

“Taking the Hard Way Out: Evangelization in a Post-Christian World”

Talk for Annual Symposium on the New Evangelization at Benedictine College

Introduction

Let's face it: we are living in strange times. It's not just the corruption of morals, but even more so, it's the inconsistency of cultural values and the societal blindness that continuously leaves me scratching my head or shrugging my shoulders.

Cultural Blindness

There are many examples, but one still fresh in my mind was when the news broke of Hugh Hefner's passing last fall. Of course, he is commonly heralded as a protagonist of sexual liberation. One story I heard about him on the radio, though, spoke about how he was actually harmful to women. This caught my attention: I thought, finally they are catching on to how this whole supposedly sexual revolution has been harmful to women. I thought the story was going to feature women who had been victimized by the hyper-sexualized culture which resulted from such protagonists as he. How naïve of me. The report instead talked about how he personally mistreated women closely associated with him. And they acted surprised about this!

Of course, it was shortly after this that we began to witness the explosion of news stories about sexual harassment of women by men in all different walks of life: entertainment, politics, news media, you name it. The #metoo movement is now headline news, and has

remained so for months. But this is another really major head-scratcher for me, and perhaps for you, too. The whole point of these last fifty years of sexual revolution was supposed to be liberation. In his celebrated history of the city where I'm from, "The Season of the Witch," David Talbot describes how San Francisco radically changed in the 60s and 70s. In treating the subject of the infamous "summer of love," he cites the common refrain heard at that time. Sorry for the graphic language, but this is what those who were relishing their new-found sexual liberation were saying in "the city" back then: "everyone was having sex with everyone, and nobody cared." This was meant in a gleeful way: finally people are freed from the strictures and shackles of an oppressive moral code.

We have been witnessing a continuously progressive – or better yet, regressive – gender ideology ever since, one based on the idea that there are really no differences between men and women other than a few incidental anatomical factors. The idea was that women are now finally free to be just like men, and now with the development of certain artificial measures, they were able to do so in every way, including being able to get away with being just as sexually irresponsible as men. Sex is for fun, and now women can have just as much fun as men without the consequence.

That was the cry of the day. But somehow it didn't work out that way. Why is it that it's overwhelmingly women who suffer from sexual harassment? We don't really think of men suffering when a woman makes uninvited advances towards him, do we? The very

thought will draw a chuckle, because we all know that, for some reason, *most men really like that*. But it's a different thing when a man makes such advances toward a woman. For fifty years the culture has been telling us the opposite, and now all of a sudden women standing up in protest against it. I think this as come as a shock to a lot of men, given the unrelenting narrative of the sexual revolution. Everyone is admitting that this is a big problem, but no one dares to suggest that maybe it's this very narrative that is wrong.

And so the head-scratching continues. And I continue to see it all over the place. One recent example is an editorial that appeared in the New York Times just two weeks ago, in reaction to an announcement of the Trump administration about funding for a Title X family planning program. The author denounces as "retrograde" the idea that sex is inextricably linked with procreation, and instead asserts as inextricably linked women's "progress in America" with the availability of birth control. But is that not precisely that which engenders in men the attitude that sees women as objects of desire and to be used as such for their pleasure, rather than as equals in the human adventure who must be respected as having intrinsic dignity just like themselves? There is one point the author makes, though, with which I would agree: "women still have ... far to go in attaining full equality in the United States." The area of disagreement is what is meant by "full equality." I would have hoped that the barrage of reports of sexual harassment and assault on women in all sectors of society would have made that clear, but perhaps that was too much to hope for. I fear that confusion will continue to reign, for *society must*

acknowledge and affirm how women are different from men in order for them to be truly equal to men.

Lessons from the Body

I suggest, then, that we take as our starting point a matter about which there can be no confusion nor any room for opinion: biology. Think about the human body for a moment. First of all, right there, there is a tipoff: we cannot think of a generic human body, only of a male body or a female body. But in both cases think about how the body, whether male or female, comprises a whole complex of systems.

There is, for example, the cardiovascular system, the pulmonary system, the nervous system, the digestive system, the skeletal system, and so forth. Each system is, as we would say in canon law, “perfect.” That is, not flawless, but perfect in the sense that it has all of the means it needs to attain its end. So, for example, the cardiovascular system, in conjunction with the pulmonary system, is complete in and of itself: the heart pumps the blood which flows to the lungs where it obtains oxygen, and then is pumped out to the arteries into the capillaries and to every cell of the body, and then returns through the veins back to the heart and then to the lungs. So the body obtains the oxygen it needs. Same thing with the digestive system: it absorbs the food which has passed through the esophagus into the stomach to the small and large intestines; the nutrition is sent to the body and the waste is stored where it is eventually passed out of the body. And so forth. You get the picture.

But there is one system in each of the two types of bodies which is not perfect, not complete in and of itself, it cannot attain its end except with the assistance of the system of its counterpart, and which is why there is no generic human body: that is the reproductive system. A baby can be made only when the two systems are joined together in accordance with the way they were designed. And this goes back to the very beginning of creation.

As Genesis 1 tells us, God made them male and female. The very design of our bodies shows the complementarity that God intended from the beginning. Why did God do this? He could have designed us another way, He even could have designed the reproductive system to also be complete in and of itself just like the other systems of the body. And that is actually the case in some lower life forms. But the higher life forms, and especially human beings, God did not design this way. He designed the body to work in a complementary manner in order to bring new life into the world.

Sacramentality of the Body

Now, let's take it from the natural to the supernatural level: the body has a certain sacramental quality to it. The entire Catholic way of looking at the world is through the lens of the sacramental principle, which can be summed up as "the invisible made visible through the physical." This has to do with the power of symbol. Unfortunately, in our post-Christian age the idea of symbol – as with just about everything else of the sacred –

has been trivialized. Symbolism is seen as something superficial, other than reality, rather than that which plunges us into the depths of reality.

Yet, the human person has an instinctive need of symbol, and as desensitized as our society has become to the power of symbol, we still have remnants of this sensitivity in the culture. Just look at the debate over flag-burning: people on both sides of that debate know that we are not talking simply about a piece of colorful cloth. No respectful American, for example, would dream of tearing up a flag and using it to wash his car. And the debate has taken on a new twist with the controversy over NFL players who “take a knee” during the singing of our National Anthem. Why would this be such a hotly contested controversy if it were just a matter of a simple gesture unrelated to reality? You see, then, that the use of symbol has the power to speak to the deepest core of who we are like nothing else: our values, our cherished beliefs, even our identity, and at its most profound level, what we live for and are willing to die for.

It is logical, then, that the insight our Catholic faith gives us is the understanding that the body is a symbol, that is, a sign which both points to something greater beyond itself and makes that greater reality present: the body is a symbol of the totality of the person. So, for example, an attack on the body is an attack on the person, but it is not the only way to attack a person. There are other vile techniques, too, such as character assassination or humiliation. Wouldn't it be ludicrous, though, for someone to punch you in the stomach and then say, “I wasn't attacking you, I was only attacking your body.”

This is why the Church has always regarded the body with such great reverence. Indeed, St. Paul teaches that the body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). This explains, for example, why until recently the Church always prohibited cremation, and why the Church still prefers burial over cremation in celebrating the funeral rites. So if we look at the body from the standpoint of the sacramental principle, we can learn a lot about our human nature from it. We each have our own unique identity: every system of the body is complete unto itself except for one. But God created us for communion, not isolation: the one system that is not complete unto itself – the reproductive system – is the one that needs the complementarity of the opposite sex to attain its end, which is new life and the union of the spouses. This is how God designed the physical body, and so this is how we realize our spiritual fulfillment as well: a communion that is life-giving – ultimately, a communion with God that gives eternal life.

Applied to the Ends of Marriage: Complementarity of Primary and Secondary

We must, then, begin and always maintain a deep respect for the body, and honor it for the purposes for which God designed it. And here is where I believe we get to the root of the problem of so much moral and cultural corruption and confusion that Blessed Paul VI foresaw in *Humanae Vitae*. To be honest, I don't hear very much about this anymore. Just by bringing it up I risk stirring up controversy and probably being dismissed as, well, retrograde. But as I've come to understand: such is life!

What I'm referring to here is the time-honored teaching of the Church regarding the hierarchical relationship between the two ends of marriage, the primary end being the procreation and education of offspring, and the secondary end being the unity and mutual good of the spouses.

The Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, did not directly speak of primary and secondary ends, although one could infer it from its treatment of the nature and purposes of marriage. The pertinent passage is found in n. 48, which states in part:

The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their off-springs as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone.... By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. Thus a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love 'are no longer two, but one flesh' (Matt. 19:ff), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate

union of their persons and of their actions.... As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them.

So you see, a certain emphasis is placed upon the relationship between husband and wife, but not to the detriment of the first end of marriage; indeed, the phrase “ordained for” is used only in reference to the procreation and education of children. It is the relationship of the husband and wife to each other, though, which seems to have gained the primary focus in the post-Conciliar discussions, so much so that the revised Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983 to incorporate the post-Conciliar reforms, in naming the ends of marriage in canon 1055, which takes as its source *Gaudium et spes* n. 48, lists them in reverse order but without any mention of primary and secondary ends: “The matrimonial covenant ... is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring”

All of this leads some people to conclude that Vatican II *changed* the teaching, even though in actuality – as so often seems to be the case – the Council never said any such thing. Moreover, it is this very assertion that was roundly condemned by Pope Pius XII and the Holy See in the years immediately prior to the Council. The question of Church doctrine “changing,” of course, is material for an entirely different lecture. For our purposes here I will just point out what I’m sure is already obvious to all of us here: Church teaching does not “change” in the sense of contradicting what came before or

becoming something different now that it wasn't before; rather, it does not so much change as develop, whereby the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gains deeper and fuller insights into the truths always contained within the deposit of faith. How, then, do we make sense of the teaching in *Gaudium et spes* – and, for that matter, canon 1055, although the Code of Canon Law is not a magisterial document – in light of the consistent teaching of the Church prior to it? If you're thinking right now that I am leading up to proposing an answer to this question, you're right!

Continuity and Development in Understanding the Ends of Marriage

One profound example of development of doctrine is St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body, whereby he probes the nuptial imagery of Scripture that is so deep in our tradition, especially in the commentaries of the Church fathers, and brings them out into the light, drawing out all of their virtualities, and developing them with great insight into God's ingenious design of making us male and female. I'm sure that most, if not all, of you are quite familiar with this theology, and so you know that it is built upon his Philosophy of Personalism. Reading *Gaudium et spes* through this lens – and the document does seem to be animated by this philosophy – and with a hermeneutic of continuity with what went before, I would suggest we understand it this way: ontologically and objectively the procreation and education of offspring is primary and the unity and mutual good of the spouses secondary, but on the subjective level it doesn't work quite that way.

This is a reflection that comes from common human experience: psychologically, when someone sees a member of the opposite sex to whom he or she is attracted, one feels a spontaneous urge to unite with that person because of the attractiveness one sees in the other person, without first giving thought to children or, for that matter, any other consequences of such a relationship. That is to say, the impulse that one feels in this attraction is an impulse toward the other person and being united to that person him/herself, and not initially an impulse toward having children with that person (although this could be implicit in the desire for union with the person). However, this does not change the fact that God created us for giving life. This goes back to the design of the body: the reproductive system is designed for, well, reproduction. That is how babies are made (in the natural order, at least). It is also the only way that the two people can have a conjugal union, for conjugal love is comprehensive, on every level, including the physical, and this is the only way for the intimate physical union of the bodies to happen in accordance with the way our bodies are designed. But the conjugal union is realized not by an act of the body alone, as is reproduction, but requires the will of the two spouses as well.

The body is a sacrament (lower case “s”): if the body is designed this way, so is the entire human person. The primary end of marriage forces a couple to live beyond themselves, to live for another. They cannot ignore the demands that childrearing places on them (*someone* has to get up in the middle of the night when the baby is crying!). If they were to live primarily for their own mutual good, they could easily deceive themselves into

believing that they are thinking of their spouse when actually they are just satisfying their own desire. Viewed through the lens of the Philosophy of Personalism, St. John Paul explains this as “love of desire.”

He affirms this “love as desire” as part of the essence of love which results from our natural limitation and insufficiency as human beings, given that we can exist only as man or as woman. Our sex, then, is a limitation. Therefore, the man and the woman need each other in order to complete their own being. And this need for completion, he says, makes itself felt through the sexual urge. It is because of this that love as desire, more than any other kind, runs the risk of degenerating into the mentality of using the other person for one’s own gratification. One does not need to be an intellectual to realize that if one’s own immediate desires, what one “gets out of it,” predominates in the relationship, it can deform the love between a man and a woman and rob them of it.

This is one of the great insights we receive from St. John Paul. By pondering this in the light of, and in continuity with, the teaching that came before, we gain a further insight, namely, it is precisely by respecting the proper hierarchical relationship of the two ends of marriage that a check is kept on love as desire from degenerating in this way. This is why Pope Pius XII was so emphatic in teaching this truth of our faith. In his celebrated allocution to midwives in 1951, he said the following on this point:

Now, the truth is that matrimony, as an institution of nature, in virtue of the Creator's will, has not as a primary and intimate end the personal perfection of the married couple but the procreation and upbringing of a new life. The other ends, inasmuch as they are intended by nature, are not equally primary, much less superior to the primary end, but are essentially subordinated to it.

He then states in no uncertain terms that this is established Church teaching: "the Holy See, by a public decree, proclaimed that it could not admit the opinion of some recent authors who denied that the primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of the offspring, or teach that the secondary ends are not essentially subordinated to the primary end, but are on an equal footing and independent of it." He is quick to point out, though, that this in no way diminishes the importance or sanctity of the second end. He says:

Would this lead, perhaps, to ... denying or diminishing what is good and just in personal values resulting from matrimony and its realization?

Certainly not, because the Creator has designed that for the procreation of a new life human beings made of flesh and blood, gifted with soul and heart, shall be called upon as men and not as animals deprived of reason to be the authors of their posterity. It is for this end that the Lord desires the union of husband and wife. Indeed, the Holy Scripture says of God that He created

man to His image and He created him male and female, and willed ... that
'a man shall leave mother and father, and shall cleave to his wife: and they
shall be two in one flesh'.

It is precisely by respecting the objective hierarchical ordering of the ends of marriage that the couple will be led down the path of holiness such that they will realize their vocation of marriage in all that it is meant to be: a school of self-perfection. Or, as Pope Pius XI put it in his Encyclical *Casti Connubii*, which is really the backdrop to this entire discussion: "... it is a sacred ordinance that whoever shall have first subjected himself to God will, by the aid of divine grace, be glad to subject to himself his own passions and concupiscence; while he who is a rebel against God will, to his sorrow, experience within himself the violent rebellion of his worst passions" (n. 96).

Witnessing to the Hard Truths

I realize that this is a hard truth for some – probably many – people to accept. But that is my point: it is precisely the hard truths of our faith, those which the culture ignores and even despises, that have the greatest power to move people to conversion and be transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Or to put it more simply, and as it was more common to say in times past, it has the greatest power to "win souls for Christ." Indeed, only this has the power to bring about true conversion, in which one encounters the person of Jesus Christ, comes to know and love him, and thereby attain eternal salvation. Is this not the reason why Christ left a Church behind, to continue the work of

proclaiming the Gospel, to fulfill the “Great Commission” he entrusted to his Church before he returned to his Father in glory: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20a)? If this is not our ultimate end in life – each, of course, in accordance with his or her own vocation in the Church and state of life – then we have no place in the Church!

This foundational principle was put very succinctly but compellingly by our Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, in a conversation a year ago with Father Matthew Malone, S.J., president and editor-in-chief of America Media. Archbishop Pierre reflected on the first four years of Pope Francis’ Petrine ministry, which, he said, have been marked by “[e]vangelization, mercy, encounter and accompaniment.” But, he said, Pope Francis puts evangelization in the first place. He went on to say: “The main role of the church is to evangelize – to receive the gospel and offer it to the world.... The *raison d’etre* of the church is evangelization. It’s not a business, it’s not an organization or an association for the defense of Jesus, but a group called to announce God’s presence to humanity” (Beth Griffin, Catholic News Service, March 16, 2017; appearing in an online article in “America the Jesuit Review”).

So there you have it: the very reason the Church exists is to evangelize; not to antagonize nor to appease, not to pressure nor to placate, but to be Christ’s presence for others, so

that they might find and encounter the one Savior of the world and come to be saved. That is, winnings soul for Christ.

In his letter inviting me to offer a keynote speech at this Symposium, President Minnis mentioned that the Symposium takes “an interdisciplinary approach with a concern for practical application to evangelization and pastoral care.” I do not think that there could be a more timely strategy for us to adopt than, as President Minnis also said in that same letter, to “celebrate the fullness of [*Humanae Vitae*’s] teaching on marriage and family.” Talk about a “practical application to evangelization and pastoral care”! For those of good faith, who are willing to be challenged and think things through and search sincerely and objectively for the truth, a light goes on. We all have known people – and perhaps for some of you it has been your own personal experience – who have been won over by the surprising wisdom of the Church’s timeless teaching. Many grew up indoctrinate in the typical secular orthodoxy that is forced on us today – all of those myths of the sexual revolution I mentioned at the beginning of this talk – and were convinced of the rightness of it, only to learn that they were duped after discovering what the Church *really* teaches *and why*. Often this happens after they have done damage to themselves and others in living by the secularized code of conduct. Indeed, one of the most common responses of young people who are granted this grace of understanding is: “Why didn’t anyone tell me this sooner? It would have saved me untold suffering.” Such people make the most ardent disciples, and provide a much-needed witness for many “cradle Catholics.”

Strategy for Evangelization

That is why the worst thing we can do, if we truly want to fulfill our reason for being as Catholics, is to soften or downplay the hard parts of our faith, those teachings where we encounter the most resistance and even hostility in the culture. How could we do such a thing, if we are convinced that this is true, and for the true good of all people? Of course, we need to find a winsome way to present these truths; we must lead with that encounter to which Pope Francis is continually urging us. It must begin with a human encounter, where we value and affirm the other for their unique humanity, rather than seeing the other as another potential “sale” with the business attitude against which Archbishop Pierre cautioned us. But we must encounter them with the hope of being able to share this treasure with them in a way that will help them to become truly happy, living aware of God’s presence and in a way that pleases Him.

Ignatius Press will soon be publishing a book entitled, “Priests – What Lies Ahead? A Dialogue of Carlos Granados with Luis F. Ladaria, George Pell, Livio Melina, and Charles J. Chaput.” (As you probably know, Ignatius Press is located in the city of San Francisco, and that gives me certain perks with them, such as occasionally acquiring the manuscript of a great book before it is published!) Each of these four prominent churchmen offer their reflections on issues the Church is dealing with in the present time and will have to confront in the future. Among others, I was struck by Cardinal Pell’s observations on evangelization in the world today. He said:

I think in the Western world the alternatives are the model from the United States or the model from Germany and the low countries, Holland, Belgium. And the model from Germany is dying. Now what is the model from the United States? I think it recognizes that vitality comes from following Christ and accepting his teachings, given to us in the Catholic tradition. Too many are tempted to think that we will make better progress by modernizing, by adapting to the secular world. This would be catastrophic. We do not need to guess about the consequences of this liberal model. We have seen them in our Catholic Church: in Belgium, Holland, Quebec, and we see them in the liberal Protestant churches. They are disappearing.

So, for example, to think that you will increase the number of Catholics by allowing a few people to go to Communion after they are divorced and remarried is bizarre. Progress in Christianity comes from people embracing the cross. And through the cross you come to redemption and rejoicing and resurrection. Jesus did not have only success when he preached the gospel; he was rejected and crucified and assured us that the world would hate us. By preaching and accepting the cross, by our Christian witness of charity and forgiveness, this is the way to bring salvation to the world and come to the resurrection.

Bingo! Cardinal Pell gets to the crux of the matter – pun intended: the cross! So much of the rejection of *Humanae Vitae* and the whole body of the Church’s teaching on responsible parenthood is really a rejection of the cross. Our fallen human nature instinctively wants to flee from the cross, and yet, as he points out, it is the only way to salvation. The last thing we need in the world today are excuses for people to flee the cross. By embracing the cross, one grows in the virtue needed to, as St. Paul puts it, “be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21).

By God’s Providence, the timing of my making this point here is perfect: the season of Lent. If we take the fasting of Lent seriously and faithfully, whereby we deny our bodies or our feelings simple pleasures (which, although legitimate, might still not be the healthiest thing for us) – it provides a small but valuable lesson in this dynamic of the cross: we learn to do without, then it becomes kind of easy, and then (maybe even to our own surprise!) we actually grow to like it better that way. Such growth in enjoying a healthier way of life would not have been possible without first denying ourselves the pleasure, much like embracing the cross leads us to rejoicing in living out God’s design for our true happiness. But that always means dying to ourselves in those areas of our life that most rebel against this plan. We leaders in the Church would do a grave disservice to our people to give them excuses for taking the easy way out, such as misleading them with a false idea of what conscience means, or failing to assist them in forming their

consciences correctly. Much to some people's surprise, it's actually the hard way out that is the most effective evangelizing strategy.

Rather than excuses for fleeing the cross, what we need are creative new ideas to help people understand the wisdom and beauty of God's design, and on this score we Catholics in the United States have much to be grateful for, at least according to Cardinal Pell, for he holds us out as an example to the world of how to do things right! So if you're feeling discouraged being a Catholic in the United States today, take heart!

We must never fail to recognize the many lights of Church revival in our country, even as the Western world drifts away from the light of its Christian heritage to a new dark age. But this is not the first time this has happened. Throughout history, in times of darkness the Church has always sustained points of light that kept the flame of faith and learning and truth alive. We have many such points of light today in our country, and I certainly consider Benedictine College to be prominent among them.

Conclusion

Truth, beauty and goodness are the noblest part of our human nature, as we learn from the ancient Greek philosophers. They are also attributes of God, as we know from Scripture and Tradition. So the ancients' expounding on this teaching manifested *semina verbi*, in that they had an inkling of a supernatural truth unaided by the light of revelation: God created the human person in His image and likeness, and so has endowed us with these

attributes of His. Now tainted by original sin, we can reach the heights of the divine when we live in accordance with our original dignity aided by God's grace.

It is the truth, beauty and goodness of the Church's tradition that disposes us to the grace that makes this possible: her spiritual, cultural, artistic, intellectual and pastoral patrimony. The contemporary experience of the Church in our country proves that the more we lift up and imbue our communities with this rich patrimony, the more the Church thrives and is literally rejuvenated. What is timeless is ever young, and our young people know this! Thank you, Benedictine College, for being such an effective agent of this transformational rejuvenation of the Church in our time.

The final reflection I would like to leave with you is that, to appropriate and live out this wonderful heritage of the Church, there is a similar dynamic that goes on as with living out the two ends of marriage: this tradition is attractive, but to embrace it and live it out involves the cross. There is much death to self required if one wishes to live a good and beautiful life in accordance with God's truth. But this death makes possible communion with God leading to eternal life: directly beholding the vision of His truth, beauty and goodness forever in heaven, when He consummates for us the marriage of His divinity and our humanity that He effected in the Incarnation of His Son. And that is the end for which God made each one of us.