



Second Annual Crossroads Cultural Center
Advisory Board Meeting

June 28, 2008

The Mertz Gilmore Foundation

Key Note Address by Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, Chairman

**Comments on “The Pope Benedict XVI’s Address to the Representatives of Other Religions
Washington, D.C., 4/17/2008”**

The encounter between faith and culture has been the topic of intense discussion since the Second Vatican Council. History shows that faith can indeed refashion or generate an entirely new culture, but how precisely does this happen? I believe that the recent visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States offers us a good example of how our faith interacts with culture. The key to this interaction is the method of dialogue. It is thus important to understand what dialogue means for us.

The point of departure of our dialogue with other Christians, with non-Christians, and non-believers must be our faith itself. An authentic dialogue occurs when it is motivated by the love for truth awakened in us by our faith in Christ. Our participation in the dialogue is a way of witnessing to what faith in Christ has allowed us to experience. Otherwise, the dialogue would be an inconclusive discussion that at best will end with a kind of "holding back" in order to make a compromise possible. This may be necessary in a political discussion, but it is not the way to advance together in the pursuit of truth. A true encounter between faith and culture occurs only when our participation in a dialogue is motivated by our faith.

The purpose of a dialogue motivated by faith is not the discovery of a "common ground" between different or conflicting opinions. Rather the purpose is the common love for truth and the deepening of the bonds of solidarity that this devotion to reality creates. The first moment of such a dialogue is an affirmation of the value of the quest itself. This was clear in the Pope's speeches and in his actions during his visit to the United States.

In his meeting with followers of different religious traditions at the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, DC, the Holy Father praised the United States for its respect of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism, religiosity in its many forms, is not a problem to be overcome; it is a reality in the human quest for truth. From this perspective, dialogue expresses the conviction that such a pluralism does not mean that there is no ultimate truth or that we will never be able to know it with certainty. Dialogue requires confidence in its success!

Indeed, faith in Christ is a form of knowledge that comes to know truth in Him, and we who have encountered Truth welcome and affirm all paths of reason that can serve as the ground for receiving the seed of faith. Faith allows us to recognize Christ as the Incarnate Truth, and it inspires us to seek to know Him more and more. It's like falling in love with someone—you seek to discover the one you love in the contacts he or she has with other people. We have encountered the truth in Christ but,

precisely because of this certainty, there is so much we want to know. So the encounter with the truth in Christ doesn't restrict our range of interest in human reality. On the contrary, it expands it to infinity! The Holy Father spoke about the ardor with which faith propels our passion in reason's quest for truth. This determination not to give up in the search for truth is one of our main contributions to the dialogue. This was the main point of the Holy Father's never-delivered speech at La Sapienza, which, after discussing what he as Pope could contribute to the University's mission, asserted that the Church's main contribution today is precisely to urge all not to surrender to relativism and to have confidence in our reasoning ability, in our capacity of encountering truth. This is what the Pope calls "the broadening of reason."

So, I believe that the truly fruitful encounter between faith and culture is a dialogue that broadens reason and sustains the confidence that truth can be encountered.

Such a dialogue, insisted the Holy Father, is urgent today. We desperately need a dialogue that will help us discover common ethical values to which we can appeal to sustain a global system of laws that will protect human rights.

In his own dialogue with Jurgen Habermas on January 19, 2004, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger put it this way: "How can cultures encountering one another find ethical basis to guide their relationships on the path that would permit them to build up a common structure that tames power and imposes a legally responsible order on the exercise of power?"

This touches another area where a dialogue is very important today, namely, the encounter between faith and scientific research. In that dialogue with Habermas, the Holy Father acknowledges the difficulties for agreement on a kind of "natural law" to be the basis of a global ethics. Many of the sciences today, especially studies of evolution, no longer believe that there is meaning and purpose to be discovered in nature. As a result, the capacity of reason to deal with questions of meaning and purpose is denied.

In that connection, the Pope brings up the importance of education, seeing Catholic education as a "diaconia of truth."

According to the Holy Father, "spiritual leaders have a special duty, and we might say competence, to place the deeper questions at the forefront of human consciousness, to reawaken mankind to the mystery of human existence, and to make space in a frenetic world for reflection and prayer.... Confronted with these deeper questions concerning the origin and destiny of mankind, Christianity proposes Jesus of Nazareth. He, we believe, is the eternal *Logos* who became flesh in order to reconcile man to God and reveal the underlying reason of all things. It is He whom we bring to the forum of interreligious dialogue. The ardent desire to follow in His footsteps spurs Christians to open their minds and hearts in dialogue (cf. *Lk* 10:25–37; *Jn* 4:7–26)."

All of this is possible, remember, if our participation in a faith/culture dialogue is motivated by our encounter with Christ. To this end, the Pope observed that "in our attempt to discover points of commonality, perhaps we have shied away from the responsibility to discuss our differences with calmness and clarity. While always uniting our hearts and minds in the call for peace, we must also listen attentively to the voice of truth. In this way, our dialogue will not stop at identifying a common

set of values, but go on to probe their ultimate foundation. We have no reason to fear, for the truth unveils for us the essential relationship between the world and God. We are able to perceive that peace is a 'heavenly gift' that calls us to conform human history to the divine order. Herein lies 'the truth of peace.'"