive in America is the view that the reality of God is not properly a matter of reason. However important it may be as a matter of inspiration, relation to God cannot be integrated into the logic of reason as exercised in the public life of the academy, politics, economics, or indeed morality. In short, the God who appears to be pervasively present in America remains absent to reason in what the culture considers reason's legitimate meaning. The God of believers appears to non-believers to be an arbitrary God who is a threat to the integrity of public argument.

(2) For Benedict, a God who is truly God must make a difference to everything all the time. Affirming the truth of Romans 1:20 that, since the creation of the world, God can be seen in the things he has made—and not only by believers—, Benedict stresses that the question of God is inescapable. This indeed was one of the main—and often overlooked—points of his Regensburg lecture, whose burden was twofold: to insist, vis-a-vis the problems posed by some forms of Islam, that God is inherently reasonable; but to insist also, at the same time, in relation to the West, that reason realizes its integrity only when it comes to terms with its constitutive or structural openness to God.

The whole of the theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI as it bears on culture and cosmos may be said to be centered on this basic fact that “I do not come from myself; rather, I come from another.” What reason most basically is, therefore, is a dialogue with God: whatever the content of our conscious acts, we always speak at least implicitly about the reality of God and of our relation to him. No act of creaturely consciousness remains neutral or can remain silent with respect to the creator.

It follows that the religious dimension of our existence can never be rightly understood as a merely voluntary, extra-rational, or private addition to the life of reason. What Benedict’s work shows, in a word, is that the marriage of modernity and religion in America is a marriage between modernity and a religion already formed in the reductive terms of a peculiarly modern—for example, post-Puritan and post-Enlightenment—understanding of God, creation, and reason.

(3) Now, it is important for Benedict, if he is not to fall into the kind of reductive religion he is rejecting, that he give reasons for this argument that are persuasive at least in principle to those who do not share his faith. To be sure, Benedict makes his proposal as a Catholic and hence as a theologian. Speaking from within his faith, he nevertheless offers a renewed interpretation of the conscience and the natural law that are common to all human beings, and in so doing makes also a *philosophical* claim that makes *reasonable* demands on all human beings.

Regarding conscience: Benedict suggests that to the traditional meaning of conscience as *synderesis* (moral awareness) we add, at an even more basic level, conscience as *anamnesis* (primitive recollection of God). Notably, Benedict makes this proposal (also) in terms of Socrates, who did not have the benefit of Christian revelation. Socrates witnessed by his life and argument that I become truly self-aware only by recalling in some primitive if unarticulated way the “more”—stemming from the presence of a transcendent source—that is always implied in my self-awareness and is somehow more interior to me than I am to myself. This is so, Benedict says, because the reality of God “is identical to the foundations of human existence.”

Secondly, Benedict has appealed often in his pontificate to natural law, but it is a natural law that has recuperated its finality and center in God. He affirms and develops Aquinas’s understanding of the natural moral precept to seek to know the truth about God and to live in community with others. Note that Benedict emphasizes the nature of law as a matter of desire and thus love, in contrast to the modern tendency, following Kant, to conceive law more basically as duty. As emphasized in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, what the human being *desires* (*eros*) is most basically to love God above all things and others for their own sake (*agape*). The point is thus that this desire to love God and others generously arises naturally. It is not merely a function of grace, although the desire is fully realized only in grace.

The task of Christians, then, is to awaken this desire and give witness to it: to show that the restlessness driving every act of human consciousness in its depths is—even in America—a restlessness for God and for love. This is what is meant by the “pursuit of happiness,” rightly conceived.

(4) What Benedict’s views on God, creation, and reason imply for the various areas of life in America can scarcely be hinted at here. (a) Suffice it to say, first, with respect to the academy: the search for truth, about being as love and finally about God, needs to take its place at the heart of the modern university, in a way that respects while reconfiguring the rightful autonomy of the disciplines. Renewing this search implies the deepening of reason to include interiority and contemplativeness—or

more concretely, humility and obedience—as integral to the methods of research proper to the academy. Experience must find its proper place as more basic than experiment as a source of knowledge in the sciences—social and natural. And so on.

Benedict’s understanding of reason does not reject the heritage of the Enlightenment. For him, the problem with the Enlightenment is not that it overemphasized reason, but that it unduly narrowed reason to a matter of technical control. Benedict means to affirm reason, recovering its full scope and depth. Insofar as Post-Enlightenment reason has been concerned with infinity, it is the “bad infinity” of endlessly fragmented objects, as distinct from the good infinity that opens to integration in a universe of beings under God. What Post-Enlightenment reason has done, in a word, is to cut human knowledge off from the natural desire for the truth about God as the logos of love.

A final point in connection with education: in his recent (21 January 2008) letter to the diocese of Rome regarding the education of young people, Benedict recalls the importance, given that education must be rooted in the search for truth, of ensuring that young people are taught openness to suffering. The search for truth involves the self-sacrifice integral to love. He says that the danger in shielding young people from difficulties and the experience of suffering in their search for truth is that they will grow up to become brittle and ungenerous adults.

(b) Regarding freedom and rights: freedom for Benedict is most basically an act of love in search of God, which includes even as it transforms America’s dominant view of freedom as an originally indifferent act of choice or exercise of options. “Rights” for Benedict flow from the natural desire and thus responsibility to love God and others, and this includes even as it transforms America’s dominant view of rights as primarily “immunities from coercion.”

(c) Finally, regarding religion and the political order. Benedict unequivocally affirms the West’s separation between Church and state. However, he rejects the idea of a purely juridical state. The fact that the state is not the source of truth about man and God does not mean that the state can ever be neutral or indifferent to that truth. Indeed, the pervasively juridically-conceived state in America has been an integral part of the public ethos that permits and encourages ongoing debate—but only so long as the debate does not terminate in any substantive truth that would be binding on all citizens. For Benedict, the purely juridical state implies a reductive view of human conscience and a formalistic notion of natural law. In fact, the juridical state with its proceduralist public ethos leads logically to nothing less than what Benedict has termed a “dictatorship of relativism.”

In sum, Benedict’s theology does not reject the distinctive goods realized in America’s institutions. On the contrary, he accepts these goods in their most basic and natural intentions. This does not mean that he accepts America’s achievements in their dominant present form, to which he would then wish merely to *add* a Christian difference—a difference that would then inevitably be received as a merely private difference, in the end not making much of a difference at all. Rather, Benedict’s theology endorses America’s achievements, but with a dynamic for transformation that begins from inside our cultural and institutional logic. This dynamic, for example, changes the dominant notions of reason and freedom all the while taking over, now in an enlarged sense pointing toward their final Gospel meaning, all that America wishes to protect regarding human autonomy and dignity by means of its dominant notions of reason and freedom.

(5) Lastly, a brief word about the nature and “realism” of the transformation indicated here. The main principles are three. First, Benedict’s argument, in the spirit of Augustine, presupposes that all human

beings have some primitive experience of restlessness for love and for God, however much this experience often gets diverted in our culture into a pursuit of happiness conceived largely as the consumption of commodities. Benedict's theology thus presupposes that lives and indeed arguments that testify to this movement toward love and toward God will find resonance within the minds and hearts of others in the broader culture.

Secondly, Benedict insists over and over again that this work of cultural transformation is in the first instance not a matter of working up plans for new structures. As he puts it, "what the Church needs to respond to the needs of man in every age is holiness and not management." What is needed is that Christians *reform themselves* patiently and from the inside, a reformation which, as inclusive of the whole human being and thus also of his body, will involve a patient but genuine reformation of structures.

Thirdly, Benedict stresses that cultural transformation will never be realized without suffering. This point cannot be overemphasized. A widespread assumption today—though it often goes unspoken—is that, if Jesus had had the benefit of liberal institutions and access to the Internet and so on, he could have avoided an ignominious death on the Cross. Needless to say, such is not the view of Benedict.

Benedict insists on the contrary that the "the cross is revelation. . . . It reveals who God is and who man is." What this means is that suffering the cross is not necessary only for one who lives his or her Christianity faithfully; suffering the cross already has its presentiment in the person who lives the fullness of his humanity justly. Which is to say, in the concrete order of history, it is "reasonable"—and not only a function of one's faith—to expect to suffer crucifixion. Ratzinger/Benedict refers again to the case of Socrates, and I conclude by quoting his striking statement at length:

In the Republic [Plato] asks what is likely to be the position of the completely just man in this world. He comes to the conclusion that a man's righteousness is only complete and guaranteed when he takes on the appearance of unrighteousness, for only then is it clear that he does not follow the opinion of men but pursues justice only for its own sake. So according to Plato the truly just man must be misunderstood and persecuted in this world; indeed, Plato goes so far as to write: "They will say that our just man will be scourged, racked, fettered . . . , and at last, after all manner of suffering, will be crucified" This passage, written four hundred years before Christ, is always bound to move a Christian deeply. Serious philosophical thinking here surmises that the completely just man in this world must be the crucified just man; something is sensed of that revelation of man which comes to pass on the cross.

This expectation of the cross, which finds its warrant in Christian faith but is also somehow already prefigured in reason, cannot be forgotten, even for a moment, in the Christian's engagement with the culture. (As has rightly been said, success is not a name of God.)

(7) To return in conclusion, then, to our opening question: what is distinctive about Benedict's theology, and what does it mean for us? Simply, Benedict proposes a new sense of the integrity of nature and reason, now understood in light of the statement of *Gaudium et Spes* that Jesus Christ, in his revelation of the Father's love, reveals the mystery of man to himself (par. 22). Relative to America, *Gaudium et Spes* as interpreted by Benedict entails a new sense of the reasonableness of God- and love-centeredness—in short, of the call to holiness—and consequently a new sense also of the reasonableness of the demand for openness to God and to love precisely at the heart of America's *public* culture. Thank you very much.

Albacete: Well, it's great to hear *GS 22*. It brought back those wonderful days.

Well we are at the end of the show. I feel compelled to say a word or two following this fascinating discussion about the significance and impact of the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI for American Catholics, and indeed for all the American people, for our lives as citizens of this country. I feel that it is important to remind ourselves that the most important thing about this visit is not the impact of his teaching, of his particular way of interpreting the mission of the Church today. Joseph Ratzinger has come to the United States many times before. Supreme Knight, Carl Anderson will remember the time he came to speak to us at the John Paul II Institute in Washington, DC. The last time I saw him in the United States was at a meeting with theologians and bishops in San Francisco. I wasn't invited to that meeting, of course. I was down the street from where he was directing a priests' retreat and I was able to sneak in for a moment to say "hello" and I invited him to pop in at the retreat for a brief visit. It was on his way there that they hauled him back saying that he had no time. Thinking about these and other times I saw him in the U.S. and this upcoming visit as Pope, I realized that the most important thing about this visit was not the presence of Joseph Ratzinger in the U.S., but the presence of the Pope.

The greatest threat for the Christian faith is the separation of Christ from the flesh. This un-fleshed Christianity becomes an abstraction which in the end is powerless to deal with real life, and becomes an uninteresting fossil of other days. This will happen no matter how brilliant, how perceptive, how moving and inspiring, how topical the way in which the Christian message is expressed by a Pope, bishop, priest, theologian, philosopher or whatever.

Christianity does not begin in the world of thought and human action. Christianity arose—and arises again and again, as has been said already, in the experience of an encounter with Jesus Christ in the flesh, an encounter in the flesh, an encounter with a face, a nose, ears. Christianity arises from such an encounter in the flesh. Pope Benedict XVI will be with us not just as Joseph Ratzinger in his brilliance as a philosopher, as a theologian, as a pastor, but he will be with us as the fleshly assurance that it is possible today to encounter Jesus Christ in the flesh; that it is as much possible in the year 2008 as it was that afternoon at 4 p.m. when John and Andrew first saw him and tentatively followed. That this can happen today is to witness to what we need the most, the assurance that this is so. The presence of the Pope gives us this assurance, the assurance that makes the Church and sustains it. The moment he sets foot in our land, at that very moment, the presence of Christ in the flesh, as he promised, will be perfectly fulfilled. And for this, above all, we rejoice and thank the Lord. Thank you.