



A dialogue with Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I. on his new book

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The Metropolitan Club, New York, NY

(transcript not reviewed by the speaker)

Paredes: Your Eminence, Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete, ladies and gentlemen, good evening and welcome to all on behalf of the American Bible Society, Crossroads Cultural Center and Lumen Christi.

I am Mario Paredes, Presidential Liaison to the Roman Catholic Ministry of the American Bible Society and I am also a member of the Advisory Board of Crossroads Cultural Center.

Your Eminence, we are honored to host this presentation of your new book *The Difference God Makes* in this wonderful venue in New York City. We believe that your book is exceptionally important because of the way it goes to the core of the predicament of the Church in our country today. It does so by bringing us back to the simplest, most fundamental question: What does it mean to be Catholic?

His Eminence will answer some questions from the audience after his address. If you have questions, please write them on the card you have found on your chair, then, when Msgr. Albacete opens the Q&A session, raise your hand and give the card to the a Crossroads' staff member.

Now it is my joy and privilege to introduce to you a man who does not need an introduction, and you know that I am referring to the dear Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete. He is certainly the leader of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation for the United States, and he is a well-known theologian, an author and a columnist, and a dear friend. Let us welcome Msgr. Albacete.

Albacete: It is my great pleasure to introduce to you someone whom I have had the pleasure to know for many years, Francis Cardinal George, the Archbishop of Chicago.

Cardinal George grew up on the Northwest Side of Chicago (suddenly everybody's from Chicago!) and attended the seminaries of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a religious order he entered in 1957. He earned a Masters of Art degree in philosophy from The Catholic University of America and in theology from the University of Ottawa. He was ordained a priest in 1963. He completed a doctorate in philosophy at Tulane University in 1970 and a doctorate in sacred theology in 1989 at the Pontifical Urban University, Rome. Among other positions, he has served the Church as professor of philosophy at Creighton University, provincial and vicar general in the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Bishop of Yakima, and Archbishop of Portland, Oregon. In April 1997 Pope John Paul II appointed him Archbishop of Chicago and in 1998 named him to the College of Cardinals. He currently serves as President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Since its founding in 1997, he has served as Episcopal Moderator of the Lumen Christi Institute for Catholic Thought at the University of Chicago and since then he has spoken at and participated in many of its programs.

As part of his teaching office as bishop, he has spoken widely on many topics and, as part of that office, has harvested and gathered his reflections in an important new book, *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion and Culture*. It is in that capacity that he speaks to us this evening. Your Eminence...

George: Thank you very much, Msgr. Albacete, and thanks to all of you for coming this evening. I am particularly grateful to Mario and the American Bible Society and especially to Crossroads Cultural Center that

did so much to organize and to see to it that we'd be well-received here. It's a deep pleasure and a great honor for me to be with you this evening.

In a way, the entire book that is being presented this evening is an extended commentary and reflection on the experiences I had as a five and six-year-old boy being dragged along by my mother when she went shopping for clothes for my father. She used to take me shopping because she wanted to be sure she knew where I was, even when she was downtown in the Loop in Chicago, and I think she enjoyed talking to me when she shopped. She was mostly talking to herself, but she ended up doing that through me. And when she went through a men's store, she would choose clothing for my father by saying, "Your father would like that." Or "Your father would never wear that." "Your father won't like that but he'll learn to like it." And the reflections to herself were constant. She was a very good shopper. She knew quality and she knew what she was looking for. She read all the ads and she made comparisons. She was very careful. My parents were married just a few months before the Great Depression of 1929 and they were very careful throughout their lives as to how money was spent. But it was spent well because she knew how to shop.

But what was interesting was that her judgments about what my father liked or didn't like or would learn to like were always right. She knew him better than he knew himself. He didn't shop much for his own clothing. He wasn't particularly that interested in it, but when he did, he wouldn't wear what he bought for himself—not only because he preferred to wear what she bought for him, but also because she was right. She understood his mind. She had in her own mind, his mind, his reaction about clothing and about many other things as well. And he understood her very well.

I came to learn, by reflecting on that, how there can be two minds in one, how a person can retain his or her own identity, because her tastes were not my father's in many things, and yet be open to the viewpoints and the desires of someone else, and not find any tension in that, but find a fulfillment in that.

And it seems to me that what I'm trying to do in the book is to say that ecclesial communion is a way living through one another in Christ. "We have the mind of Christ," as Saint Paul says, "if we are in His body, the Church." And the relationships that we have through Christ are also universal. So in a sense while I pick at various themes, basically I'm talking about relationships that are universal, talking about our identity first of all as related, and only secondarily as the product of our own choices, and that, in fact, if we're to understand the network of relationships in which we find our identity, we have to see things whole, not just as people specialized on one or the other department of understanding reality.

In his latest encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI articulates how a Catholic vision pertains to the most pressing social and economic issues of our times, and how it ultimately has the power to unite the human race. The Pope writes, "The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships or rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion." The Holy Father also asks for an examination and a greater understanding of the category of relationship and its importance. He wouldn't have had to ask for that so insistently had he read my book first! The book came out after the encyclical, but nonetheless it was being written while he was writing his.

The book attends to the identity that is ours, therefore through relationships, and the vision necessary to see things interrelated, to see things whole. God makes little difference, in fact, if we allow ourselves to reduce God to our size and see Him as just one more fixture in the universe, bigger and more important perhaps, but just one more being. Yet God both transcends His creation, and is present within it as the cause of its very being. Our relationship to God, therefore, makes all the difference in the world because it brings us into relationship with everyone else and everything else that He has created. Christians believe this is accomplished through Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, who therefore enables us to understand how our neighbor is also our brother or sister. The book, therefore, takes up the nature of God, especially the first chapter and several other places, and

His relationship to everything else. *Who is God?*, is a question more than ever important because if you worship a false God then you will have social consequences sometimes leading to violence.

If we are individuals, first of all, for whom relationships are just added on in some adventitious way, rather than being persons who are born related before we even know who we are, then we start with rights, and not with duties or obligations to others. But since rights have to be protected, we then get into a legal framework that is almost always adversarial. Society becomes brittle and violent. Natural communities, such as marriage, are much weakened. People's mobility and the pursuit of one's own dreams, even in conflict with others, have become something of a priority in our culture. None of this fosters the kind of relationship that is necessary to live humanely, let alone religiously. The book, therefore, considers the relationships that establish our fundamental identity.

We all know that, when you stop to think about it, we are born someone's son, someone's daughter, someone's brother, someone's sister, someone's cousin, nephew, niece, but we don't know anything about that, but they are still relationships that tell us who we are. And we break them at our peril, or try to break them. We never break them. They are always with us. We are always someone's son, someone's daughter, even if we're estranged. We're always first of all related before we come to understand who we are by reason of our own attempts to establish an identity that will always be unique, yet will remain unique in this network of relationships.

This is also true in the Church. The Church is a family. We are baptized as infants, most of us, and we're brought into the Church related to God as one of His creatures, who, brought out of the Church, is related to God as a son or a daughter in Christ. So it is the network that we're not aware of when we're baptized, the network we're not aware of when we're conceived or born, but it is the work of a lifetime to grow into those relationships with God, become saints, with our family in such a way that we contribute to it and not just receive an identity from it in society and all the rest.

The relationships are prior, certainly experientially, but also ontologically because of what we believe God to be—Trinity. And that is very much against the ideology of individualism that is prevalent in shaping not just our political system (that's fine—individuals protected, rights protected constitutionally). The problem is that the political paradigm has become to a great extent the paradigm for all of human experience. And so losing the family as the basic unit of society, if not of politics, we also lose our humanity because we are tempted to break relationships which, if we do, we destroy ourselves. The thesis of the book is that our relationships cannot be un-chosen, even if we've chosen them, like marriage, they cannot be un-chosen lest we destroy ourselves.

The ideology of individualism manifests itself in various ways. Violence is the most obvious. Modern culture is based upon opposition and contention. The media need oppressors and victims or there isn't a story. Courts are set up for winners and losers. Business thrives on often unfriendly competition, and politics opposes those in power to those who have lost power and who will do what they have to do to gain it again. It's basically conflict in many ways and conflict institutionally contained, sometimes but often not.

The Church's role is to save others. Conflict to a certain level, the highest level is one of harmony and peace, mutual, and love of God because God brings good out of evil in God's own time in ways that we don't understand and won't fully understand until Christ returns in glory. Our mission in the meantime is to call people to that level which isn't only higher, but also more global. It's more universal. It is broader. It is Catholic. That is what is sometimes missing in the public conversation and in the institutions of our country, and many others as well.

The institutional relationship between Church and State in our country is the constitutional way of talking about something that is far deeper; therefore—the relationship between faith and culture, which is the way that Pope

John Paul II used to raise the question. So we have an intuitional separation, and that's fine. It's helpful. There's always a separation in Catholicism between the institution of Church and the institution of State. The king is never a priest in Catholicism, as is the case in other religions at times. So there's no problem with the institutional separation. The problem is if it is used in order to say there should be no dialogue between faith and culture because there's a separation of Church and State. If we forget that man is a social being, first of all, and if we begin to think that we are fundamentally antagonistic beings in competition with others in order to establish our rights, then the separation between Church and State necessarily also becomes antagonistic rather than cooperative.

Besides promoting social violence and justifying institutional conflict, the ideology of individualism undermines the natural institutional that is marriage. Certainly one chooses freely to marry another, but once marriage is contracted, that relationship is normative for the rest of one's life. Marriage means growing not only to live with someone, but also through someone else, having their self-consciousness become part of one's proper self-consciousness in the way I was explaining using the example of my mother shopping for clothing for my dad. Living through a spouse in marriage leads us with Saint Paul to discover the relationship between Christ and the Church. It is Saint Paul who says in the captivity epistles that Christ is the bridegroom of his bride, the Church. "We have the mind of Christ," Saint Paul tells us. As baptized believers gathered into Christ's body we bring into our self-consciousness everyone who Christ loves and died to save, which is everyone.

The Church is therefore a network of relationships called *communio*, and the human race is a network of relationships called *solidarity*. The two should complement one another. At that point of complementarity there is no separation, there is cooperation, mutuality based on a recognition of differences, and it's that concept of mutuality that the Pope has introduced into Catholic social teaching in his latest encyclical also in order to try to figure out how an economy that necessarily permits competition and the freedom of markets nonetheless will operate all of that in such a way that the mutuality between classes and among peoples who share the goods in an economy will be the primary note of an economy based on gratuitousness. It's a very different vision of what it should obtain, but it's a vision that's not at all unfaithful to the goal that John XXIII had in calling the Second Vatican Council where seeing a world so divided, so split up, so disunited by class, by nation-state, by race, and watching the world destroy itself in two world wars, and in constant revolutions in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, he said that someone has to tell the human race that we are one human family. And the Church, sure in Her own internal unity, should be the messenger and the leaven in a society where relationships of peace and harmony can become prior once again. If we have only since the Council introduced into the internal life of the Church the very lesions of a wounded world to whom we're supposed to be Good Samaritans, according to Paul VI at the end of the Council, declaring that the spirituality of the Council is the spirituality of the Good Samaritan. If we ourselves become wounded men by the wayside then we may share the world's experience, and we can't possibly fulfill the mission of the Church or the purpose of the Second Vatican Council.

The Church isn't a department of State. On the other hand, the State shouldn't make itself into a kind of church, which is at times our temptation in America. Abraham Lincoln's understanding of Americans as "the almost chosen people." He had the good grace to say "almost," but sometimes we don't say that, and we imagine that globalization will mean America writ large. It won't, as we've come to understand.

The book examines in various contexts, therefore, the relationships that create cultures that are in conversation with the Catholic faith, with the Universal Church. Pope John Paul II saw the need to address cultures as such, societies as a whole. He was interested always in seeing how we could foster cultures that are more Gospel-friendly because if we had that, many institutional problems would take care of themselves, and it would make sense to be a believer. It's very hard to come to conversion if everything around you tells you, "this is a bad choice," because the culture isn't only around us; it's in us, and therefore, it's very difficult to reject part of ourselves in order to become more than we would be on our own by being converted to Jesus Christ.

Evangelization involves not just converting individuals, but changing the culture so that society itself is transformed into a place that is a bit more like the Kingdom of Heaven—more just, more loving, more generous. The Gospel, therefore, proclaims relationships. The Church is not sectarian and extends beyond every community, even national communities. Pope Benedict XVI said that clearly when he visited the United Nations a year ago last April. The nation state is not nearly as important as the global human family; that is, a sense of catholicity, of universality, of global solidarity that the Church has been proclaiming for some time and with ever greater insistence since the Second Vatican Council.

If you go back to that talk that Pope Benedict gave to the United Nations, it was, I believe, one of the most important of the speeches that he gave in his few days with us because what he was doing was redefining the mission of the United Nations organization. He had the political leaders of the world, each representing a sovereign state, called together in the United Nations organization in its inception to say, “Never again will sovereign state invade sovereign state. We will live in peace.” But it wasn’t part of the initial mission of the United Nations to say, “Never again will a sovereign state oppress its own people by denying their human rights,” which may or may not be civil rights in a particular country. And the Pope took advantage of the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights to say, “These are universal rights; they’re given by God, not by nation states. And if the laws of a nation state don’t properly incorporate them, then it is the human family, concerned about this part of our family that is gathered into an oppressive country that has to rescue those people, not by violent invasions.” He said that very clearly because the whole question of the legality of intervening in another state is much disputed, but rather through creating some kind of vehicle in a non-violent way to rescue people who are being oppressed by their own government from the very sovereign government itself. This certainly relativizes state sovereignty, which has been a fundamental principle of international relationships since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. He’s calling for a global order. He called for it again more explicitly in *Caritas in Veritate* which would permit people to do things, of course always at the level at which they can best operate. The principle of subsidiarity is part of the principle of solidarity, but nonetheless one that makes us all responsible for other people around the world because we’re members of a common human family redeemed by one Savior and called to a common destiny. That of course is something that the United Nations had in its original charter, and it was something they said they had to study. I think they did take it up last October, but I’m not entirely sure what they did with his talk at that time.

Unlike national identities, all of the great faiths are already global. We can cooperate as believers on a social level, even though we’re not going to believe the same things entirely, but the world will be a more peaceful place. John Paul II tried to do that by calling various religious leaders together in Assisi, not to pray together, for that would violate conscience, for there are differences in our understanding of God, and so we have to be sure that we are worshipping the God who revealed Himself no matter what other god someone else is worshipping. Nonetheless, if respecting one another’s beliefs and conscience, we can pray in each other’s presence, if not together, and pray respectfully, then there will no longer be an excuse to use religion, at least, and differences of religion as a framework for violence. We will be able to create a sense of identity that transcends other divisions. The differences between religions will still remain, but along with a sense of mutual respect will come a conviction that religion can never be used to justify violence. We will become peace-makers together, even with differences and disagreements.

In this universal nation, people act at various levels in the Church and in society, but evangelization has a global mission with actions that take place in homes, in parishes, in societies, in cities, in countries. Believers live their lives, and religion is integral to that life, but people aren’t always thinking about it very theoretically. They’re living it. People go to mass regularly, do their best to build up their family and contribute to society. Catholicism is a way of life, a way of thinking, and a way of loving that incarnates a vision uneasy with itself if it is not global, if it is less than universal.

The book speaks of relationships that are universal as the love of God. Universal relationships shape the Catholic Church which is a community formed by sharing the gifts that Christ gives us—the Gospel, the sacraments, the pastoral governance of the successors of the apostles. The means of Christ’s grace to make us truly one are present now and present everywhere; they’re universal. Ways of life will differ within the Church, but the goal of life is always sanctity.

One of the great joys of being a bishop in any diocese is that you go from parish to parish, and generally you’re there when it’s a fairly important occasion. You meet people at their best, but nonetheless, you meet people who are saints. It does work when the Gospel is proclaimed with integrity, when the sacraments are celebrated as they are given us by the Church—these actions of the Risen Christ who calls us into a new way of life and not just a better life, when the people are gathered into loving faith communities where they can be pastored with the love that Christ wants them to be pastored with, and can then turn with love to one another and help each other generously. People become saints and there are a lot of saints around. There are saints here, I’m sure. And that’s one of the important things to remember, and sometimes in the bigger picture we tend to get absorbed into the problems and the evils, which are very real, but it does work. Holy people might not reflect on sanctity as such, and they don’t always make the headlines, but they are everywhere—fathers and mothers of families, people dedicated not only to their faith, but also to their work in society in helping others in Christ’s name. The difference God makes is holiness in His Son, Jesus Christ, through His body, the Church.

Of course many people do not believe that one can accept the truth that one is not created by himself and still be free, and that’s part of the cultural problem with individualism. The book takes up the sense of freedom in the faith and in western culture because this is a theme we’ve continuously re-thought in theory and in practice. In pastoral ministry one meets people who try to live only by their own truths and in their own dreams, who recognize when they reach a certain level of maturity that this path is a trap leading not to individual creativity but to isolation. To be ourselves, we have to be something more than ourselves. Christ and His Church in the Gospel and always more, which is why conversion is the fundamental dynamic of the life of faith. No matter who you are, you have to change. You have to become something more, and you can never exhaust that “more” in Christ.

The Church is conferred with the truth of who we really are in Christ and of our destiny for all eternity, and that is the truth that sets us free. The Church speaks of evangelizing respectfully by watching for people when they are ready to hear the truth that is liberating, and the very conviction, however, that you don’t have to sacrifice subjective freedom by accepting objective truth is a conviction that isn’t well protected in universities and in other parts of our society. And since individual freedom is more important even than life itself—we kill to be free; we’ve done it all the time—we will certainly not accept a truth that limits our freedom; to say that just the opposite, the truths that are genuinely true and are universal will enable you to find yourself, and not to be smothered in some kind of dogmatic embrace—that’s hard to get people to understand.

The Church, therefore, looks for the best places where She can proclaim the Gospel with chance it will call people to conversion. John Paul II always said, “Propose and never impose.” Sometimes I think if I were founding a religious order today it would be composed of bartenders and taxi cab drivers because that’s where people talk, and some of those conversations, not intentionally as in the conversations in universities or in media, our legal departments, especially legal schools, propose to change the culture. Nonetheless, those small conversations are also culturally transforming as well.

Goodness has its own attractiveness. We are to witness to Christ and enter into dialogue with everyone. The book you’ll see is an exercise in the rules for dialogue with a lot of different people in different places. The book examines, therefore, some major theatres of dialogue. The three sections of the book consider the Church’s mission which is establishing universal communion; that’s what we’re here for; that’s what Christ said before he ascended to the Father, “Go and teach all nations, baptizing everyone as disciples.” The Church’s life

in hierarchical communion, Her internal way of relating, and the Church's goal which is communion with God.

Thinking in terms of relationships, and thinking in terms of the whole, our habits, the book says, are properly Catholic, but they're learned habits; we have to come to them. They lead us, however, into a deeper sense of the difference that God makes.

I would say "thank you" and end, but since we're in New York, and occasionally New York papers are read outside of New York, last week's *New York Sunday Times* had an interesting article on "Words without Borders," talking about the National Book Awards, and saying, "Three of the five candidates in the fiction category were not born in this country." Like the Archdiocese of Chicago, 40 per cent of the 2.3 something million Catholics in Cook and Lake Counties in Northeastern Illinois, (the two counties that make up the Archdiocese of Chicago), 40 per cent of baptized Catholics were not born in this country. That has its own richness and it has its own challenges. So here we are with the National Book Awards, American books, three of the five candidates were not born in this country. Two of these three live abroad. I think without thinking about it, necessarily what the author of this commentary on the situation of the National Book Awards is really bringing us into the question of globalization, not in the economy or in politics, but in literature and in culture. "The judges of the National Book Awards tacitly suggest a heartening response: the American idea not only translates, it disregards national boundaries." To some extent that's true. It's why Americans and their revolution, and the crimes they based on their revolution, and the Russians based on their revolution which they have now eschewed, thought that their nationalism were themselves universal. We play a World Series every year with a game that is played only in this country for the most part. "It's also true," the author goes on to say, "that there are limitations to how much a reader can appreciate cultural preoccupations that differ too greatly from the readers own." Similar to how much, I suppose, one can absorb another's consciousness or at least another culture. Those who have tried to do it know how difficult it is not just to learn another language but also to really understand it from within itself, to understand it as a cultural vehicle. "Whoever it is, [talking about the one who will obtain the prize in the National Book Awards], he or she will be a writer who expands the versatile adjective 'American' [the reason why I'm reading this—the author has a phrase...] in bridging the world's understanding of itself." I'm glad to see that *The New York Times* has caught up with my book, and has understood the vision behind it and the goal behind it even when they're talking about National Book Awards.

The book therefore is offered as an attempt to try to help us think in a context which isn't totally natural to our culture, but which is natural to our intelligence and our hearts. And with that I offer to you this evening and I thank you for your attention.