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I MUST FIRST OF ALL THANK Fr. McLaughlin for the warm kindness of his introductory remarks. It is, I assure you, my distinct pleasure to be with you at Fordham once again, after the passage of, alas, too many years. But I should add that the cordiality of your greeting leaves me somewhat breathless. After having at least cooperated in the decision which unceremoniously robbed you of two such splendid men as your former president and rector, Fr. Vincent O'Keefe, and your distinguished professor of ethics, Fr. Andrew Varga, I half expected quite another sort of welcome from you!

In the same vein, I confess I was not entirely consoled at the historical coincidence which one of your Jesuit historians pointed out to me: that we celebrate, in 1966, the four hundredth anniversary of the arrival on American shores of the first Jesuit to land here. His name, too, was Pedro, Fr. Pedro Martinez, but the natives seem to have been considerably less kind to him than you have been to me. They lost little time before proceeding to strangle and club him to death!

But we celebrate another anniversary today: our theme is a glad one, "Fordham: The University in the American Experience." That

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This address by Father General was delivered at Fordham University's 125th Anniversary Convocation on April 5, 1966. All quotations are from two documents of Vatican Council II: *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* and *The Declaration on Religious Freedom*.—Ed.

theme, I suggest, is remarkably appropriate for an American, Catholic, and Jesuit university, in an epoch which will probably go down in history as "the age of Vatican II."

For, comparing that Council with its predecessors in history, it is striking how clearly it manifests the Church's own care to scrutinize, attentively and sympathetically, how contemporary man "experiences" his world, and his own meaning in that world. Never before does she seem to have made so determined and protracted an effort to "recognize and understand the world in which we live."

That world, the Council notes repeatedly, is boiling with the dynamism of change. Psychology, history, anthropology, the whole array of sciences so invite contemporary man to "see things in their mutable and evolutionary aspects," that mankind in general has gradually passed from "a static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one." We can, in our time, quite literally speak of having entered "a new age of human history" in which industrialization, urbanization, and a host of other factors are day by day creating a "mass culture" bringing in its wake "new ways of thinking and acting."

The Church acknowledges the deep-seated problems which inevitably attend such radical changes. But significantly, she prefers to dwell on the positive features of our changing world. Not only has man's experience been altered in the past few centuries, but that alteration represents in many ways a significant advance, a "growing awareness."

The special focus of modern man's awareness has been the dignity of the human person, but it has taken time, indeed "centuries of experience," for human reason fully to acknowledge the exigencies of human dignity. Here too, the history of modern man represents a "growing discovery" of the rights which flow from his personal dignity, accompanied by a "growing consciousness of the personal responsibility that every man has." The Church rejoices at this "mounting increase in the sense of autonomy as well as of responsibility." She judges it to be "of paramount importance for the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race" that day by day more and more "men and women are conscious that they themselves are authors and artisans of the culture of their community."

Ours, then, is a changing world; a time when man's consciousness

of his dignity and freedom is constantly maturing; a time when man feels increasingly responsible for the progress of his world.

But, why, one might ask, this sustained effort of attention to the world of modern man's experience? Obviously, the Church in Council is anxious to revitalize the dialogue between herself and the world—but on what terms? Is she searching merely for a new language, a new way of communicating ancient, timeless truths to men of these latter days? She defines her perennial task as that of “scrutinizing the ‘signs of the times’ and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” But the care she brings to her study of the modern world suggests that this relationship may be reversible. Could it be that the “signs” of each succeeding time in history may cast new light upon the Gospel message itself? Do the various faces of the changing world reveal, in some measure, the changing face of Christ? Do they stimulate the Church to draw out of her ancient treasure “things both old and new”?

This is precisely what the Church is saying when she proclaims herself “truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.” She does not merely stand off and contemplate the march of history, she puts herself squarely inside the historical picture.

Quite literally, she “goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot as the world does.” She needs the “ripening which comes with the experience of the centuries.” She is “enriched by the development of human social life.” She profits from “the experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of culture” from every quarter of the globe and from every period of history.

Change, dynamism, history: these are not merely features of the world about her, they are the inner tissue of the Church's own reality. Enmeshed in solidarity with a historically progressing mankind, she points to the fact that the very message of salvation which God speaks to her is “spoken according to the culture proper to each epoch,” that she must accordingly use the discoveries of various cultures and the diverse philosophies they generate, not only to express, but even to examine, to understand ever more fully the Word God speaks to her, to penetrate ever more deeply into the riches of the constitution given her by Christ.

This is ultimately why she insists that the entire people of God

remain alert, "to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age"—voices, not only of pastors and theologians, but of "men of every rank and condition," of "those who live in the world" and specialize in various fields of human learning and activity, even of "those who oppose and persecute" the Church. Not only does she urge her children to judge those voices in the light of the Gospel, she suggests that they take the opposite tack as well, and strive to discern what those voices can contribute to the deeper penetration, fuller understanding, and more vital presentation of Christ's word to the world.

What the Second Vatican Council clearly implies, therefore, is that the Church not only passes judgment on, but *learns from* the "signs of the times." Those signs aid her to discern more fully the riches of the Gospel in whose very light she passes judgment. She learns not only *about* human history, but *from* it; and from it she learns in significant measure what she interiorly is, what her nature, what her mission is.

But all of this is founded on a mighty act of faith in the secular, human world as the arena of God's unceasing activity. The same belief that once led St. Ignatius to "seek God in all things," inspires the Church anew to "decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires" of the "men of our age." This means that she sees the world as God's world, bathed in the light of Christ, who even before the Incarnation, "was already in the world as the 'light which enlightens every man.'" She sees mankind in its totality as "constantly worked upon by the Spirit" Who "fills the earth" at the same time as He leads the People of God.

This is why she can affirm that believers, of every age and stamp, forever hear God's voice "in the discourse of creatures," that unbelievers, when they labor "with a humble and steady mind" to "penetrate the secrets of reality" are led "by the hand of God."

This vision of the world assures the Church that the Spirit who "directs the unfolding of time and renews the face of the earth" charges the word of believer and unbeliever, the discoveries of human culture, indeed, the entire scroll of secular history, with power to illumine "God's design for man's total vocation."

This, then is the vision which assures her she can learn from the world.

The faith underlying that vision is an ancient one. Nevertheless, the Second Vatican Council's affirmation of that faith is fresh with the spirit of renewal. The Church admits quite openly that not too long ago views like evolution, values like religious liberty, hopes like that of building a better world for man to dwell in stirred more suspicion than responsiveness in believers and theologians alike. Those who took such views and values seriously often felt obliged to turn their backs on a Christianity which seemed hostile to them. We believers must admit our share of responsibility for the "critical reaction to religious beliefs" which often accounts for "the birth of atheism" in the hearts of our fellow-men.

But such hostilities are, hopefully, in the past. Instead of bewailing the difficulties involved in reconciling the truths of faith and the progressive discoveries of science, the Church reminds us now that such difficulties can "stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith" itself. Instead of harping on the "unfortunate results" of cultural currents which so easily can turn into atheistic channels, she prefers to warn us that such results "do not necessarily follow from the culture of today, nor should they lead us into the temptation of not acknowledging its positive values."

However frequently in the past the values of human dignity, freedom, and autonomy may have been deprecated as *merely* secular, *merely* natural values, the Church proclaims "by virtue of the Gospel committed to her" that these are "values proper to the human spirit," that they "stem from endowments conferred by God on man," that they have "roots in divine revelation" and hence deserve more conscientious respect from Christians than from others.

Hence she urges her children to collaborate with the "dynamic movements of today" which foster those human values and strive to build an earth where they can find home and native air. The Church would have her children share "those noble longings" which inspire "the human family to make its life more human," and "render the whole earth submissive to this goal." We must show in acts that the religious character of the Christian's mission makes him not less, but more, indeed, "supremely human."

Our lives must witness that Christianity does not reproach man his ambition to "build the earth" as though he were setting himself as a "kind of rival to the Creator." On the contrary, the "triumphs of

the human race" are a telling "sign of God's grace and the flowering of His own mysterious design." The Church sees man's rightful autonomy not as derogated, but actually "re-established—and strengthened" by the original divine commission to "subdue the earth, develop himself" and make the earth a "dwelling worthy of the whole human family."

Human dignity, human freedom, and the noble task of building the earth: the time has passed when Catholics might speak of these as merely human, merely secular ideals. The Church has made her attitude unambiguously clear: they are authentically Christian values.

But in taking this stand, the Church has also proven her capacity to learn: she has learned from modern and contemporary man's experience.

But more particularly, she has learned from that school to which the contemporary world owes so much: the American experience.

For without the American democratic experiment, dedicated to the proposition that "all men are created equal" and "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," how much longer would it have taken the world and the Church to recognize how sacred and central these rights must be, not only to the developed human sense, but to the Christian sense as well? Without the American experience of religious pluralism, how much longer would we have had to wait for the recent Council's *Constitution on Religious Liberty*?

That document is highly regarded. With a fraternal pride I know you will not hold against me, I salute with you the role of that patient, strong, and courageous thinker we have with us here today, Fr. John Courtney Murray. It really represents the peculiar contribution of the entire American people; it puts the seal on a central strand of experience itself.

But what is true of the Church's renewed affirmation of religious liberty and human dignity, is true as well, *mutatis mutandis*, of her rededication to the task of "building the earth" into a better home for man. For this creative dynamism has been, since the frontier days, the very tissue of America's unique national adventure. From this pioneer people the entire world has learned to take that task seriously, envisage its possibilities imaginatively, attack it ingen-

iously, so that each succeeding generation may hope to leave the material world which God created "very good," an even better place than they found it at their coming.

From the modern world, and from the American experience, the Church has, I repeat, learned. She will, and, as must Fordham University, continue to learn from that experience—to learn from it, but also to contribute to its healthy development.

I cannot here envision the task of sketching the lines your learning, and your contribution, must follow. Even the Church in Council claims at times to set forth only "certain general principles" drawn from the word of God "without always having at hand the solution to particular problems." At points she feels obliged to leave her program "but a general one . . . and deliberately so, given the immense variety of situations and forms of human culture" and the "constant state of development" which enmeshes the questions she is dealing with.

I can but share the modesty of the Church's attitude.

But you will indulge me if, taking my stand once again on the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council, I propose certain "atmospheric conditions" which must prevail if your historic mission as a university—American, Catholic, and Jesuit—is to be fruitful.

The first of those conditions I can express in a single word: dialogue. The Church of the Second Vatican Council unambiguously represents herself as "stand[ing] forth as a sign of that brotherhood which [not only] allows honest dialogue" [but] "gives it vigor." Her mission requires that "we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the recognition of lawful diversity"—consequently, she urges all, pastors and faithful alike, to "engage in dialogue with ever abounding fruitfulness, resolving differences not by mutual recrimination, not by thunderous anathemas hurled back and forth," but by "enlighten[ing] each other through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity."

But this same "respect and love ought to be extended" to those outside the family of the faith. Her "desire for dialogue . . . excludes no one," embraces "those who cultivate outstanding qualities of the human spirit." It even includes "those who oppress the Church and harass her in manifold ways." Both "believers and unbelievers alike" are dedicated to the "rightful betterment of the world"—and she

sees that this end “cannot be realized . . . apart from sincere and prudent dialogue.”

Where better than in the halls of the university can such dialogue be fruitfully, responsibly pursued?

Where better can her theologians “collaborate with men versed in the other sciences through a sharing of their resources and points of view”? What better place for them to develop the skillful “use . . . not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences”?

Where better can her priests pursue the “unremitting study” to “fit [them] to do their part in establishing dialogue with the world and with men of all shades of opinion”?

What more suitable place than the university for the wider body of the faithful to learn to “understand perfectly” the “way of thinking and judging” shared by “other men of their time”; “to blend new sciences and theories and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with Christian morality and with the teaching of Christian doctrine”? Where else can her laymen learn to “act as citizens of the world,” equip themselves with the “genuine expertise in their various fields” that will enable them to “take on [their] own distinctive role” and “gladly work with men seeking the same goals”?

Genuine dialogue, however, calls for the second atmospheric condition: scientific probity. This includes a respect for “the rightful independence,” the “legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences.” It implies a recognition that each of the “human arts and disciplines” may and must “use its own principles and its proper method, each in its own domain.” The Catholic university may well examine itself: has it always been as confident as the Church that “methodical investigation within every branch of human learning, [when] carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, . . . never truly conflicts with faith”? Does the Catholic university really share her robust belief that the “earthly matters” which science investigates, and “the concerns of faith” all Catholics hold dear, really “derive from the same God”—that the findings of the various scientific disciplines point to the same “marvelous wisdom which was with God from all eternity,”—and became Incarnate in the Jesus of Nazareth, who speaks to us still through the continuing Incarnation which is His Church? That

confidence is an ancient one; it has always grounded the Church's unflagging esteem for faith's perennial task of seeking understanding. But never before has the Church more boldly summoned the university to renew, deepen, and act upon that ancient faith. I hope that Fordham will take the lead in answering that summons.

But if "the inquiry [after truth] is to be free, carried out with the aid of teaching or instruction," the "dignity of the human person" requires that each of us consent tactfully to "assist one another in the quest for truth." This supposes a third condition of the university atmosphere, freedom: the acceptance on the part of all that "within the limits of morality and the common utility, man can freely search for the truth, express his opinion and publish it." The Church in Council makes it peremptorily clear that "all the faithful, whether clerics or laity, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought and of expressing their mind with humility and fortitude in those matters on which they enjoy competence." It goes without saying that the special locus for such freedom of inquiry has always been, and must continue to be, the university.

For the Christian university's perennial task has been to insure the awareness, the talent, and the instruments whereby the body corporate of Christianity must do its thinking, bring its faith to self-reflective understanding, and devise appropriate lines of action in and upon both Church and world. The Catholic university represents, accordingly, a most appropriate organ for the Church's perennial function of self-study and reflection. The university must be free to analyze, therefore; and analyze not only false and ungrounded attacks upon the faith, but formulations, defenses and practical orientations which, in a phrase St. Thomas used centuries ago, only bring the faith into derision. This critical function she must exercise competently, responsibly, but frankly and honestly as well.

Such freedom to study and to analyze, she requires as a university. Where such freedom fails to flower, invaluable sectors of human experience are inevitably cut away, and the dialogue the Church must continually carry on with the changing world of human culture is seriously crippled. Then the university in question is no longer worthy to be called a university. Nor is it any more worthy to be called a Catholic university.

Only when grounded on the Church's robust faith in the unity of

truth, only when functioning in an atmosphere of dialogue, probity, and freedom—only then can Fordham as a Catholic university hope to form Christians of the stamp the Church requires: “men who, on the one hand will respect the moral order and be obedient to lawful authority, and, on the other hand, will be lovers of true freedom—men who will come to decisions on their own judgment and in the light of truth; govern their activities with a sense of responsibility, and strive after what is true and right, willing always to join with others in cooperative effort.”

Only when her faculty, her students, and alumni are men of this stamp, can Fordham feel confident she has lived up to her mission: the mission of sending forth witnesses to the Church as the truly “universal sacrament of salvation.” In their attitudes and in their lives they must show forth the Church’s heartfelt sympathy with “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted.”

Only such witness can invite the world again to believe that the Christian hope for mankind is one with all that is deepest, truest, in what once was called the American Dream, but now has become the dream of mankind itself.

In a very special way, I rejoice with you that Fordham has fully shared that American Dream. But I rejoice and am proud that Fordham has done more than merely share it. During the past 125 years, she has always opened her doors to the poor, the underprivileged, the children of immigrants, the “huddled masses, yearning to breathe free.” In a very real sense, Fordham has contributed toward making the American Dream a reality.

God grant that as she steps out on this new era of her history, Fordham may never lose contact with that past, but deepen and broaden her contribution till her effect is felt and the light of her witness shines to the ends of the earth.