

**Common Ground, Uncommon Upheaval:
The American Catholic Church at the Crossroads**
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It is an honor to be invited here this evening. I commend your committee for the ecumenical astuteness shown in asking me to speak on the Catholic Common Ground Initiative.

Before beginning to explore the meaning and possible outcomes of this undertaking known as the Common Ground, I want to give you a bit more about my own social location. No theologian or critic of culture approaches a topic without an angle on its reality. Mine was shaped by a working class family that was solidly Roman Catholic in a deep south that was not only Protestant but predominately free church. All of my education before entering the convent was at Catholic schools, and that education was continued at my congregation's college. I have taught at elementary, high school, college, and graduate levels and have also done catechetical work. Though originally educated by my congregation for a career in French and Spanish, teaching religion in high school aroused such an interest in theology that, when invited to do so, I decided to pursue the doctorate in theology. Being by this time convinced that all theology in the future must be carried on with an ecumenical consciousness, I chose for doctoral studies a University which, while now considered non-sectarian, was founded by Methodists and retains a distinctly Protestant flavor. My teaching has taken me to a variety of college and university settings, mostly Roman Catholic. During that time I also had the great good fortune to be selected for a bi-lateral dialogue between Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics. Currently, I am on the United Methodist/Roman Catholic dialogue. By 1992, my own doubts about what is going on in American Catholic higher education, combined

with other circumstances, led me to found a theological center for women where I can create with others an environment for learning that respects what I believe is best in the Catholic Christian tradition.

I thank the committee for the opportunity and motivation to attend carefully to the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, an effort designed to provide a forum for facing some of the most neuralgic issues plaguing the American Roman Catholic Church. This presentation will fall into five major parts: (1) an overview of the groupings into which Roman Catholics in the United States tend to fall; (2) an indication of the promoter, purposes, participants, and procedures for the Common Ground Initiative; (3) reactions to the announcement of the Initiative; (4) theological issues embedded in the ensuing controversies; and finally (5) some musings in response to the question posed to me by the organizers about whether or not the Roman Catholic Church in the US is headed for a schism.

The Terrain

There are at least two ways to think of the matter of “groupings”; one is by class and the other is by conviction. What you need to know about the first is that before the Second World War the majority of American Roman Catholics belonged to the working class. Although ethnically diverse, their expectations of the Church were quite similar, as were their challenges. They were struggling to make their way in an American society whose power brokers were not favorable to the Roman Catholic Church or to its adherents. The faithful looked to the Church to care for them spiritually and to stand up for them politically and socially. Foremost among political concerns was the right of labor to

organize, a right that Catholic priests and bishops defended with great courage. In addition, they founded organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, dedicated to helping each other in times of sickness, providing for decent burial, rendering assistance to families who lost the wage-earner. Orders of nuns, brothers and priests established schools to educate the Catholic children of this working class and to provide health care. By and large, they were religious orders who drew members from the respective ethnic group so the priests, brothers and nuns understood the culture of the people.

This picture has now changed dramatically. The children of those working class Catholics went to college and beyond. They entered the professions and moved out of the cities to suburbs and estates. They became “management,” whereas their parents had been “labor,” and they view the rights of workers from a different angle.

Let me cite from a recent article in which Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reflects on the report he has written for his most recent *ad limina* visit (visits with the Pope which an ordinary has every five years in order to acquaint the Pope with the realities in the diocese and in the home country).

The places they [the upwardly mobile Catholics] left in the central city were taken by the African-American population that came north..., by the new Latin American immigrants...and now by the new Asian Pacific arrivals--the Vietnamese, the Laotians and in particular the Hmong. These newcomers were not accompanied by a large number of priests nor by many groups of religious men and women, as had been the case with the first European immigrants.

These newcomers remain among the poorest of the poor in Milwaukee, trying desperately to move ahead in an economy where unskilled workers are seldom in demand. As a result, the church for the first time in Milwaukee must minister to a sociologically highly diverse Catholic population. It is no longer a homogenous church.”

Archbishop Weakland goes on to say that working class Catholics who did not move out of the city “feel the church has abandoned labor and now sides with

management and the wealthy class. They observe that the members of the boards of the colleges, universities, hospitals and even the members of the parish councils of the large churches in the suburbs are anti-labor, anti-union and, thus, anti-working poor.”¹

The rise of an educated, professional, upper class in American Roman Catholicism has complicated the situation enormously.

In terms of conviction, on the other hand, the groupings are different and, I confess, it is not clear to me how conviction correlates with class. On the far right there are those who long to have Vatican II and all it did reversed. They have militated for and succeeded in being allowed to use the Tridentine Missal at Mass. They are unabashed in their admiration for the old ways and in their disdain for American secular culture. Allied to them are others who put at the center of their understanding of what makes a Catholic loyalty to the Pope (which really means Pope John Paul II, for they do not express the same loyalty for previous Vicars of Christ). Mother Angelica of the Eternal Word Network is the unofficial patroness of this group and her behavior toward Cardinal Mahoney of Los Angeles shows why this group is considered selective in its obedience to authority. (In a now famous episode, Mother Angelica publically exhorted the members of her audience who were in Cardinal Mahoney’s diocese to give “zero compliance” with directives contained in his pastoral letter on the liturgy. This has occasioned an open dispute between them.) Catholic United for the Faith is an organization consonant with these aims.

The third group is, I suspect, the most numerous. It is the group of ordinary Roman Catholics who attend Sunday liturgy, contribute to parish life in a variety of ways, and are generally happy with Vatican II and its results. They want their children to have a

good education and to respect and love the Catholic tradition, though in my circles they are not faring well in the latter regard. They worry about the shortage of priests and nuns, and take a very practical approach to the issues of married clergy: it would help make the eucharist more available. By and large, they do not follow the theological disputes, nor do they draw spiritual sustenance from Catholic intellectual life. Their focus tends to be parochial, though their concern is often global, and their assessment of Catholic life generally positive. The National Council of Catholic Women is an organization that could symbolize this group.

On the left there are a number of organizations that have gained a great deal of publicity, though their numbers are not as big as their bark: Women's Ordination Conference, Call to Action, Catholic for a Free Choice, Corpus--a national association for a married priesthood which would include women. I think that Archbishop Weakland captures the spirit of the grouping to which all these organizations appeal (with varying degrees of success) as the "restless innovators." Their loyalty is to the church that is yet to be. They often rely on models of democracy to counter what they take to be an excessive authoritarianism in contemporary Roman Catholicism. They are highly conscious and educated, read widely and follow the operations of the National Council of Catholic Bishops (the US Conference of bishops) as well as activities of (liberal) scholarly societies such as the Catholic Theological Society of America. They see positive values in secular culture and are often embarrassed by a church perceived as lagging behind, especially on social issues.

Digging Into Common Ground²

This is the background against which Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, God rest him, Archbishop of Chicago, announced the Catholic Common Ground Initiative. On August 12, 1996, he held a press conference to release the statement, *Called to Be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril*. The statement opens with a pair of questions that sets the tone and indicates the motivation for the initiative: “Will the Catholic Church in the United States enter the new millennium as a church of promise, augmented by the faith of rising generations and able to be a leavening force in our culture? Or will it become a church on the defensive, torn by dissension and weakened in its core structures?” The text also offers a definition of the term common ground: “it is common ground centered on faith in Jesus, marked by accountability to the living Catholic tradition, and ruled by a renewed spirit of civility, dialogue, generosity, and broad and serious consultation.”³ The stated aim of the Common Ground Initiative was clearly pastoral.

At the news conference, Cardinal Bernardin said, “I have been troubled that an increasing polarization within the church and, at times, a meanspiritedness have hindered the kind of dialogue that helps address our mission as a church and our concerns as a church. As a result, the unity of the church is threatened, the faithful members of the church are weary and our witness to government, society and culture is compromised.”⁴

Called to Be Catholic notes that “there are urgent questions that the church in the United States knows it must air openly and honestly but which it increasingly feels pressed to evade or, at best, address obliquely.” Among the issues named are

- the changing roles of women
- religious education
- the Eucharistic liturgy

- the meaning of human sexuality and the gap between church teachings and the convictions of many faithful in this arena
- the image and morale of priests, and the declining ratios of priests and vowed religious to people in the pews
- the ways in which the church is present in political life, its responsibility to the poor and defenseless, and its support for lay people in their family life and daily callings
- dwindling financial support from parishioners
- the manner of decision-making and consultation in church governance
- the responsibility of theology to authoritative church teachings.

And that does not exhaust the topics listed!

At the same time, some working principles were delineated:

- that no single group of viewpoint in the church has a complete monopoly on the truth
- that those with whom we differ are acting in good faith and thus deserve civility, charity and a good-faith effort to understand their concerns
- that we should put the best possible construction on differing positions, “looking for good points instead of just attacking weak ones
- that we should be cautious in ascribing motives and not impugn another’s love of the church and loyalty to it
- that we should bring the church to engage the realities of contemporary culture, assessing both its valid achievement and real dangers

If successful, such an effort would change what too often looks like feuding among American Roman Catholics into something resembling a reasoned discussion and might result in resolving some of the deep-seated differences. Cardinal Bernardin is on

record as believing that dialogue across ideological lines is crucial to preserving church unity. It is the only way to avoid “squandering” Catholic influence in American society, a waste that was much on his mind, especially as the cancer that had been earlier diagnosed and treated returned in an incurable form.

The Common Ground committee of twenty-five includes seven bishops, six priests, three women religious, seven laymen and two laywomen. When Cardinal Bernardin became too ill to chair, he named as his successor the Most Reverend Oscar Lipscomb, Archbishop of Mobile, Alabama--a noted intellectual among American bishops.

The Quake and the Fall Out

In the time of aftershocks from the news reports, several things happened in rapid succession. Within a couple of months there were three to four hundred thousand copies of the statement in print. It was published in newspapers and journals and downloaded from the electronic “home page” of the Archdiocese of Chicago. It was covered on national network news and on national public radio (where religion generally gets short shrift in the U. S.). According to Monsignor Philip J. Murnion, one of the committee members, Cardinal Bernardin received hundreds of letters, as did the National Pastoral Center that is staffing the Initiative. Since that initial wave of publicity, a number of Catholic parishes, seminaries, colleges and universities have formed Common Ground committees and are discussing the topics identified by the national Catholic Common Ground Initiative.

On the other hand, Cardinal Bernardin's press conference also brought forth immediate evidence of the very polarization--and at times the meanspiritedness--that the Initiative was designed to address. Lay commentators divided along predictable lines, according to their organizational affiliations. Let me give you a sampling of responses.

- Linda Pieczynski of Call to Action said, "If we had wide-ranging discussions among people of all positions we would be better off than having the Vatican say a matter is closed and cannot be discussed."
- William Donohue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights wrote, "There are some aspects of the church that are non-negotiable, and the sooner this is acknowledged, the better off everyone will be."
- Rosemary Ruether, theologian, commented, "The cardinal is issuing a broad invitation. But if the boundaries of discussion are based solely on official Catholic teaching, he seems to be eliminating from the table the polarizing issues and the people who are polarized."
- Paul Likoudis, news editor of *The Wanderer*, opined: "Cardinal Bernardin seems to be abdicating the teaching and ruling authority he has for the sake of some ethereal dialogue. It's time for sanctions, not dialogue."

I could go on, but I think that gives the flavor of the public responses from representative lay Catholics. It was, however, the reactions of fellow cardinals that was virtually unprecedented. The Initiative was publically questioned by Anthony Bevilacqua, Archbishop of Philadelphia, James Hickey, Archbishop of Washington, DC, and Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston--three very important American churchmen.

Cardinal Law muted his criticism of Cardinal Bernardin by addressing himself to the statement, saying that it was “unfortunate” that the Initiative had been tied to it. The fundamental flaw in the document, according to Cardinal Law, is “its appeal for ‘dialogue’ as a path to ‘common ground.’” Cardinal Law’s critique makes clear that he thinks the church need not *seek* common ground. “The Church already has ‘common ground.’ It is found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and it is mediated to us through the authoritative and binding teaching of the Magisterium. This disconnect that is so often found today between that Catholic common ground and the faith and practice of some Catholics is alarming.”⁵

Cardinal Hickey’s criticism was in the same vein: “We cannot achieve church unity by accommodating those who dissent from church teaching--whether on the right or left. To compromise the faith of the church is to forfeit our common ground and to risk deeper polarization.”⁶ From Philadelphia came an equally stark reaction from Cardinal Bevilacqua, who said, “when divergent opinions on theological matters are examined in a public forum, by a group, most whom are not theologians, then reported secondhand in the media, confusion among Catholics grows.”⁷ Another brother bishop, not a cardinal-- Bishop John J. Myers of the Diocese of Peoria, disagreed with the whole premise of the Initiative: “I do not think the church is approaching paralysis. When asked what direction the church should take, I have consistently said, ‘Neither right nor left, but deeper into the mystery of Christ.’”⁸

It cannot have helped that so much of the reporting on Cardinal Bernardin’s idea was couched in politicized language. For example, in one newspaper, *Called to Be*

Catholic was referred to as a “manifesto” and in another’s coverage, Cardinal Bernardin’s August press conference was headlined, “Contentious Catholics.”

No doubt stung by such public rebuke, but steady on his course of dialogue, Cardinal Bernardin issued a written statement in which he acknowledged the positive responses and attempted to answer the criticisms. “We do not seek ‘least common denominator Catholicism,” he said. To the critics who questioned the composition of the committee, the list of topics, the boundaries laid down and, in some cases, the very fact that a dialogue was going to take place: “Of course, we anticipated criticisms from some groups on the right or left who are convinced that anything not explicitly committed to their respective agenda will only strengthen their adversaries or legitimate the status quo. ... They simply do not see the situation as we do.” For unnamed but presumably ecclesial critics, Cardinal Bernardin had this comment: “More troubling is the criticism that mixes arguable points with what I believe are grave misunderstandings. ... While millions of Catholics of good will cannot deny their concerns and dissatisfactions, they do not want to be drawn into some basically hostile posture toward the church and its teaching. It is essential that we offer these faithful people guidelines and models of dialogue.”⁹

In the years since the announcement--that is, since August, 1996--the Catholic Common Ground Initiative has sponsored two major conferences, now known as the Cardinal Bernardin Conference. The first was on “The US Culture and the Challenge of Discipleship” (March 7-9, 1997) and the second on “Church Authority in American Culture” (March 6-8, 1998). News coverage indicates that those attending the conferences are too middle of the road to generate the kind of discussion that reveals and resolves differences. As one participant, Jesuit priest Brian Hehir said of the second

experience, using the analogy of a speedometer (and thinking in miles, of course, not kilometers), this gathering “is all between 40 and 60; there are no 20s or 80s.”¹⁰ It seems to be a perduring problem that the conservatives of the American Roman Catholic Church refuse to enter into dialogue with Roman Catholics with different understandings of faith and church.

Theological Fault Lines

Time will not permit that I consider all of the theological fault lines that have become public because Cardinal Bernardin and the Catholic Common Cause Committee rose to name the demons assaulting American Roman Catholicism and embraced dialogue as the way to healing. Here I want to consider only two. The first is a divide that will probably not surprise you. The second might. Well, on second thought, they both might.

There is no question in my mind that the effort to open discussion has revealed divisions among American Roman Catholics about the very possibility of dialogue within the church. It would seem that for some, what is possible abroad with separated Christians is not allowable at home within the family of the Roman Catholic tradition. It is a point of view that had been disclosed earlier in June of 1996, when Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco gave the Campion Lecture at Oxford University.¹¹ In that lecture, Archbishop Quinn responded to the invitation to “fraternal dialogue” issued by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*. The archbishop addressed issues that, in his judgment, create obstacles to Christian unity. In the course of the lengthy lecture, Archbishop Quinn considers the current exercise of the papacy; the Roman Curia—especially in relation to the episcopacy; collegiality in relationship to the teaching,

governing and sanctifying functions of the church; and subsidiarity, among other topics. The lecture raised a storm of criticism, much of it based on the assumption that it was somehow wrong for the Archbishop of San Francisco to do what separated Christians had been invited to do. (This phenomenon reminds me of what I have frequently said--and not always in jest: that the women of the Roman Catholic church should separate and form our own church so that we can have a dialogue with Roman Catholic church officials, especially at the Vatican.)

This notion, namely that a faithful Catholic can enter into ecumenical and interreligious dialogue but that it constitutes “dissent” when carried on within the church, is one of the unexamined assumptions causing a great deal of misunderstanding and pain in the American Roman Catholic Church. In fact, “dissent” itself has become a code word with which it is possible to tar a thinker who dares express an opinion in other than official language.

The distinction between dialogue and dissent is an important one. Equally important is the issue of whether all disagreement with church teaching is illegitimate.

Archbishop Lipscomb went to great lengths to understand the point of view of the critics and yet to rehabilitate the notion of dialogue in his opening address before the First Cardinal Bernardin Conference, an address entitled: “Dialogue: A Labor in Love.”¹² There Archbishop Lipscomb reminds the listeners of two important theological descriptions of dialogue, one from Pope Paul VI and the other from a document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*. Let me quote the words of Pope Paul VI:

In the dialogue one discovers how different are the ways which lead to the light of faith, and how it is possible to make them converge on the same goal.

Even if these ways are divergent they can become complementary by forcing our reasoning process out of the worn paths and by obliging it to deepen its research to find fresh expressions.

The dialectic of this exercise of thought and patience will make us discover elements of truth also in the opinions of others, it will force us to express our teachings with greater fairness, and it will reward us for the work of having explained it in accordance with the objections of another or despite his slow assimilation of our teaching. The dialogue will make us wise; it will make us teachers.

In an earlier response to the critics, Cardinal Bernardin was careful to say that the overture to dialogue within the church ‘no more legitimates dissent than does dialogue with other faith traditions.’ Then he leaves room for varying understandings of dissent itself by continuing, “In fact, the question of dissent in the church and whether it is ever justified is a complicated and theologically technical one, and our statement did not pursue it.”¹³

In a very important article on “The Church & Dissent,” theologian Richard A. McCormick identifies one position that sees dissent “as opposed to orthodoxy, as disloyalty, and ‘infidelity,’ as a denial of authority, as the cause of confusion and an attack on faith, as catering to fads and ecclesiastical careerism, as reflecting timidity in high places, as a cave-in to lobbyists, as inevitably involving the destructive notion of a dual magisterium [teaching authority] in the church.”¹⁴ In my opinion, that pretty much covers the waterfront.

The other position, and it is the one espoused by McCormick himself, believes that “Vatican II authorized a new critical spirit in the church, a spirit that lifted the notion of dissent from a suspect gloss in theological textbooks into the mainstream of Catholic life and polity.” The second stance toward dissent accepts it, then, as “a normal aspect of human growth in understanding.” These two attitudes are, as McCormick says, “transparent of a notion of church, what it means to be church.”¹⁵

The second theological fault line concerns just this last transparency: namely, the notion of church. It is remarkable to me that some of the critics fixed on the way that the statement, *Called to Be Catholic*, printed the word “church,” and on the choice of pronoun to refer to that church. Thus Philip F. Lawler: “Throughout the document which Cardinal Bernardin used as the basis for the CCGP, the Church is referred to as “it” rather than the traditional “she”” the word “church is rendered with a lower-case “c.” Such stylistic bows to secular usage might be overlooked, if they did not match the document’s approach to more substantive issues.”¹⁶ I think there is a whole world hidden in these criticisms.

For many of the most vocal critics from the right, the Church is imagined as a person and the person is female. They take this very seriously. The Head of the Church is Jesus Christ, Himself male, and the Vicar of Christ and all who stand in his stead must also be male in order to give bodily representation to Jesus Christ and his headship over the Church, variously imagined as his bride, his spouse, his body.

The effect of this imagery--and of a certain way of understanding the relationship between male and female in the church--is to shape an expectation that officials (the men, husbands, fathers) of the Church will be clear, firm, and unyielding in presenting the

teachings of the church. The very act of listening to faithful who have doubts or raise questions about these teachings is considered a sign of weakness and/or dereliction of duty. Thus the disdain for someone like Cardinal Bernardin who invites a dialogue in which such doubts, questions and even disagreements might be aired and given a hearing.

Critics who hold this view of the Church and of Church authority consider that Pope John Paul II has done exactly what he should do in issuing his papal letters and especially in bringing to fruition the universal *Catechism*. As Lawler says in the same article, “Here, in 2,865 meticulously formulated propositions, is an all-embracing, up-to-date statement of the fundamental truths which Catholics embrace. The definition of a Catholic “common ground,” which the Bernardin initiative seeks to construct, is already available for sale at your local bookstore!”

One news article called dialogue “the pastoral rather than the patriarchal” approach.¹⁷ I would rather say that it is a newly accepted pastoral model, one that allows for what women have known for generations: namely, that asking questions and even testing the limits is a way of growing up.

Sally Cunneen has written a most insightful book on the subject entitled, *Mother Church, What the Experience of Women is Teacher Her*. Note she keeps the standard usage that Lawler is so concerned to preserve, but turns it around a bit. That is, Cunneen thinks of the church in female imagery, but not as a bride or wife to be kept in line by the husband, nor of a mother who thinks of the faithful as children. Cunneen’s vision is rather of a mothering church that encourages her members to grow to full maturity. Listen to her words:

One reason the institutional church has had trouble turning over many functions to its people is because of motherly concern that her children will be confused. But if they are adults? There is still another difficulty. Part of the reason the church has had trouble accepting its full human identity is because it has excluded both women and the feminine values it wishes to preserve--caring, healing, helping others to grow--from its hierarchical organization and teaching office. Ironically, we have seen [that is, in the earlier parts of the book] that if mothers are to act more successfully for themselves and other, they need to be strong, to think clearly, to relate to the wider community, and to plan for the years after their children are grown. As women today increasingly press for personal equality in public and private life, they are also challenging the church to rethink its traditional commitment to charity. It is a matter of uncovering the contemporary implications of St. Paul's insistence that no gifts, neither prophecy nor speaking in tongues, matter so much as the ability to incorporate love into our relationships with others. By defining itself in opposition to the feminine, western culture and the church have at their best tended to "help" women, but have not listened to their wisdom nor seen their strength. Women's testimony suggest that such charity should not be restricted to people's physical needs, but extended to the psychological, intellectual and spiritual aspects of their development. The deeper implication of Vatican II is that charity today means helping the people of God become the holding environment for human growth that

good mothering provides. But this can be accomplished only by men and women who have restored mothering to their inner lives and outer work, who see themselves as sharers in the same process of growth.¹⁸

I consider this a description of what Cardinal Bernardin was trying to accomplish with his Catholic Common Ground Initiative. I would add that, to my mind, Cardinal Bernardin was indeed a churchman who listened and in his listening learned. Some of the scorn he suffered was because he took a more “feminine” approach to the divisions that afflict the church.

I have highlighted two of the theological issues related to the Initiative: does dialogue inevitably mean disloyalty? and how do one’s images of male and female where authority is concerned affect the exercise and expectations of that authority in the church?

I might note that these are not the issues being taken up by the initiative itself, but then all eight scholars who have presented papers to date have been men.

Let me bring this to a close by offering an opinion on the question of schism. The reality is that all of the twenty-five members of the Common Ground Committee, most of the critics I have cited--on the right and on the left--and those writing articles about this are all around the same age: late forties to early sixties. Young Catholics in the United States are engaged neither in the project nor in the issues. What I am pointing out is that no one has been very successful in passing on his or her version of the Roman Catholic faith to the younger generation. I can assure you, from teaching at the University of Notre Dame--which is a premier Catholic University where many students come from

conservative families--the level of religious illiteracy was appalling. On the other hand, most of the Catholic students practiced their faith--they just had little understanding of what they are doing.

It is the opinion of some sociologists and well as of bishops such as Archbishop Rembert Weakland that the vast majority of American Roman Catholics are relatively happy with the changes of Vatican II and with the way things are progressing.¹⁹ On issues that affect their lives directly, they have also followed their own conscience despite any attempts to make them think otherwise. I do not think there is the critical mass for a schism, especially if that is understood to mean that bishops would be involved as well.

The far greater likelihood is that, if efforts like the Catholic Common Ground Initiative are not successful in creating a national dialogue in the church, subtle shifts will take place that will make it impossible to recognize the Roman Catholicism that is practiced. Let me give but two examples. First: the way introductory courses are being taught at many major Catholic universities. The introductory classes are being taught by graduate students. Often such classes concentrate on the biblical revelation. Since a command of ancient languages is required for admission to most graduate schools and since fundamentalist Protestants produce large numbers of students who know these languages, Catholic graduate schools have many fundamentalist Protestants studying Sacred Scripture. When these graduate students teach the introductory courses, they pass along, not only their interpretation of the texts but a whole anthropology and theology that is foreign to the main lines of Roman Catholic contemporary thinking. As a teacher who wrestled with the results in the second course that such undergraduate students took, I can tell you that it is a serious problem. Graduate schools do not want to address it because

they have hired professors who want to practice their scholarship with people who can handle the languages, regardless of their theological persuasions. In fact, I am sad to say, one's theology seems to make little difference to the way scripture is studied these days.

The second example is the rise of home schooling among Roman Catholics. Particularly in the mid-West, Roman Catholics who want their children to have a religious upbringing but have little or no access to Catholic schools (or disapprove of the way such schools are being run) have gone the way of home schooling. I am told by those knowledgeable in the area that the majority of home schooling materials have been prepared by fundamentalist Protestants who began home schooling as a protest against the teaching of evolution and other such scientific approaches in the public schools. Literalism with respect to the interpretation of the Bible, a complete lack of appreciation for the sacramental principle, a vision of humanity that believes we are depraved and unable to do anything good without the grace of God, a worldview that drives home the belief that women were created subordinate to man and therefore are destined to serve them, no room for any kind of devotion to Mary--these are examples of the theological fall-out that concerns me deeply as I think about the future. Compared to what I believe is happening among us, schism would be clean and identifiable. This is much harder to see and know what to do.

I am convinced that addressing both of these issues requires people who are willing to dedicate themselves to the future by sacrificing some of their own interests to prepare the next generation. That is what religious sisters and brothers did for generations. We are only now coming to appreciate the systemic change they affected by

their lives of devotion and the confusion with which we are threatened now that we no longer have them in sufficient numbers.

I thank you for your attention and welcome your comments and questions.

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¹ *America* (April 18, 1998): 9.

² This catchy title is borrowed from Thomas J. Reese, S.J., who had an article of the same name in *America* (September 21, 1996).

³ All references to *Called to Be Catholic* are from Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb, *Catholic Common Ground Initiative, Foundational Documents*. Crossroads, 1997.

⁴ The Baltimore Sun Company (8/13/96)

⁵ *The Pilot* (August 16, 1996)

⁶ *Call to Action News* (September-October, 1996)

⁷ From an article by James Webb, "Bernardin Responds to Flak from Fellow Bishops," *Indiana Times* (8/30/96).

⁸ Catholics Concerned homepage: <http://members.aol.com/cathoconce/CalledtobeCatholic.html>

⁹ The whole of this text may be found in *Catholic Common Ground Initiative, Foundational Documents*.

¹⁰ Robert McClory, "So much common ground, debate disappeared" *National Catholic Reporter* (March 20, 1998).

¹¹ The entire text of the lecture is available on-line from the Eternal Word Network: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/OXFORD.TXT>.

¹² *CCGI*, chapter 5.

¹³ *CCGI*, p. 53.

¹⁴ *Commonweal* (February 27, 1998): 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶ *Catholic World Report* (October, 1996).

¹⁷ *The Chicago Tribune* (September 4, 1996).

¹⁸ Sally Cuneen, *Mother Church, What the Experience of Women is Teaching Her*. (Paulist, 1991), pp. 184-185.

¹⁹ See *The Search for Common Ground* (Our Sunday Visitor, 1997) for a study of one mid-West diocese on the question of what unites and divides Catholic Americans.