



7th Annual Crossroads Advisory Board Meeting

April 13, 2013

American Bible Society

Introduction: Angelo Sala, President

Keynote Address: Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, Chairman

Angelo Sala: Good afternoon and welcome to the seventh annual meeting of the Crossroads Advisory Board. First of all I would like to give a heartfelt thanks to the Chairman of the Board, Msgr. Albacete, and to all of you for having found the time in your very busy schedule to spend almost the entire day with us. Besides those from New York, some have come from Baltimore and Chicago. Finally, let me thank, very warmly, the American Bible Society and our great friend Mario Paredes for the generous hospitality they have provided for today's event, as well as Alicia de Frange whose help in organizing all of this has been invaluable.

Our thoughts and prayers go to our newly-appointed member, Dr. Kim Shankman, who could not be here because she is at the side of her son John, whose conditions are still very serious, in spite of some miraculous changes (he is now somehow able to communicate).

In the last 12 months Crossroads has organized 32 public events (3 more than in the previous year) in 6 cities in the US: New York, Washington, Boston, Houston, Denver, and Los Angeles. So, we had another very good year.

But are good results enough to support an activity, an effort, a real work, which is based exclusively on the free and gratuitous commitment of a group of volunteers (including the members of the advisory board)? Results cannot be the foundation of our commitment (and, actually, they are not!): they are part of the fruits, if any. So, what sustains our work as a cultural center?

Since we all work for free, the answer to this question is vital and requires being continually rediscovered. The energy for a gratuitous work is regenerated in me if this work is a step toward my happiness, if it satisfies a need that I experience, if it stirs an interest of mine, if it expresses a love that I have. So, what has Crossroads to do with my happiness, my needs, my interests, my love? The answer to this simple and decisive question is personal. However, the answer depends not only upon our awareness and freedom, but also upon Crossroads itself, its nature, its goal, its ideals, and its method. A deeper awareness of these aspects is very important in order to give a personal answer to the question.

This is the reason why we want to take a fresh look at our mission statement (which you have received in advance and is also in your folder), which tries to sum up our initial understanding of Crossroads' nature, goal, ideals and method. We need to re-discover (or discover) these aspects and we need to see how they have been confirmed and corrected by 9 years of intense activity.

For this purpose, we will start with a short video and a report on the past year's activities from the various cities. Our beloved Chairman will then give a talk about the contents of the Crossroads mission statement, immediately followed by a dialogue, lead by him. We are interested in knowing what you find particularly important in it, and whether, in your experience, the activities of the Center have been consistent with it, what is valuable and what should be corrected.

After a coffee break, we will continue the discussion, focusing instead on topics or areas that, from the point of view of your profession, you see emerging in your field and that could or should become the object of future Crossroads events.

We will then end with a dinner here before the presentation on the God Particle by our Dr. Giorgio Ambrosio and Prof. Barr from the University of Delaware. And now, Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete.

Albacete: I think we're doing much better than I thought. You all know this joke, the old story of the drunken man who had lost his car keys and was looking for them on the street. And another person who was not drunk passes by and says, "What happened?"

The drunk man answers, "I can't find my car keys."

And he responds, "You lost them somewhere around here?"

"No, no, no. I lost them about four blocks away, but there's more light here."

So he could've been perfect in designing and carrying out his task of looking for his lost key. I usually do the opposite; when I'm looking for something I lose, I make it even more difficult to find. But suppose this man or this woman knows exactly what to do, and does it. He or she is never going to find that key because she's looking in the wrong place. We can be eminently successful in all that we do, and all the results that have been just presented are so inspiring and encouraging and satisfying. Even if we have a crisis, we do pretty well. There's even a little money around; I want to remember that! So it's very positive. But if we are not looking, seeking to understand our call, our desire to do this, its origin, if we are not looking in the right place, then all of this, in the end, will be useless.

I want to identify that right place to see what it implies, and then at the end there are some specific questions about the mission statement which Angelo sent me and we will have our discussion based on those questions, I hope in the light of what we grasp now.

I read the last speech for the Second Vatican Council. It ended on December 8, 1965, the Feast of the Solemnity of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. So that's why they chose that particular day. That speech of the Pope, Pope Paul VI, can be found very easily on the Internet. But what's more difficult to find is the address that he gave the day before, December 7, 1965. That day was the last session of the Council. Not the closing of the Council, but the last session. Read this; I think it's stunning. You can quote many parts of this address to people who have absolutely no idea that it would come from a Catholic Pope.

In my opinion, his concern is that the Council have successful activities associated with it, reform the catechesis, the liturgy, all of these things. To all of that, and even consider the great questions of the day at the scientific level and other levels of study, the Council did all of that, but that it must do it within this particular point of departure or else it is not a truth of the Second Vatican Council.

I remember reading this speech way back, (I wasn't a priest yet) and how impressed I was, and now rereading it for this other gig—the priests' retreat we had, I have become more and more stunned. And what we need to do, although we're doing alright, as we can see the results, but I would suggest that we devote some time, not necessarily even today, to see how we're doing at the level of the point of departure for these activities. For example, at the end I would like to recommend that these brilliant organizers put together at some convenient time a day of recollection for the Advisory Board because we need that in

order to grasp that particular point of departure. It is a matter of allowing ourselves to be shaped by a certain attitude in front of knowledge and in front of reality.

St. Augustine expresses it very well when he said that he had to read all of the Platonic books and waste his time because what he got out of there he found in the teachings of the Church later. He said, "God, why did you make me plough through all those books if you were just going to reveal this to me?" He had come to the conclusion that the reason why God wanted him to study all the secular philosophy was so that he could learn the difference between presumption and confession. The follower of Christ is motivated by confession. The worker who is doing some secular work can be doing it with someone who doesn't have that point of view, but is doing it and it comes out fine. This is not a condition for the success of scientific examinations or anything like that. This is a personal matter.

Why (and it keeps coming up in all the questions) are we doing this? What do we expect? Just like being here today. It's amazing. Don't you have anything better to do than come to the American Bible Society, confirm the mysterious absence of Mario Paredes who is campaigning for another Pope, forgetting that he's been elected? Anyway, we're all here, and I assure you that if we didn't have this meeting, I would never be anywhere near here on a Saturday. I would be asleep. I definitely would. We're not paid. I do it as a penance for a particularly shameful confession. There is an attraction, an interest. But there are many attractions and many interests. What is the particular quality of this one? In what does its strength lie? If we grasp that, then we are guided by it in all the activities that we undertake and plan.

The presumption of St. Augustine was precisely that, a knowledge, not that it was of incorrect facts, but it was the attitude of knowledge that attributed its successes to our own efforts or goodness. Efforts or goodness—God rewarding us: Because we behave, we have successful events. The moment we digress, it will all come crumbling down. That is the thinking according to presumption. Confession, on the other hand, was simply an expression of the joy and the wonder of the glory of God present in reality, present in our world, present within us.

The Pope, to summarize very, very briefly in his speech, at the end concludes that our attitude should be obviously one of confession—confession of what? Confession of the value, the always more value of man. Confession of the fact that in all situations we will affirm, not because of the teaching of the Church, although the Church teaches that, not even because of the reading of the Council, but because we wonder at this creature.

I watch the National Geographic Channel a lot and find out how to murder people! Lovely stuff. At one level the amazing insignificance of the human being in the light of the Gospels. I keep looking at the people, and my brother watches it with me and thinks I'm completely crazy. "Look! He has feet!"

My brother answers, "Well, what do you expect?"

"Well, they evolved so that he could walk, so that Jesus could have feet. I don't know." It surprises me that this little creature in front of this vast and overwhelmingly awesome, in the best sense of the word, cosmos, this little creature, is worth all of it and more. One sole human person! That kind of attraction. It is, by the way, in all of us, only I would like to talk about myself, put on my lights so I can see it better. It is that kind of attraction that motivates or should motivate the activities we undertake.

Pope Paul VI says something that people are surprised is associated with the Second Vatican Council, "What is the religious value of this council?" Now someone in another talk mentioned it, and I thought of it myself too—isn't what we want the very opposite? Are people going to say, "Oh look, Catholic religion. Don't they have the freedom, the integrity to think by themselves?" The religious sense of the council cannot be equated to this. But the Pope calls the religious sense, "Giving glory to God." It is precisely marveling, caring for the beauty, sensitivity of the real, of what exists.

The present Pope in his own discussion...it's becoming very popular to have discussions with rabbis. I'm looking for someone. In any case, it's a fascinating discussion about what we are looking at now. In one's stance before reality, before the world, before the cosmos, the way we stand before it, can there be at that moment, under that powerful attraction and conviction that we want to share with other people, is there any room for doubt? Or is such a certainty achieved that no possible doubt is allowed? You may get off the horse later and doubt comes back, but this is a doubt *within* the certitude. This is not a little Mickey Mouse pope discussing that. And it's fascinating because the man who was to become Pope says, Yes, there must be a space...I don't know if we can call it doubt or not, but we cannot enter the presence of God without being overwhelmed in such a way that it is in a sense too much for us to grasp. In that too-muchness, there is room for doubt. In fact, if it is not there, (again this is the speech of the man who was to become Pope), one would question whether the attitude or feeling of awe in all of that is the proper one.

That extra, how the human person exhibits this extra-ness, is what I think we need to reflect on because according to Pope Paul VI, the purpose of the Council and everything that it generates afterwards, all those activities, (we are fruits of the Council too), should be guided by this desire to give glory to God, and this does not mean that the Council is a reunion of the dogmatic proclamations or piety or anything like that. But first comes God. Listen to this:

Could we speak of having given glory to God, of having sought knowledge and love of Him, of having made progress in our effort of contemplating Him, in our eagerness for honoring Him and in the art of proclaiming Him [to the people of today]?... from this basic purpose [to give this glory to God, to do what we do, to follow the attractions that we have in the secular sphere, to do them with love and amazement at the glory of God, this should be the direction of the future of this council.]...To appreciate it properly it is necessary to remember the time in which it was realized.

First is the giving glory to God. Within that, we find other things, but within that. One of them is the awareness of the times in which we live, the awareness of our cultural environment. The point is that giving glory to God as a desire will lead us, if followed correctly, to the question of the culture that surrounds us and to what happens when the two meet, when the glory of God meets the time in which we live. What happens? How does this happen within the heart of the human person? What happens there?

Look at the description of our times:

A time which everyone admits is orientated toward the conquest of the kingdom of earth rather than of that of heaven; a time in which forgetfulness of God has become habitual, and seems, quite wrongly, to be prompted by the progress of science; a time in which the fundamental act of the human person [that which carries our person, that which determines us as human—the fundamental act of the human person] more conscious now of himself and of his liberty, tends to pronounce in favor of his own absolute autonomy,

in emancipation from every transcendent law; a time in which secularism seems the legitimate consequence of modern thought and the highest wisdom in the temporal ordering of society; a time, moreover, in which the soul of man has plumbed the depths of irrationality and desolation; a time, finally, which is characterized by upheavals and a hitherto unknown decline even in the great world religions.

It was at such a time as this that our council was held to the honor of God, in the name of Christ and under the impulse of the Spirit: who "searcheth all things," "making us understand God's gifts to us" (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-12), and who is now quickening the Church, giving her a vision at once profound and all-embracing of the life of the world. The theocentric and theological concept of man and the universe, almost in defiance of the charge of anachronism and irrelevance, has been given a new prominence by the council, through claims which the world will at first judge to be foolish, but which, we hope, it will later come to recognize as being truly human, wise and salutary: namely, God is—and more, He is real, He lives, a personal, provident God, infinitely good; and not only good in Himself, but also immeasurably good to us. He will be recognized as Our Creator, our truth, our happiness; so much so that the effort to look on Him, [the effort to look on that reality that we are calling God] and to center our heart in Him [This is what we want; we want to see Him] which we call contemplation, is the highest, the most perfect act of the spirit, the act which even today can and must be at the apex of all human activity.

Then we suggest that the next step, if you wish, after taking a look at our relation with God and our relation with nature and our relation with human beings, then accept an act of introspection, which is where we are at this moment today, going over what has happened to us.

But this introspection has not been an end in itself. [Our introspection] has not been simply an exercise of human understanding or of a merely worldly culture. The Church has gathered herself together in deep spiritual awareness, not to produce a learned analysis of religious psychology, or an account of her own experiences, not even to devote herself to reaffirming her rights and explaining her laws. Rather, [our introspection is] to find in herself, active and alive, the Holy Spirit, the word of Christ; and to probe more deeply still the mystery, the plan and the presence of God above and within herself; to revitalize in herself that faith which is the secret of her confidence and of her wisdom, and that love which impels her to sing without ceasing the praises of God. "Cantare amantis est" (Song is the expression of a lover), says St. Augustine (Serm. 336; P. L. 38, 1472).

Then he says to note that our efforts to underline, to follow, to affirm "the religious meaning of the council" [that is, relation to God in what we do, has led us, commits us] to the study of the modern world."

Never before perhaps, so much as on this occasion, has the Church felt the need to know, to draw near to, to understand, to penetrate, serve and evangelize the society in which she lives; and to get to grips with it, almost to run after it, in its rapid and continuous change. This attitude, a response to the distances and divisions we have witnessed over recent centuries, in the last century and in our own especially, between the Church and secular

society—this attitude has been strongly and unceasingly at work in the council; so much so that some [people have been complaining about this] have been inclined to suspect that an easy-going and excessive responsiveness to the outside world, to passing events, cultural fashions, temporary needs, an alien way of thinking...may have swayed persons and acts of the ecumenical synod, at the expense of the fidelity which is due to tradition, and this to the detriment of the religious orientation of the council itself. We do not believe that this shortcoming should be imputed to it, to its real and deep intentions, to its authentic manifestations.

We prefer to point out how charity has been the principal religious feature of this council. Now, no one can reprove as want of religion or infidelity to the Gospel such a basic orientation, when we recall that it is Christ Himself who taught us that love for our brothers is the distinctive mark of His disciples (cf. John 13:35); when we listen to the words of the apostle: "If he is to offer service pure and unblemished in the sight of God, who is our Father, he must take care of orphans and widows in their need, and keep himself untainted by the world" (James 1:27) and again: "He has seen his brother, and has no love for him; what love can he have for the God he has never seen?" (1 John 4:20).

What I want to underline here is that you see what he is doing; he is starting from that point of departure...and following, if we situate ourselves correctly in a sense that an openness to the glory of God. If we do that, we will be lead across this path, including, next step, not only the desire for knowledge and commitment to search for knowledge, secular knowledge, but also to charity, to care, to love.

The Church of the council has been concerned, not just with herself and with her relationship of union with God, but with man—man as he really is today: living man, man all wrapped up in himself, man who makes himself not only the center of his every interest but dares to claim that he is the principle and explanation of all reality. Every perceptible element in man, every one of the countless guises in which he appears, has, in a sense, been displayed in full view of the council Fathers, who, in their turn, are mere men...Among these guises we may cite man as the tragic actor of his own plays; man as the superman of yesterday and today, ever frail, unreal, selfish, and savage; man unhappy with himself as he laughs and cries; man the versatile actor ready to perform any part; man the narrow devotee of nothing but scientific reality; man as he is, a creature who thinks and loves and toils and is always waiting for something, the "growing son" (Gen. 49:22); man sacred because of the innocence of his childhood, because of the mystery of his poverty, because of the dedication of his suffering; man as an individual and man in society; man who lives in the glories of the past and dreams of those of the future; man the sinner and man the saint, and so on.

Secular humanism, revealing itself in its horrible anti-clerical reality has, in a certain sense, defied the council. The religion of the God who became man has met the religion (for such it is) of man who makes himself God. And what happened? Was there a clash, a battle, a condemnation? There could have been, but there was none. The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it. [Are our activities motivated by this "boundless

sympathy" for modern human beings?]) The attention of our council has been absorbed by the discovery of human needs (and these needs grow in proportion to the greatness which the son of the earth claims for himself). But we call upon those who term themselves modern humanists, and who have renounced the transcendent value of the highest realities, to give the council credit at least for one quality and to recognize our own new type of humanism: we, too, in fact, we more than any others, worship mankind.

The word "worship" was removed by the Vatican censors, for obvious reasons, though the recording exists of him saying it, and the official phrase is: "We more than any others *honor* mankind." But of course what he meant is the humanity of Christ, which is not just honored, but also worshiped as it is the humanity of the Son of God.

So it goes on and on and on.

I think the mission statement was prophetic. I think we have been faithful to it. I think the fruits we have seen are the fruits of our fidelity to this path, even if we don't refer to it this way or give reference to it. I think that we are at the center of the drama of today which is precisely to show that the religious sense, that the glory of God is not a competitor of human progress, human achievements. I don't know how to do that. We would have to vary it in certain projects. In some we could be direct, as we do already. But even in the others, is there a way of making the air perfumed with this desire so that we can say, "Well, I want this for Your glory?" I think, anyway, that we could have a little day of recollection to do that.

I read the mission statement, obviously. I don't remember, does the word "God" appear in it anywhere at all, and above all, does the word "Jesus Christ" appear? I don't remember. But I remember this: Fr. Giussani faced a situation like that at which people in the Movement were very successful as a political presence in Italy, at the universities especially, and he was horrified because the success was being attributed to proclamation, or whatever St. Augustine said. And he said, "This year let's make a super-poster," and what he wrote down was essentially a reflection on the Apostles Creed—a confession that Christ who was dead, now lives, and lives in the life of the Church, and so on and so forth, all the stuff that is in the Creed. And he said, "This will be this year's." Well, it revolutionized everything. People were amazed at such explicitness, something which presumably should have been kept hidden in order to attract.

When our friend Peter Beinart went to Rimini and said that if we did something like that in the United States, we would really have an impact on American culture, remember one of the three characteristics that he put together, the very first one was the religious one? That event was a Catholic event. There was no way whatsoever of disguising it. The second one, remember, was the critical part where we showed our intelligence, our devotion to work hard, research, desire to know. He said it reminded him of the English Literature Department at Harvard. Nothing was foreign to it. That was great, he said. And the third, he said it was a Disney World because it was a family coming together, a friendship. He said that those three in the United States do not come together. If you succeed in doing it, you will see unleashed a fascinating fascination, and you can begin to think of having an impact on American culture.