NEW YORK ENCOUNTER X

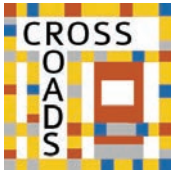
This Urge for the Truth

Proceedings of New York Encounter 2022

NEW YORK ENCOUNTER

This Urge for the Truth

This book contains transcripts, not reviewed by the authors, of talks given at the New York Encounter 2022



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New York Encounter 2022

A pandemic turned the whole world upside down. Millions of people died, and their relatives and friends have had to cope with suffering and death. Nobody could avoid, at least for one moment, some radical questions: Why do we have to suffer and die? What is the meaning of all of this? Is there nothing I can do? What can I rely on? Feeling ill at ease, we moved on to less unsettling questions: Is Covid really dangerous? Are masks necessary? Should vaccination be mandatory? For many of us, our political affiliations provided "answers" to these questions, inviting us to follow a party line rather than search for the truth.

This same dynamic, fueled by the media and online communities we choose to trust, happens all the time in our public life: whether the election was fair or stolen; whether a demonstration was a protest or a riot; whether racism is systemic; whether gender is related to biological sex; whether climate change is real. It seems we live in different worlds, each with its own "truths" that often spare us the hard work of seeking the truth. But at what price?

Reality no longer surprises us. It is twisted to fit to our interpretations, and its meaning is purely subjective. Its impact does not open questions which would set us on a journey and, after a while, even the most tragic events do not change our minds. As a result, we feel both trapped in our certitudes and afraid of the unexpected. We are left dissatisfied, with the nagging feeling that we are losing ourselves. And yet, a subtle, relentless desire for what is true remains.

Can we ever know what is real and who is trustworthy? Why does truth matter? And how can we reach it?

"One day the wanderer slammed a door shut behind him, came to a halt, and wept. Then he said: 'This penchant and urge for what is true, real, non-apparent, certain - how I hate it!"

- Friedrich Nietzsche, The Joyous Science


This World is not Conclusion
- Emily Dickinson-
This World is not Conclusion.
A Species stands beyond -
Invisible, as Music -
But positive, as Sound -
It beckons, and it baffles -
Philosophy, dont know -
And through a Riddle, at the last -
Sagacity, must go -
To guess it, puzzles scholars -
To gain it, Men have borne
Contempt of Generations
And Crucifixion, shown -
Faith slips - and laughs, and rallies -
Blushes, if any see -
Plucks at a twig of Evidence -
And asks a Vane, the way -
Much Gesture, from the Pulpit -
Strong Hallelujahs roll -
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
That nibbles at the soul -

"The Tooth That Nibbles at the Soul" (Emily Dickinson)

The Encounter opens with poetry and music, with ***Matthew Cossack****, baritone,* ***Andrea Domenici****, jazz pianist,* ***Radoslava Jasik****, classical pianist, and* ***Vaneese Thomas****, singer*

Introduction

Our being—what the Bible calls "heart," that is, courage, tenacity, shrewdness, effort—is a thirst for truth and happiness. There is no work, from the humble one of the housewife to the brilliant one of the designer, that can escape this reference in search of full satisfaction, of human fulfillment: thirst for truth, which starts from curiosity to delve into the mysterious enigma of search and thirst for happiness, which starts from instinct and expands to that dignified concreteness that alone saves instinct from being corrupted into a false and ephemeral breath. It is this heart that mobilizes anyone, whatever business they carry out. All life is obligated by this logic: there is no other source of energy that obliges and enables more than this one to look after the work in which one is committed, in its even more minute aspects.

Desire is like the spark that starts the engine. All human movements arise from this phenomenon, from this constitutive dynamism of the person. Desire turns on the engine of the person. And then one starts to look for a job, to look for a woman or a man, starts to look for a more comfortable chair and a more decent residence. One gets interested in why some have and some others do not have, why some are treated in a certain way and this person is not. All of this happens precisely by virtue of the enlargement, the widening, the ripening of these stimuli that one has within and the Bible globally calls

"heart"—and that I would also call "reason." And, in some way, there is no reason without affection being awakened.

~ Fr. Luigi Giussani, excerpt from *L'io, il potere e le opere*

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Music plays

Der Wanderer, poem by Georg Philipp Schmidt von Lübeck.
Music by Franz Schubert.

The Wanderer
(English Translation)

I come from the mountains;
the valley steams, the ocean roars.
I wander, silent and joyless,
and my sighs for ever ask: Where?

Here the sun seems so cold,
the blossom faded, life old,
and men's words mere hollow noise;
I am a stranger everywhere.

Where are you, my beloved land?
Sought, dreamt of, yet never known!
The land so green with hope,
the land where my roses bloom,

Where my friends walk,
where my dead ones rise again,
the land that speaks my tongue,
O land, where are you?

I wander, silent and joyless,
and my sighs for ever ask: Where?
In a ghostly whisper the answer comes:
'There, where you are not, is happiness!'

Reader: "One day the wanderer slammed a door shut behind him, came to a halt, and wept. Then he said: 'This penchant and urge for what is true, real, non-apparent, certain—how I hate it!'" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyous Science*.

piano music

Reader: *This World is Not Conclusion*, by Emily Dickinson.

This World is not Conclusion.
A Species stands beyond -
Invisible, as Music -
But positive, as Sound -
It beckons, and it baffles -
Philosophy, don't know -
And through a Riddle, at the last -
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Much Gesture, from the Pulpit -
Strong Hallelujahs roll -
Narcotics cannot still the Tooth
That nibbles at the soul –

Singer: Wayfaring Stranger

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger
Traveling through this world below
There's no sickness, no toil or danger
In that bright land to which I go
I'm going there to see my father
And all my loved ones, who've gone on
I'm just going over Jordan
I'm just going over home
I know dark clouds will gather 'round me
I know my way is hard and steep
Yet beauteous fields arise before me
Where God's redeemed their vigils keep
I'm going there to see my mother
She said she'd meet me when I come
So I'm just going over Jordan
I'm just going over home
I'm just going over Jordan
I'm just going over home

Reader: I had listened to Chopin's Prelude, *The Raindrop*, many times, because my father liked it. I began to like it too as I got older, nine or ten years old, because the main melody is easy to grasp and very pleasant. At first, the suggestive music of the main melody impressed me. But after hearing it ten, twenty, thirty times, once, while I was seated in the parlor, my father put that record on again. All at once I understood that I had understood nothing of what *The Raindrop* really was. For the real theme of that piece was not the music in the foreground, that immediate melody, so tender and suggestive. It was not the instinctive listening to that piece that brought out its truth. It's true meaning was something apparently monotonous. So monotonous, in fact, as to be just one note that repeats itself continuously with a few slight variations from the beginning to the end. But when you notice this note, it is as if the rest were to withdraw into the margins. Becoming as it were, a frame

to the picture. The picture itself consists only in this note that becomes a kind of fixation. And the "I" from the beginning to the end is struck continuously by this overwhelming feeling. That day I understood without being able to put it into words, I sensed what it was all about. I said to myself, That's how life is.

This piece of Chopin is so beautiful because it is a symbol of life. In life, man is struck by things that arouse his tenderness, by things that attract him instinctively, that he likes, that put him at ease, that are to his taste. In a word, what rules is what is instinctive, immediate, easy, overwhelming. And yet, life lies beyond the music in the foreground. It is a single note from the beginning to the end. From the time we are children until we are old, just one single note. Once you become aware of this note, you never lose it again. You cannot lose it again. It remains a fixation. But a fixation that makes you wise, knowledgeable, intelligent. It is this fixation that makes one human. It is the desire for happiness. That is the note that from the beginning to the end dominates and decides the meaning of the whole piece. That decides from the beginning to the end, what a person's life is—thirst for happiness. Whatever it is that you like that attracts you, that you desire, will make you happy for a moment but passes immediately. And yet, there is a note that remains intact, with a few slight mutations, but from the beginning to the end it remains profoundly intact and in its absolute simplicity, and its singularity, dominates the whole of life—the thirst for happiness.

That is the note of life. It accompanies me like my thoughts. Were I to remove it, life would lose its dignity. The fantasy of colors and forms in which life expresses itself would become a basket of shreds with no origin, no aim, and no meaning. For whoever no longer perceives this, reality becomes something trite. Whether it's a question of family, friendship, company, lineage, state, or people. All artists have the genius of recomposing and reproducing this monotony, which is more beautiful than any variation. If you listen to the prelude by fixating on following the note, it is as if you find it hard to breathe because you've got a sort of "overfull" feeling. So much so, that as the piece draws to an end, the note withdraws and the music in the foreground seems to have conquered, as if to say, at last, *We've done it*. At last, we're free.

And then in its newfound space, it goes ahead for three or four notes. But

just as you get around to thinking we're free, that fixation begins again and brings the piece to an end. The thirst for happiness, the destiny of happiness, can be obliterated and forgotten for a short time, but it comes back as an urge without which man cannot live. It marks the beginning and the end of the short passage that is our life. We recognize, we need to recognize that note in ourselves because the eye is like a piece of music made of that note. That has that note as its theme.

So, the things that catch our attention instinctively are the most superficial. Instant pleasure, instant enjoyment, instant success, first impressions, reactions, and whatever is instinctive, that note continuously destroys what is instinctive, and prevents you from halting on the way, from coming to a stop. Because what is instinctive in love and beauty, in your taste for work and success, fossilizes you, turns you to stone. It is that dominant note that shatters the stones and moves the whole of reality that is the time of our lives. It moves it as water moves the pebbles in a brook. As the sea moves the sand. So all the questions that a human being may ask, all the expectations he or she may have, end up in this note. The thirst for happiness.

music plays
Chopin, Raindrop Prelude (Op. 28 No. 15)

Riro Manuscalco: Our thanks to all the artists who made this opening possible. Of course, I had prepared something to say but, it's different. This year is different. Last year was even more different, in a sense. At times we find ourselves in the shoes of the wanderer, who silently and joylessly asks, "Where?" And a ghostly whisper replies, "There, where you are not, is happiness!" And yet, there was Nietzsche, who was not necessarily an optimist. [*audience laughter*] I don't believe in optimism myself, actually. Those who know me know I am against it. But what does Nietzsche, say? You may hate this urge for what is true, but it won't go away. Not even a pandemic can take that away. And like a tooth that nibbles at our soul, the truth beyond beckons and baffles, invisible as music, but positive as sound, writes Emily Dickinson. And then the final step we took: the deepest longing of a stranger who is looking for his land, his father, his mother, with the certainty that

they exist. It's not a matter of optimism, it's a matter of certainty. And it's the certainty of that heartbeat, that raindrop in Chopin's prelude, the heartbeat of life, the heartbeat of our unquenchable thirst for happiness, our urge for the truth. And we're here taking all precautions possible to run 2022 New York Encounter in person because of the certainty that we have that we can build on this desire. Tonight, we tried to open up the door; now there's a weekend in front of us, and we want to accept that there's a tooth that nibbles at our soul, that we can actually build something together with this urge for the truth. Desire builds. Desire always builds, and that's what we want to do, that's the invitation. Welcome to New York Encounter 2022, this is the invitation. Come with us on this journey. And again, thanks again to all the artists. [*audience applause*]

Politics: A Zero-Sum Game?

*Overcoming ideological divides in the political battlefield with **William Haslam**, former Governor of Tennessee, and **Dan Lipinski**, former U.S. Congressman, moderated by **Kimberly Shankman**, Dean of Benedictine College, Atchison, Kansas*

Introduction

The Encounter 2022 explores how seeking the truth in any human endeavor, and loving it more than one's own preconceived opinions, is essential in order to overcome ideological divides and restore a much-needed trust in each other and our public institutions. An area where the opposite seems to apply is politics. This is why examples of seeking the truth more than winning an argument and bridging the sectarian divide that dominates the political arena, even to the point of sacrificing personal power, are so important. Both speakers have long careers on the political front lines and will share stories of these attempts and their views about where to go from here..

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Kimberly Shankman: Good morning, and on behalf of the Encounter I welcome everybody—those here in person and those following us online. I'm Kim Shankman, the Dean of Benedictine College, and I will moderate this event. Before starting, I'd like to thank Benedictine College for its generous support in organizing this conversation.

I'll now introduce you to the speakers, but remind you that their full bios are available on the Encounter website. Bill Haslam is the former governor of

the state of Tennessee. He was first elected in 2010, and was reelected in 2014 with the largest victory in modern Tennessee history. Since leaving office, he's returned to the private sector and continues to be engaged in many local and national issues. He is currently the Chair of the Wilson Center and serves on the National Board of Directors for Teach for America and Young Life. He is also the author of *Faithful Presence: The Promise and Peril of Faith in the Public Square*.

Daniel Lipinski represented the third district of Illinois in the United States House of Representatives as a Democrat from 2005 to 2021. During his tenure, Dan served on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, as well as a Science, Space, and Technology Committee. He currently serves on the Advisory Council of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. He has recently published articles in *America*, *The Atlantic*, *First Things*, and *Public Discourse*, as well as op-eds in *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Wall Street Journal*. So, let's welcome our speakers and get ready for this conversation. [*audience applause]*

I prepared a question for each of them, to give them a chance to tell you just a little bit more about who they are and how they got here, so we'll start with Congressman Lipinski. One of the striking things about your background is that your father was also a member of Congress, and you succeeded him in the same district. I would like you to tell us what struck you about his job that made you want to follow in his footsteps; if you think the job is still pretty much the same as it was when your father was doing it; and if you knew then what you know now, would you have gone down that road? [*audience laughter*]

Dan Lipinski: I don't have a choice now do I? Well, thank you. It's great to be here. I want to thank Communion and Liberation for this great event. Professor Shankman, Governor Haslam, good to be with you. I used to warn people that I was a politician, and before that I was a professor who sometimes taught three-hour classes, so I can go on a long time. I'll try to rein myself in here. Just tap me if I'm going too long.

Yes, my father was a member of Congress for 22 years. But before that he was on the Chicago City Council, and I'll always remember that my father believes being in elected office is about helping people. That's the way he

always saw it, is helping people. Whether that's passing a law that helps people or helping someone individually. Watching my father, listening to him, that's what I got from him. And so I always thought it's a great thing to be able to help people out and be called to service. I learned that in church and at home. I went to Catholic school for 12 years. I went to Jesuit high school; the motto was: "Men and women for others." So service was always something I felt I was called to in some way. At some point I decided I wanted to be a teacher, be a professor. After two engineering degrees, I went and earned a PhD in political science and was that, and I thought that's the way I was going to serve. But I still felt that pull, because I always loved government politics. That's why I went for the PhD in political science. When my father retired, I knew I had an opportunity to run for that seat in Congress. I went to my wife and said, "Yeah, what do you think about me running for Congress?" And she was very much, "You know, if that's what you want to do," and so I felt called. I'll say I was moved by the Holy Spirit to enter politics. I'm certainly happy that I did. I served for 16 years in the House, until I was defeated in the Democratic primary in 2020, because...well, I feel it was because I stood up for the truth. I stood up for my Catholic faith, and what that calls me to be supportive of, and so I'm very happy that I was called to service. And now I feel a continued call to serve in other ways since I've left office.

Shankman: Thanks. Governor Haslam, before holding office you were a very successful businessman. Maybe you want to tell people how your experience of leading a company differs from being a governor of a state. What was the most rewarding thing about that difference? What was the most challenging thing about that difference, and if your children were looking to you, would you advise them to enter public service?

William Haslam: What you miss about business and politics is the definitiveness of it. You know you have sales, and you have expenses, you have margins, and that tells your profits. The numbers are what they are. In politics, it's so much more of a perception game. I probably served with a hundred different other people as governors during the eight years I was in office, the way term rotations work, and if I asked the general public who were the really good governors, you would get some names of the people who happened to be the most prominent, but they weren't the best. Like I said,

it's a perception-driven occupation, if you will. What's better about being in politics is this: it's the leverage to make a difference. So, when I was in office, we decided we were going to try to be the first state to offer two free years of community college or technical school to everybody in the state, and to set the program up so we could promise the mother of a newborn baby, "When that baby gets to be the right age, he or she can have free college." You can't do that in private business. You don't have the scope and leverage to be able to make those kinds of changes. And so that's what I love about it. My kids, the kids of politicians—they're drawn to it or they run from it. My children were all really quick to say, "That's your world. We're glad you're doing it, we're glad you've been called to do that." Would I encourage them to pursue it? I would. It's hard to compare the difference you can make, the leverage you have in public service to make a difference.

Shankman: Great, thank you. One of the things that unites both of you is you're both very well-known as politicians whose political positions are really influenced by your faith, as you alluded to directly Congressman Lipinski. I'm wondering if you can walk us through your decision-making process. How does your faith influence you on something really far away from a doctrinal issue? The example I was thinking of is the bipartisan infrastructure bill. How would you use your faith to help you decide whether or not to do that? Do you feel like you're called to be a person who represents the interests of your constituents, therefore you evaluate the bill in how it directly affects your constituents? Or do you think the job God has called you to do is more concerned with the long-term interests of the entire country? Would you say, "Even if this doesn't help my constituents or maybe even hurts them, I would support it anyway if I thought it was in the long-term good?" Let's start with you and then we'll go around.

Haslam: Sure. One of the points I make all the time is, if you are being a faithful follower of what you really believe, there are going to be times when you make decisions that make people on the Right mad at you and decisions that make people on the Left mad at you, sometimes in the same day. I honestly think if you're reading the Gospels and the New Testament the way I think you did, there's going to be things that make both sides mad at you, so you have to kind of accept that. But I think your question is,

What about those non-doctrinal issues, the things there are no clear scriptural admonitions about at all? How do you react? Well, the reason I ran to begin with was, there's a passage in Jeremiah 29: the Israelites are being held captive in Babylon. Jeremiah basically writes them and says, Get used to it, you're going to be there a while. And he says to plant gardens and build houses and have your children marry. And seek the welfare of the place where I have called you, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. To me, that was kind of what I said: I'm here to seek the welfare of the place where I've been called. So again, there are times when the Bible tells us we're supposed to be concerned about the poor; what's that look like in terms of economic systems? That's open for debate, right? But there are times when I thought, Okay, what's the best way I can seek the welfare of the place where I've been called?

Shankman: Okay, Congressman Lipinski?

Lipinksi: Well, I think one of the big issues that we face today is the divide in our country. It's a very different position to be a mayor or governor than to be a representative. When you're a representative, it's so much easier, unfortunately, for representatives to pass past the buck, and I don't. I'm an engineer and I look at the facts, the statistics; I work through that and reason through these decisions. A lot of times in politics, people vote for an idea, and I always say in the legislature that you need to vote for a bill, and you really need to see what's in the bill. I mean, first and foremost, we are elected by our constituents. We are there to represent them, and so the constituents have to come first. But certainly you don't do anything that's going to be detrimental to the country as a whole just to help your constituents. These are things where reason needs to come in. Reason, debate, deliberation—a lot of things are lacking right now in Congress, some compromises in order to help the common good.

Shankman: One of the things that would be interesting for people to hear would be an example of a time you might have said, "Okay, I'm going to follow my conscience on this one," and then it had a good impact. You know, your party was maybe pushing you one way or your constituents, but you said, "Well, my conscience tells me that I have to do something different." Could you tell us how that might have worked out for the good?

Lipinski: As a representative, it's hard to have an impact specifically with the one vote, but two things come to mind. I'll go through them quickly. One was when the Affordable Care Act first passed the House of Representatives in 2009. There are a group of us pro-life Democrats who held out our votes and said we will not vote for this unless you put in language that says there will be no funding for abortion or insurance that covers abortion in this new insurance program. And it was a battle to the end, but finally the House Leadership, Speaker Pelosi, had to give in and allow us a vote, and we were able to get that into the bill. I was very happy that we were able to succeed there. Unfortunately, when the bill came back, we weren't able to do that, so I hate telling that story because in the end it didn't work out. I'll always remember that moment, though. I said, "This is what I came here to do, to make a difference." I felt like I really made a difference at that point.

There's one other thing that comes to mind. I had a constituent who was going to be deported, and it was through no fault of her own. I went and met with her at the detention facility. The only way to stop it was to get the chair and the ranking member—the top Republican, the top Democrat on this subcommittee—to agree to stop this deportation. The chair of that committee was a very conservative Republican, Steve King from Iowa, and I had a good relationship with him. He was someone that a lot of Democrats did not talk to at all. Later on he said some things that were pretty awful—

Haslam: You're being kind. [*audience laughter*]

Lipinski: But I thought, This is part of my job, to have relationships with people across the aisle. This woman was not deported because I was able to talk to him and got him to look at her case. He didn't knee-jerk say, "Oh, this is an illegal immigrant, we need to deport her." He actually looked at her case because he knew who I was, and he knew and he trusted me. People never wanted me to talk about that because they said we don't want people to know that you were friendly with Steve King, but this woman now is living in the United States, she's married now, she's a citizen, and I was very happy that I was able to do that. And it was because I chose to have a relationship with someone who most other people in my party would have just said, Oh, you know, he's worthless; I'm just staying away from him.

Haslam: Unfortunately, some of the stories where you go against your

party don't always end up well. Like the congressman said, my experience on the Affordable Care Act actually played out in a different way. I remember it came up before the Supreme Court, asking whether it was legal to have a mandate to buy insurance; and then the Supreme Court came back and surprised everybody by saying, Well, the mandate's legal, but what's not legal is forcing states to cover this additional population because the states have to pay part of the cost. And so then it came back to every individual state to decide that. Our state's very conservative; President Obama at the time was not very popular, and Obamacare was not popular at all. Over a period of time, though, I thought there are some really good things that could really help our citizens if we could change some things in there, and so I worked really hard to get a bill, to get a waiver passed with HHS in Washington that would allow us to do some things that we needed to. I was so excited to finally get there and present what I thought was actually a conservative answer to this, but then we got smeared in the legislature. It lost in the very first committee, which is a bad way to lose.

Did it politically make sense for Dan to do something with Steve King? No, but there is a woman who didn't get deported because of that. If you're being faithful, there are decisions that are going to play out that way.

Shankman: Thank you for those answers, they're very interesting. Okay, so I know that both of you are very interested in this issue of tribalism and political division and divisiveness, and so I was wondering if you could share a little bit, sort of your overall thoughts and maybe some ideas of solutions about how we got here, what kinds of ways we can try and bridge these divides, and what kinds of messages of hope for the future you can bring.

Haslam: I'll go first, because that's why I agreed to come to this, to answer that question. Jesus always starts with us. If you think about it, when a woman is caught in adultery, he starts with the religious people that are there. When he goes to the temple, he's upset with the religious people, and flips the tables over and most pointedly says, If the meat's gone bad, it's not the meat's fault, it's the salt's fault. We're the salt. And if it's dark, it's the light's fault. When we look at tribalism and polarization, we have to start with ourselves. One of my biggest disappointments in office was that Christians were no different in the political arena than everyone else. As a matter of fact,

just as likely to say things on the internet that they'd never say in person. Just as likely to spread unfounded rumors or stories, and I can keep going. We're supposed to be different, but we're not. So I'd say let's start with ourselves. We have a certain advantage when it comes to this. We have a God who calls us to humility. That's one of the clearest things. "For God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." James says it, Peter says it—humility's all through there. And we can start with humility because we believe what it says about us, that "like sheep we all have gone astray, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of god." We can start with that because we know that we're broken people. We know that. That's part of our starting point, and so that needs to be our starting point in politics as well. Humility. And then the second thing, and the second reason I decided to come speak at this event was: our urge should be for truth. It's not to win the argument, it's not to score a great hit on social media, but our urge is to get to the right answer. That's our assignment. Not to win but to get to the right answer. If we would start modeling that humility and that desire for the right answer, then we might be salt that is worth more than being thrown out.

Shankman: Congressman Lipinski.

Lipinski: I really have to be careful here now. Everything the governor said, I completely agree with. I have to be careful because I spent a lot of time on this—I'm writing a book on this right now, the Catholic answer to our divided nation. Please don't ask me about it in a few months, because it won't be done for a while. But no, we don't have tribalism in this country, we have sectarianism. It fits all the definitions of sectarianism. It's a sectarian political and political/social divide. We have two sects in this country, Democrats and Republicans, Left and Right. There's a set of beliefs for everything from tax policy to the nature of the human person. We are constantly bombarded by this idea that we need to choose one of these two sets of beliefs, and if we step out of line—as I stepped out of line—then you're a heretic and you get punished. What holds these two groups together more than anything else is hatred for the other side. It's not love of the people in the group, it's hating the other side, and it is destroying our country. I know a lot of faithful Catholics look at the Left and see a denial of God, and of Christianity specifically, and really want to lash out and say, Well, that means we've got to join the

sectarian Right and use the same tactics that the Left is using. That's what we see going on. I think that's what the Governor Haslam is talking about here. As Christians, we're not acting differently. We are called to show people that neither the Left or the Right is correct. There is a better way, and there's a real need for us to get to this truth out and to communicate this truth. And sometimes we forget that we are called to evangelize the culture and not just to complain about the culture, not just tell people that they're wrong; it's to evangelize, it's to spread the Good News. It's not the job of the government. We shouldn't be saying we need to get control of the government so that we can force this. That's not what we as Christians have been taught from the beginning, from Jesus Christ. And sometimes we will be seen as losers in the world. Again, no one wants to lose in politics. I didn't want to lose, but I'm hopeful that my witness served a purpose. Saint Thomas More, when he was executed because he refused to acknowledge the king as the head of the Church in England, had the highest position in government besides the king. He gave up all that power, and then he gave up his life, and so he could be seen as the biggest loser there is, but his witness today is probably more important than it was when he gave his life back then. We also have to accept that we are sometimes called to lose in the eyes of the world, but to be witnesses. We are all a part of this, and that's what I love about this event this weekend. We all understand that call, and we need to get out there. It's so easy to fall into a trap, though, and just start fighting the other side instead of trying to really evangelize and change people, change the culture.

Shankman: I just want to follow up just a little bit because I think everyone understands that this is really crucial. Is this something that you see happening from individual witness organically growing through friendship groups or events like this, where people from all different perspectives of good faith get together and exchange ideas, or is there a policy- or public-oriented approach?

Lipinksi: Since that's a really hard one, I'm going to turn it over to the governor. [*audience laughter*]

There are no easy answers, that's the problem. There are some government policies that I want to change, no question about that. That would be helpful, but there are no simple answers and I think that's one of the problems that we

we're running into right now. There's this idea out there that there are simple answers. Oh, there's a simple answer for this problem, for that problem; if only we do exactly what I say. In reality, most of these answers are not simple, they're not easy. We also have to have an understanding that things aren't going to be done tomorrow. Having a longer view is something we have lost as a culture. We know what the end of the story is. How we get there, only God knows.

We're losing our institutions. People don't trust institutions. They're not joining institutions. Through my struggles in my last two elections, one I won and one I lost, I really found a group of people who were helpful to me. Not just in my political life, but in my spiritual life, and that is so critically important. This is what we are called to do, especially as Catholics: to really believe in community and in the importance of community.

Haslam: Great answer. I think that the important thing to start with is remembering who's not going to do that, okay? That is not the media's job; their business model is based on outrage. The madder I can get you, the more you're going to watch my cable news on loop, and you're going to click on that article, etc. The political parties, that's not their job, either. Their job is to elect people, and most folks who are in office, their job is to keep getting elected, so it's not going to come from there. I do think it's going to come from people like us, and folks who say, "I think there's a different way to do this and I really do have a desire for something different than this." You would be surprised—I think Dan will echo this—how few voices it takes to change a politician's mind. Good and bad. But I was shocked how often we'd be working on something, and one of our legislators would say, Yes, I'm with you, I'm with you on that, and then they'd get five emails against it and suddenly say, I'm sorry, I can't be with you anymore. My point is, I think when people take the frustration and exhaustion that we feel with this, and start to talk about that and start to have other like-minded people talk about that, it gives courage to other people who are thinking the same thing but not saying it. My answer your question is, I think it'll be more of a grassroots thing, but it helps to have groups like this one where people say, I was with 500 other people this weekend and there's a real latent desire to have a more aspirational, hope-based politics than just this outrage.

Shankman: Congressman Lipinski mentioned that solutions don't come tomorrow, it's a longer term thing. But people tend to think solutions are quick and easy. I don't know if that's just kind of baked into the cake of democracy and is always going to be a problem, or is there some element of constituent education that leaders can do to help people understand the reality of it?

Haslam: I think really strong leaders have a real desire to tell the truth, and by that I don't mean just tell the truth about their personal life, etc., but to tell the truth about our situation. Unfortunately, democracy doesn't always count the cost of tomorrow, okay? Like, if we do *that*, here's the cost to our environment. Or if we do *this*, here's the cost to our long-term debt. The consequences aren't ever part of the conversation. I'm kind of hoping there's room now in the conversation for people to go, "That works really well for now, but we need to think longer than now." [*audience applause*]

Lipinksi: I couldn't agree more with what the governor said. It's going to take leadership, and I keep hoping for a president we can see as a leader who is going to do these things, but unfortunately it's not happening. Someone has to step forward and really show—or a number of people have to step forward and show—a different way. These solutions aren't easy. That was the hardest thing in a campaign, going against someone who said, Oh, I have the answer and it's an easy answer, it's a simple answer, and Lipinski just won't do it. When I tried to explain, no, the problem is tougher than that, it hurt me as a politician.

Haslam: We're people who believe in grace, okay, and one of the things I learned in politics is this is way harder than it looks. Every year, the President of the United States, whoever it is, has all the governors and spouses to dinner. The president's cabinet is there and it's a black-tie dinner. It's a pretty cool deal. The Marine band is playing. But—it was Obama's last year—I was sitting next to a guy who had been a hardcore Democrat all his life and had been with President Obama all along the way, and I said, "What do you know now that you wish you'd known when you came here?" And he said, "I wish I'd known how hard all this is." He said, "I wouldn't have been nearly as hard on George W. Bush. Don't get me wrong, I still disagree with him. I disagreed with his approach on Iraq, but I have a lot more sense for how hard

these issues are." And I think Dan would say that, too. I'd say it. We look at what we've just been through with Covid and with everybody saying, Well, they got it wrong on this, this, and this, and I'm like, Hey guys, we were trying to figure this out as it went. Whether you are a school principal or are in Washington, if we start showing folks a little grace, maybe that might catch on. Maybe.

Shankman: Polarization issues also weigh really heavily on the people in office, like your story about Representative King. Okay, there are reasons, but it must have been very hard for him to know that he's a pariah, that people don't even want to talk to him, don't want to have anything to do with him. That must be an extra burden of political leadership, getting tagged as a certain kind of person. That influences who will talk to you. Do you have any ideas about how political leadership can be made more attractive at a human level so people don't feel like, If I take a step into this field I'm going to have a big target on my back for half the population?

Lipinski: I wish I had that answer, too. There's a fear of stepping out of line with your group. That weighs so heavily. I've always believed that people are more influenced by others around them than they ever admit. The good part of that is, we have the opportunity to influence people if we speak out. It's amazing how risk-averse politicians are. They're really, really risk-averse. A politician needs to stand up there and act like he or she is confident in everything, but then in reality they're really scared. You're always running scared. Neither side of the political divide shows any grace, and that's what makes these two sects so different from Christianity. You can't be fearful of falling out of line.

Political leaders are important. We have to support good ones and support the ones who are who are acting in ways that we are supportive of, not just espousing the right policies, but acting as humans. The politicians I really liked, who I got along well with, who were friends of mine, were the ones that would let you in a little bit and show their humanity. A lot of politicians never do. Vulnerability is the toughest thing for a politician, but to me, vulnerability gives me more trust than anything else, and I think that goes for all human relations.

Shankman: Thanks. Do you have anything to add?

Haslam: Not really. I mean, I think there's certain things that we as people of faith can bring to that discussion that other people can't. We we believe in both justice and mercy. We believe in love and truth, and I think we're equipped to have these conversations, or we should be in ways that other people aren't.

Shankman: Yes, seek justice, love, mercy, and walk humbly before the Lord.

Haslam: Right. And do all those. You don't get to pick two of the three, we're supposed to do all three.

Shankman: There you go. I think there's a number of young people here in the room, so do you have advice for them if they're thinking about entering public service?

Haslam: I don't want to presume to tell other people what the call on their life is, but I think we're all wired to want to make a difference. It is hard to compare the difference you can make in public life to anything else. Again, the multiplier effect is greater, and I don't know if I'll ever have a public service role again, but I'll be a little sad if I don't. I would tell young people to consider it. But even if you don't, even if you think you're not that person, then find other people, the right people, to help run. People who are committed to finding the *right* answer instead of just *their* answer. People who have a sense of humility. The thing that scares me is, I think more and more people are saying, "I'm just frustrated and exhausted and a pox on both of their houses; I'm out of here." And what you're finding in the country today is that Independents are actually growing. If you're for balanced debate, you might think that's good; but what it's actually doing is leaving the fringes of each party in control of the whole primary process, where people put up yard signs and put bumper stickers on their car and call people to vote and knock on doors. So don't disengage. This would be the message.

Lipinski: I agree with everything that you said. A lot of people disengage. I remember two people who came up to me and said, "I used to come to your town hall meetings, but I stopped because the last time I went, I thought a fight was going to break out." And someone else said, "Hey, I used to come to your town hall meetings, but I stopped because I wanted to ask a question last time, but then I was afraid someone was going to yell at me if I asked the

question." People, good people, have dropped out and left it to those who are more radical, those who then control both parties. That is a big problem. What we need to do is support those people in politics, in government, who are showing the right way, showing the correct way. That's the thing to do, and if you want to do it, be ready. It's a tough, tough life, but it is incredibly rewarding.

Shankman: Who is your political hero and why? Congressman, do you want to start?

Lipinski: Well, I'm going cheat and do two. I'd always say Ronald Reagan. I went to high school during Reagan's first term, college during the second term. I loved Ronald Reagan. The thing that really stood out, and still stands out to me today is: Ronald Reagan had his principles, but he understood he needed to compromise, and he would compromise to do something better for the country. To advance good policies, he was always willing to compromise. Ronald Reagan would have been kicked out of the Republican Party a few years back for many of the things that he did. I always very much admired that, and I think that is the way to go. Still, my hero's really my father, who got into politics to help people. He'll tell you he wanted to be somebody. And for him, to be somebody was to be able to help people. He always looked to do that and that really meant more to me than anything.

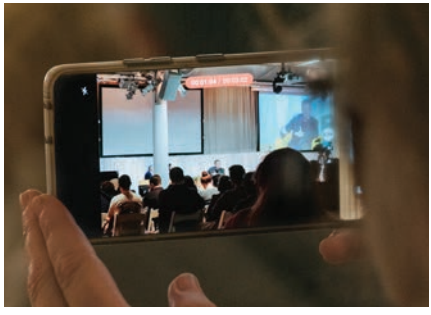
Haslam: If he gets to cheat, I get to cheat, too. I'll take two, alright?

Shankman: [*laughs*] Okay, if you must.

Haslam: Howard Baker was a United States senator from Tennessee. He became Majority Leader, and was Reagan's Chief of Staff, and then Bush 41's ambassador to Japan. Baker had a saying: "Always remember the other fella might be right." That's heresy in politics today. I mean, if you say that today, you know whoever's running against you in the primary will blast you, okay? But it's true, and it's how I think we as people of faith should approach the conversation. The things that become a big deal and a big argument, in hindsight people go, Really? That was a thing? In 1978, President Carter proposed giving the Panama Canal to Panama. Who owned the Panama Canal? Well, we did, and Baker voted as a Republican to give it to Panama, and people went crazy that he had done that. I know a lot of people think it cost him the chance to be president, which he'd always wanted to be. He

ran in the '80 primary and Reagan beat him. That was the first person I ever worked for in politics, and I was working for him during that time. This is pre-email and pre-texting, so the way you told your representative or your senator how you felt, you wrote them a letter. My job was opening mail, and it was like 20,000-to-1 against the Panama Canal deal. I didn't hang around with the senator all that much, but one time I rode with him on the little train from the senate office building to the Capitol and I said, "Sir, I don't understand why are you doing this?" And he said, "Every now and then you just have to figure out the right thing to do and do it." I said I was going to name two, but we're out of time so I'll leave it at that.[*audience applause*]

Shankman: Thanks so much to both of our speakers. [*audience applause*]



"Journalism is in the Service of Truth" (Oriana Fallaci)

*A conversation on truth in journalism, with **Patrick Radden Keefe**, writer and investigative journalist, and **Thomas Rosenstiel**, former executive director of the Associate Press Institute, introduced by a tribute to the late Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci by her personal assistant, **Elena Perazzini**, writer. Moderated by **Brandon Vaidyanathan**, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology, The Catholic University of America*

Introduction

Faithfulness to facts and truths has always represented the highest ideal of journalism. But in recent years market pressure and increasing politicization have undermined this ideal and damaged the social standing of journalism. Is restoring this ideal still possible? What is the future of journalism? What will it look like? Panelists will address these questions and present examples of professional journalism where factual truth was pursued even when it was inconvenient to one's career.

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Brandon Vaidyanathan: Good morning, and on behalf of the New York Encounter I want to welcome all of you—those of you here in person, those of you watching online. I'm Brandon Vaidyanathan, sociologist. Don't let that scare you. We're here to talk about journalism, and I'm moderating this session with two really distinguished journalists. I'm going to introduce them very briefly, but please do check out their full bios on our website. To my left is Patrick Radden Keefe, a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. He's the author of many *New York Times* bestsellers, including *Say Nothing: A True Story of*

Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland, and, most recently, *The Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty*. Tom Rosenstiel is a visiting professor at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, at the University of Maryland, and before that he was for nine years the Executive Director of the American Press Institute. He's the author of several novels, the most recent of which is titled *The Days to Come*.

We're going to preface our conversation today with a short video about Oriana Fallaci, one of the most important journalists of the past century. Her words, in fact, provide us with this session's theme. To introduce the video, we're delighted and honored to have with us Elena Perazzini, an accomplished author and documentary filmmaker who worked very closely with Fallaci for a number of years. So please join me in welcoming Elena Perazzini. [*audience applause*]

Elena Perazzini: Hello, good morning, and thank you very much for being here. When I heard that the theme of the New York Encounter was *This Urge for the Truth*, I first thought about journalism and, immediately after, I thought of Oriana Fallaci. She is one of the greatest, albeit controversial, Italian writers, whose greatest passion was the search for truth. Many journalists have dedicated their work to the search for truth. For many of them, the urge for seeking the truth was greater than the risks they took. Fallaci can not only be considered an example of that, but I chose to talk about her also because she's someone who left a mark on my life. Fallaci moved to New York in 1963 and lived here for 43 years, until two weeks before her death. This is where I became her personal assistant in 1999. My idea of her started to form when I was eight years old. My mom forbade me to read Fallaci's books, but one day I secretly read a small volume with a dedication in which she said: "To those who tirelessly ask why at the cost of suffering, even of dying." Since then, she has become a hero to me. However, my job interview with her in New York was a disaster. Fallaci ruthlessly attacked me, judging my life choices as a newcomer to New York after a few minutes of conversation. And there, I began to dislike her. To my surprise, though, the next day I was hired. The time I worked for her is not one of my best memories. I remember getting out of the office and bursting into tears while walking to the subway station. I also remember my boyfriend asking me why I kept going to work. Fallaci

was definitely short-tempered, but one day a little miracle happened. She invited me to her forbidden library room, and from that day on, meeting after meeting, she started talking to me almost as a friend. On that day she told me about her return from her first experience on the front lines of the Vietnam War. She told me about how she later wrote of her disillusionment, for her useless research for the truth, "a truth that I can't find but that is there, I know that it is there at the bottom of this well that I drill with the war, and I wonder if it's necessary to touch the bottom to find it—the truth."

Many of Fallaci's stories impressed me. All of her books were charming to me. I was very disappointed, though, by some positions she took, while others infuriated me. But during our conversations I remember being struck by a peculiar desire I recognized she had. She truly wanted to help me to understand life. She had the urge to convey what she had learned, to make her experiences useful to someone else. Her desire to educate extended beyond me. As a matter of fact, Fallaci started giving speeches to students in the late '70s but they were not published until years after her death, and when I read them I was struck because I could find traces of our private conversations in our library room. In a speech she gave at Amherst college in Massachusetts in April of 1976, she talked about World War II, when she said because of the lack of freedom real journalism didn't exist in Italy. Journalism only survived thanks to clandestine papers. Thanks to them, at 12 years old, little Oriana could know things that allowed her to grow and understand her rights. So, her idea of journalism is that it has to help people to find and preserve their dignity, to eliminate ignorance, and to give them the instruments to defend themselves.

Here is another passage that talks about the writer's purpose: "The writer's goal is the search for the truth that serves life. Without the search for truth, we writers cannot work because we lack the main ingredient of our cuisine—good food, truth that preserves life." Here is another passage that talks about the impact of information on society, where she underlines that the journalist must denounce wrongs, abuses, and crime. "He has to take a stand; he has to take a risk; it's his duty." Fallaci also talked to students about being independent as a journalist, and we can see what she has to say about it in an interview with Charlie Laws in the video that we are about

to watch. Finally, to summarize her view on journalism, I want to conclude with something she often repeated: "My work is wonderful as long as it is approached not as a job, but as a mission." Thank you. [*audience applause*]

video plays

Vaidyanathan: Thank you. Oriana Fallaci certainly was a remarkable, though controversial, figure, and she held opinions that most of us would vehemently disagree with, but we're here to focus on the qualities she exemplified as a journalist and their relevance to journalism today.

To start with, I want to ask our guests what drew them to become journalists in the first place, and do you find in journalism today the same motivating factors that drew you in to begin with, or have things changed? Tom, could you start?

Thomas Rosenstiel: Sure. My origin story with journalism is not unusual. I was young, maybe 15, and I volunteered to go—this is the early 1970s mind you—from my neighborhood all-white high school to an all-black high school as part of what was considered an innovative desegregation experiment at the time. I discovered pretty innocently that I was in the middle of a political maelstrom in my community that I did not understand, and that a 15-year-old could not solve. These things were very complicated. More complicated than anything I was learning in a classroom. And an upperclassman said to me, "We want you to come work for the school newspaper." I was bowled over that a senior knew who I was, let alone that he knew anything about me and wanted me to work on the school newspaper. So I did it. I really never looked back. After that first summer, I knew I would be a journalist. The guy who recruited me to do this, he joined the other side. It was Mike McCurry, who became a flack for Bill Clinton and many other politicians. I will just say this also: I teach journalism now, and the students that I have today, at a time when journalism is under threat, are motivated by the same sense of mission that I had discovered in 1971.

Vaidyanathan: That's great, thank you. Patrick?

Patrick Radden Keefe: I probably have a typical story, in that I did a bunch of things before I started working professionally as a journalist, but

it wasn't for a lack of trying. I went to law school, I went to grad school. I initially wrote a book, but I was always trying to break in and become a magazine journalist. It just took awhile because there's no standard process for getting in. It seemed like a mysterious profession to break into, but I had been reading *The New Yorker* since I was a kid. My parents had a subscription. I started reading it as a teenager, so it seems strange to say, but my initial aspiration was not to be a journalist of any sort but specifically to write for *The New Yorker*. And at the time people would say, "Good luck kid, that's great. Good for you." The quality I gravitated to was the magazine's literary approach to the writing. There was a way of taking some of the aspects that I enjoyed in fiction and applying them to non-fiction, but I think more particularly there was a way in which a big, long magazine article could take an incredibly complex topic and, in a way that felt rigorous, could also make it accessible, and accessible to me as a high school student in a way that I could sit down and spend an hour reading a *New Yorker* piece.

I was a first-year student in college when the O.J. Simpson verdict came down, which was a huge moment at the time, and one that exposed a lot of fault lines in this country. And Henry Lewis Gates wrote a long piece for the *New Yorker* called *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*. As a topic, it was like a political football. People on the news were arguing about it. You'd see newspaper coverage, but he just kind of thoughtfully talked to all these different people and looked at it from all these different vantage points, and just deeply changed my thinking on it. And I think I could appreciate the art, the artistry with which he did that, but also the idea that this wasn't a story for specialists. He was a professor, but it wasn't a story for academics. It was something that anybody could approach, and so that was what appealed to me and drew me in.

It took quite a long time for me to actually engineer the career that I wanted to have. There were a bunch of false starts, but I would say to the second part of your question: yeah, I still love that about it. In some ways, I feel as though complexity is what is often missing in the way we cover different types of stories these days, and it's what I still love. My feeling is, if you think it's a simple story about which you should have uncomplicated feelings, then you're not looking at it hard enough; complexity and nuance

are worth tackling, and worth tackling in a way that I hope is not forbidding and can use character and story to draw people in and really make them engage.

Vaidyanathan: All right, thank you. So let's get to the Fallaci quotation in the title of our session: *Journalism is in the service of truth*. To what extent would you consider truth a value in journalism today? Is it possible to love truth more than your own opinion? Tom, how's the value of truth shaped your own work?

Rosenstiel: This is something I've written about in my non-fiction books, which are about journalism, including one book called *The Elements of Journalism*, which gets at what journalism is supposed to do. It's a wonderful quote; you have to love truth more than your own opinion. I think that's actually a fantastic phrase for what the mission of journalism should be. The word *truth* has many meanings. What we are talking about in journalism is not moral truth or absolute truth; it is something I would call closer to practical truth, by which I mean we, police, do investigations and have trials and people are convicted, and we have legislation, we solve problems. That's the kind of truth that journalism is dealing with, right? What happened, what was said; you move on from there. Can journalism do more than facts? Can it aspire to more than accuracy? And I think the answer is yes and has to be yes.

Even in 1947, as we were coming out of World War II and dealing with our recovery from Nazism and Fascism and the efforts by the Nazis to use propaganda, there was a very famous commission called the Hutchins Commission, which talked about the responsibilities of journalism. How do journalists get to the truth about the facts? How do they add context? I think there's four ideas that help me with this. One is the idea that journalism is really a discipline of verification. You go out and you try and find out what happened, and that really is the essence of loving truth more than your own opinion. I think that also gets at Patrick's idea that you are not looking to confirm your preconceptions, you are looking to learn more deeply what happened. The second idea is humility. You need to understand, you need to be serious with yourself about, okay, I'm an aging white guy from California. I go into this with these preconceptions, and I need to learn I don't understand everything before I start. The third concept is transparency.

Show people how you did this; that's an important part of whether they will believe you. The fourth idea is that the kind of truth we're dealing with in journalism is provisional. Carl Bernstein once said that the newspaper is the best obtainable version of the truth today, but because of the real-time nature of journalism, even magazine pieces, we will know more tomorrow, and so the truth of something may not be found in an individual story but will be found over time as we get closer to the truth. Journalists assess each other, we judge each other that way. We say, Is he good or is she good? What we mean by that is, does the stuff hold up three, four years later? How close to true was it? A great writer whose stuff doesn't hold up isn't really held in high regard by his or her colleagues.

Vaidyanathan: That's fantastic. Thank you. There's so much overlap it seems with social science and what we try to do, and the provisional nature of that sort of work. Patrick, let's get to a more specific example. I mean your latest book, *The Empire of Pain*, in which you expose the truth about the damage done to society by one of the most powerful and wealthy families in the US: the Sacklers. How does a journalist pursue the truth when people won't tell you the truth, or when there are powerful interests conspiring to keep the truth concealed, while at the same time not succumbing to, say, confirmation bias, or just looking for those pieces of evidence that support your priors? And as you respond, if you could also give us a bit of background, especially for those who are not familiar with the opioid crisis, as to what it was and what the role of the Sacklers was in bringing this about.

Keefe: Absolutely. I should say, in terms of journalists evaluating each other, what you just heard from Tom was the product of a very organized mind, and now by contrast...[*audience laughter*] That was amazing. I completely endorse everything you said.

I wrote this book, *Empire of Pain*. We are in the grip of a terrible public health crisis that's been going on here for 25 years, which is referred to as the opioid crisis. It's a crisis of addiction and overdose deaths in which people are finding themselves in the grip of drugs referred to as opioids, meaning that they derive from the opium poppy. There have been different phases, so initially it was a prescription pill crisis. It was actually pills that were approved by the Food and Drug Administration that people became addicted to, and

were dying from, and then it sort of morphed into a heroin crisis, heroin being a chemical cousin of those prescription pills, and now more recently a fentanyl crisis, another street drug that is very, very deadly, and whose numbers are astronomical. Nobody knows exactly how many people have died since the mid-1990s, but it's north of half a million people. A hundred thousand people died of overdoses just last year, so lurking in the background of the coronavirus pandemic has been this other epidemic, which has had a tremendous and devastating effect on this country.

My book is about one of the wealthiest families in the United States, the Sackler family, who until quite recently were known primarily for their philanthropy. They've given hundreds of millions of dollars away to the arts and the sciences. In this city, if you were to go to the Met or the Guggenheim, or Columbia University or NYU, you would see the Sackler name on the wall. This was true in institutions in London, in Paris and Beijing, in Tel Aviv—all over the world. They were really known as a very wealthy, very generous family that was giving a lot of money away, but always wanted their name on the wing of the museum, or on the university lecture hall. What was not as well-known was that the bulk of this great fortune had been acquired just in recent decades, because in the mid-1990s, their pharmaceutical company, Purdue Pharma, introduced a drug called Oxycontin, which was really the drug that started the opioid crisis. Their company had set out to sell this drug and claim that it was not addictive to get doctors to prescribe it much more widely, and it was very successful. The drug has generated $35 billion dollars in revenue since the mid-1990s, but it also gave rise to a terrible public health catastrophe. When I started work on this project, which initially was an article for *The New Yorker*, people knew about the opioid crisis, and they knew that this company, Purdue Pharma, had played a really instrumental role in starting the opioid crisis, and they knew about the Sacklers, this well-known philanthropic dynasty—but they hadn't really connected the dots. The Sacklers sort of moved through the world. They were being celebrated, they were getting knighthoods, they were winning awards, they would be there at ribbon cuttings. Part of what I wanted to do was look at both sides of this story; look at what I thought of as the sordid origins of this fortune.

I wrote this book as a dynastic saga about three generations of the Sackler

family. It starts in the early 20th century and takes you through the dawn of medical marketing, because one of the earlier Sacklers made the first great fortune marketing Valium in the 1970s. But the family didn't cooperate with the writing of the book. And so the question was: How do you write a 400-page biography of a family if the family won't talk to you? Journalists refer to this as a "write around"; sometimes the subject won't talk to you, and so you have to write around them, and a lot of journalists and editors don't like these stories and won't assign them. We have a weekly ideas meeting at *The New Yorker*. Every few months somebody will say we should profile Beyonce, and everybody will roll their eyes and say, We keep asking her but she won't cooperate, and so they all say, Oh well, we won't write a big article about Beyonce. And of course my feeling would be: you could absolutely write a big article about her without her cooperation. What you do is you talk to everybody who knows her. You talk to people she went to elementary school with, people who she knew in her early years—family members, ex-boyfriends, etc. Anything is on the table, and it takes a lot more work to do that kind of writing, but I think that often the portrait you create is much more accurate than the one you would get if you just had access to the subject of your story. If it's a billionaire family like the Sacklers, though, it would be, "Come on in and we'll talk to you. I'd like to introduce you to these three lawyers who are going to sit here during the meeting, and here are our PR reps, and the whole thing is going to be off the record, but you can come back to us with the quotes that we'll approve." In my view as a journalist, if you submit to those kinds of arrangements, you're really doing PR more than journalism. In the case of the Sacklers, I interviewed more than 200 people. I found people who'd known the family, people who'd worked in their homes, people who'd worked at their company. I got access to tens of thousands of pages of documents that came out from court proceedings. As a journalist, you're pulling on all that to try and create a portrait.

Vaidyanathan: That's great, thank you. Fallaci saw journalism as having an educational mission, and the way she put it was that journalism has to help people find and preserve their dignity, and to give them the instruments to defend themselves. I see *Empire of Pain* as exemplifying these values. You're not just unmasking the Sacklers, and also the corruption of the medical

establishment and the regulators and so on, but you're also bringing to light truths that have been hidden—right? Stories of pain, of suffering; people that have been deceived and gaslighted for decades. What are you hoping your reporting will bring about? Especially since it seems impossible to bring the Sacklers to justice. Or is there something you're hoping the public will learn from your reporting?

Keefe: It sort of goes to your earlier question about the truth versus your opinion. I mean, particularly for the kind of writing I do, I have a point of view, and in this case I had sort of a theory of the case, which is this family has actually done a lot of pretty bad stuff and it hasn't caught up with them. They've never been forced to answer questions about this. One of the things that was really striking to me as I got into my research is that Purdue Pharma launched this drug in the mid-1990s, and almost immediately people started getting addicted to it, which the company had claimed they wouldn't and couldn't. People start overdosing and dying, and the company kind of pretended that it wasn't happening. And around 2001, when it had been a few years, the problem reached a point where they had to acknowledge there's a problem, but they made an incredible pivot. What they say is, Oh, the drug isn't the problem; it's the people who are the problem. These are people with addictive personalities and weak moral character. If they weren't abusing our drug, they'd be abusing some other drug. I mean, it's essentially: guns don't kill people, people kill people, right? It's not the product. I think this is a powerful idea in our economy, in this country. You can produce a product, it can do damage, and as long as somebody else is making some decision after you put it out into the world, it's not on you. Part of what I was trying to do with the book was create some measure of accountability—and I don't mean accountability in a law-and-order way; I mean accountability in the idea that you shouldn't be able to move through this world and never have to answer questions about decisions you've made that have had momentous consequences. But the flip side is that I've gotten to know many, many families who have lost people to addiction, and I think that the way in which we talk about addiction in this country is often quite cruel and often based on a notion that it's all about free will. If you know somebody who's struggling with addiction, really what they need to do is just get their act together,

and to the degree that they don't, then that's all on them. And what I saw was a concerted effort by an industry to destigmatize an extremely addictive class of drugs that was wildly successful; it made billions of dollars, but at the same time created a lot of havoc. I wanted to tell a story where people would understand it's not as simple as, "Oh, it's just a bunch of junkies out here abusing drugs." There are entrenched and extremely powerful corporate interests on the other side of that who have benefited lavishly from this terrible public health crisis.

Vaidyanathan: I think it is a great act of public service you've done. That book is really an essential read. There is a challenge, though. In uncovering such scandals, particularly with the pharma industry in this time of a pandemic, will people start to wonder, Can we really trust the companies that are making billions off, say, vaccines and vaccine mandates? Can we trust the CDC? Is there collusion? I wonder how might we, how might the public, navigate questions as to whom to trust?

Keefe: It's such a great question—this has been so awkward for me. The book came out in April, and in an early section of the book I tell a whole story about how Pfizer, in the 1950s, bribed an FDA official. It was a huge scandal, one of the Sacklers was involved, and there was a congressional inquiry. At the time when the book first came out, I had just had my first dose of Pfizer [*audience laughter*] and was eagerly waiting for my second. I think we have to recognize that Big Pharma is a profit-driven industry. The first consideration is actually not your health; people are not doing this for purely altruistic reasons. If you've been to a hospital recently, then you have probably experienced this. You start to feel like a widget: you realize that there are a lot of people thinking about money and that this is governing your experience in the hospital. The FDA has had really significant failings, and not just in the 1950s. In the case of Oxycontin, the FDA examiner who approved Oxycontin and signed off on all the marketing for the drug, subsequently went to work for Purdue Pharma for three times his government salary. I look at that and it seems, not necessarily illegal, but pretty questionable to me. You can be aware that we shouldn't take everything for granted, but not slide all the way to the other end of the spectrum and say, I'm not going to believe anything; I don't take the FDA's word about anything. Big Pharma

is out to poison me. I shouldn't listen to the consensus of opinion of doctors and experts who are telling me I should get vaccinated. I realize that we live in a moment in our culture where everything gets flattened to a bumper sticker of one sort or another, and this is the sense in which I feel as though the kind of writing I do, and the kind of writing that I think we cherish, is somewhat endangered, because there's a sense of, well, whose team are you on? Which side are you? Are you pro-vaccine or anti-vaccine? Should we trust the FDA or not trust the FDA? I think most of us, if you really engage with it, realize that you can walk through your life day-to-day and not be on one extreme of total credulousness, or the other extreme of total cynicism. That you have to take in the information that you get and make a solid calculation. But I think the vaccines are miracles and I think we should all get vaccinated.

Vaidyanathan: In our politically polarized environment, some see tension between pursuing truth and something like social reform. There are many who have really given up on truth and the possibility of truth, and there are some who think that objectivity is impossible. All you have is some sort of moral clarity that can come from your social position, from your social location, your ethnic group, your community, your political community. But if that's the case, all we're left with is a power struggle between groups trying to change the world to their own advantage. Tom, you've pushed back in your work against this idea. Do you think objectivity is possible in journalism? Can one be objective without abandoning their moral commitments?

Rosenstiel: I'm a defender of objectivity but I think it's very important to define it. It's a lousy word, because the opposite of objectivity is subjectivity, and we all have subjectivity. There are great debates in historiography and philosophy over what *objectivity* means. I think the first thing to understand is that objectivity does not mean neutrality, okay? Objectivity refers using an objective method to do your work. When the concept of objectivity migrated, in fact, in the early 20th century into journalism, it was precisely at a moment in time when people were becoming aware of the subjective after Freud. The unconscious was something that intellectuals were thinking about, and the idea came from intellectuals. It was a call for—in the words of Walter Lipman—a more scientific spirit in journalism. Think of transparency and you get closer to what the idea of objectivity was in these early days when

it migrated. Datelines: like, where were you when you wrote the story? This was an early effort at objectivity. Bylines: who wrote this? This was an early step toward objectivity. Fast forward to today in a much more complicated world. We might have lived in a time that I would call the "trust me" era of news. Walter Cronkite saying, "That's the way it is," and then he would give the date. "I'm Walter Cronkite, CBS News." We now live in the "show me" era of journalism. Show me why I should believe you. And that, I think, gets you closer to the idea of objectivity as a process, as a method that the journalist needs to show his or her work and how they arrived at it. Show their evidence. Journalists can never be objective, but their work can be if they used a process. I would say that Patrick does objective journalism. His books are not neutral; he has a point of view. The highest compliment you can pay a journalist is to say, I loved your book but I really disagreed with its conclusion. Because that means I've trusted the work and recognized which part of it was the interpretive part.

The other thing I would add is that when you see a piece of work that is really good, that's really strong, if I did disagree, let's say, with your concept of blaming victims, and I thought that you were wrong about that, there's sufficient evidence in the book that we can discuss it. We can talk about the evidence, so it's no longer an *ad hominem* debate about you being a bad person or something like that. If we throw out the word objectivity and ask whether or not the method of reporting is strong, you actually get to something closer to the original meaning of objectivity.

I'll just add this one other thing—I know I'm going on a bit. If you look at historiography and philosophy, the first step in the objective method is identifying what philosopher Thomas Nagle calls my *initial view*. In other words, instead of denying that I have a point of view, the first step I take is to say, okay, I am this person, this is where I start; how do I expand my view, talk to more people, and begin to understand the world more comprehensively, or the subject I'm talking about more comprehensively rather than just staying, going out and proving that I was right in the first place? That is the objective method. I wish we had a better word for it. I don't like moral clarity as a substitute because, like, the Proud Boys have moral clarity. They're sure, they're absolutely sure, and the more you know about something the

more complex it becomes, the less clarity you may have. I prefer a phrase like "moral inquiry" for what journalism should be, rather than moral clarity.

Vaidyanathan: Something else that Fallaci used to say is that a journalist without enemies is not doing a great job. She often disobeyed her editors, putting her career at risk. Could you talk about how speaking the truth or pursuing the truth has been risky or costly for you? Perhaps Tom you could start.

Rosenstiel: When you're a young journalist and you're going out to cover things that you don't have an opinion about, like the zoning commission, it's fine; it's whatever. But eventually, you will find yourself in a position where you're writing about people you like. You don't want to hurt them. You are covering a presidential contest and you like one candidate over another, and you think it's really important that one side win and the other side lose, and you have to wrestle with that internally.

When I was doing my very first book, I followed ABC News as they covered the 1992 presidential election, Bill Clinton's election. I was a fly on the wall inside ABC News. They gave me complete access for the year. I was sitting in a bar with an ABC correspondent who I got to like a lot and he said, "Look, you're going to have a real challenge this year doing this book, because there are all these people who like giving you access and you really like them, you admire them, and you're going to really feel like you don't want to burn these friendships." He said to me, "Just tell the truth." And I remember that night vividly and that advice, and he'd written many books, while this was my first. It sounds pretty simple, almost overly simplistic, but you know what you know. Those words, as simple as they were, they've stuck with me.

Vaidyanathan: Thank you. Patrick, you've had people—

Keefe: I've got enemies.

Rosenstiel: [*laughs*]

Keefe: Just a little footnote on that. You need to answer to the truth, and to the degree that you feel you are trying to shape the truth one way or the other, because of relationships that you develop, then you're cheating, you're not doing your job. As a consequence, at least for me, I'll spend six months writing an article. I really get to know people. You often end up in quite intimate relationships with the people you're writing about, and I think

inescapably some of those people feel as though it's a betrayal when they read what I write, which is hard. I've had situations in which I develop quite a close relationship with somebody I'm writing about, then the piece comes out and they never speak to me again. I think in their minds it's almost like I'm a con man, right? That I've suckered them into this relationship. I'm always at pains, all along the way, to say, listen, eventually I'm going to sit down and write my piece, and when I do I'm not your PR spokesperson. I have to call it like I see it and that's a hard part of the job. Another hard part of the job, if you do the kind of thing that I've done over the years, where you're writing about wealthy people behaving badly, is that they harass you. I mean, with this Sackler book they started threatening to sue me before I'd started writing. I literally was like, Can I at least start writing? There was an announcement that I was writing the book, and I got a 17-page single-spaced legal letter from a lawyer who was saying, We're going to sue you. I got another letter that said—it's called a litigation freeze—where they said, Because there's a high likelihood that we'll eventually sue you when your book comes out, you need to not destroy any of your documents, you need to hold on to everything. Don't throw anything away, don't shred anything because this is all evidence for the eventual lawsuit that may happen. We got so many letters—

Vaidyanathan: That came from the Sacklers?

Keefe: Yeah, from a lawyer representing the Sacklers. I mean, it was kind of comical at a certain point. I got dozens of these letters over the years.

Vaidyanathan: They told you to keep it off the record, too.

Keefe: Right, yeah. Hilariously, the letters at the top would say, like, "Off the record," "Not to be quoted," and of course you know that's not the way journalism works, right? I'm going to be quoting that letter, and I do in the book. There's a gentleman named Tom Clare, who's a—if you read a story about a powerful, wealthy person allegedly doing something really terrible, it's a safe bet that eventually, in paragraph 10 or so, they're going to say, "Tom Clare an attorney for this person." He really gets around. I kept threatening my wife that I wanted to wallpaper our bathroom with the letters I got from this guy. She wasn't into the idea. I mean, I'm joking about it and I sound cavalier, and I should say I'm speaking from a position of great privilege, right? Because I write for *The New Yorker* and I've been there for 15 years. I've been

with my editor at Doubleday for three books, for 15 years. There are lawyers I trust at both places. I went to law school myself. It's maybe a little bit harder to rattle me than somebody else, so I don't mean to sound flip. I think what is frightening for me in the case of the Sacklers, but I think this is actually true with a lot of very wealthy people and corporations, is I looked at the whole history of people who had less privilege than I do and less power than I do. I mean, I don't have a lot of power, but I have a little power. People who had less than I do. Journalists who were driven out of the business because of the way in which the company went after them, people who worked at the company and tried to blow the whistle, and they just came down on them like a ton of bricks. What I saw was a pretty finely honed system in which you get PR spin doctors, you get nasty vexatious lawyers, you get this whole apparatus of enablers who surround people. Listen: Jeffrey Epstein, Harvey Weinstein—the list goes on, right? We know these stories now, and after the fact people look back and they say, My God, how could they get away with it for so long? And the answer is that they have this infrastructure of people who in some cases are quite respectable. I mean these are people I went to law school with in some instances, right? Who think of themselves as just respectable professionals who are out there doing a job—everybody deserves a lawyer. I see mercenaries who are helping protect people who are doing bad things, so I don't mean to joke about it too much. It's a very unpleasant aspect of the job, but I also think that when I get a nasty letter like that, all it does is make me feel as though what I'm doing is important, and that I should not be cowed and not be intimidated, and it's all the more reason why I need to keep pushing forward. I should say the book's been out for nine months and they haven't sued me yet, so let's see.

Vaidyanathan: It's great if you want to be a journalist, just become a lawyer first. [*audience laughter*]

Keefe: I would not advise that, actually. It's a very expensive way to do it.

Vaidyanathan: In our polarized climate, trust in the media is at historic lows. Last year, one of our guests, Matt Taibbi, talked about how news media conglomerates have become rich by fueling these divisions, right? Many in our audience are likely wondering, Can we trust journalists anymore? Who

do we trust? How do we know whom to trust? What advice would you have for them?

Keefe: I would say trust *The New Yorker*. No, I think the Cronkite era is gone, right, and it's true that we shouldn't just take what journalists tell us as the word of God. You need to be questioning, yes, but find outlets that you do trust, and for all the reasons that Tom was talking about: objectivity, transparency. In my case, you can read my book—there's a hundred pages of endnotes. If you find a claim and you're wondering, How did he know that? You can go to the back. The vast majority of people won't do it, but there's an audit trail there that says you can trust me when I'm saying these things. Because I show my work. Find the authors, find the journalists, find the outlets that you trust and navigate it that way. Don't believe everything you read on Facebook. Keep pushing through, find the source and be a critical reader.

Rosenstiel: Journalism is no longer a homogeneous entity, right? There are many different models of journalism. I have friends who watch cable news and I tell them that's not journalism. Their economic model was to feed the outrage of the audience that they have built, and now they are prisoners of that audience and that outrage. CNN is in crisis because they don't know what they're going to do; they've wandered so far from basically providing news. The whole model there is to add to the lead-in audience. If you inherit an audience at eight o'clock that's this size, if you lose that audience because you're not feeding the outrage and giving them what they want, then you're going to lose your time slot. That's just the way it is. Unfortunately it requires a savvy consumer to find the places you like, but also to broaden your own lens. I make a point of reading *The Dispatch* and *National Review* and *The Bulwark*, which are conservative publications, and follow some conservative writers, so that I have a wider world than the one I start with. That's a lot to ask of a consumer, you know, and we are all prisoners of the platform. We could have a whole another session about how their algorithms are manipulating us to want outrage and to change our expectations of what journalism will give us. The idea that people want their preconceptions affirmed is what I call the journalism of affirmation. Facebook and Google, and particularly YouTube, have increased our demand for that exponentially in the last five

or six years. They've been found out and they don't care. They just don't care. Their economic model is built on manipulating you to stay, and they know that what will make you stay is making you mad.

Vaidyanathan: We're at the end of our conversation, so let's thank our speakers. Thank you so much. [*audience applause*]

The End of the *Pax Americana*?

The changing role of the US in global affairs and its impact on world peace and stability with ***Andrew Bacevich****, Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History, Boston University, and* ***Michael Desch****, founding Director of the Notre Dame International Security Center, and moderated by* ***Paolo Carozza****, Professor of Law and Director of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame*

Introduction

Since World War II, the US has played a key role in the global defense of freedom, stability, and peace. Several events in the past few years indicate that this role is rapidly changing. Getting to the real truth of things is more necessary than ever, especially in light of convenient falsehoods that have been sometimes used in the past to bolster support for misguided foreign policies. Are we at the end of the *Pax Americana*? What is the status of US foreign policy, its priorities, and future direction? How can American families' everyday lives be affected by these changes? These are some questions that will be addressed during the event.

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Paolo Carozza: Good afternoon, everyone. It's wonderful to be here with you, to see so many people gathered again and not be simply virtual as we were last year. It really makes me filled with wonder and awe to see you all here and to see you here for this wonderful discussion that we're about to have on the *Pax Americana*. I'd like to welcome all of you, not only in the

room, but those who are also participating online. My name is Paolo Carozza, I'm a professor of law and Director of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. This particular panel is also being sponsored by Loyola University, so I'd like to express my thanks to them for their support. I have two exceptional guests here today. To my left is Andrew Bacevich, who grew up in Indiana. I think maybe that's the most important thing, so we'll just stop there. Andrew graduated from West Point and Princeton. He served in the Army, became a distinguished scholar and teacher, and is now a writer and the President and Co-founder of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a Washington, DC, think tank. He is the author, co-author, or editor of more than a dozen books, the most recent one entitled *After The Apocalypse: America's Role in a World Transformed*.

To his left is my longtime Notre Dame colleague and friend, Michael Desch, who's the Packey J. Dee Professor of International Relations at the University of Notre Dame, and the Director of the Notre Dame International Security Center. Before arriving at Notre Dame, Michael was the Founding Director of the Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs and the first holder of the Robert Gates Chair in Intelligence and National Security Decision-Making at the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. He's published numerous scholarly works and many articles, also addressing a broader audience and not only an academic one.

Undoubtedly the one question that is on everybody's mind, because it's what's in front of us in the newspapers and urgent, is: Are we going to be facing a war as soon as today in Ukraine, and what is the US's role? But before we get there, I thought maybe it'd be useful to work our way up to that, because it doesn't come out of nowhere. This whole panel was conceived last summer when we first started talking about it as a way to engage the questions and the provocations that came to us in particular, witnessing the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent collapse of Afghanistan, and the particular way that the US and President Biden responded to that. Many of us asked ourselves, Does this mark the end of a historic era of the US's involvement in the world? It certainly seemed, as a result, that it's now better and more accurate to regard the US as a declining power in the world, and not as the unipolar hegemon of the world after the end of the Cold War.

Is that right? I mean, should we regard now the US as a declining power and, if so, by what criteria? How do we understand that to be the case, and what are the implications of that? If it is declining, how should it decline? Is it possible for the US to be a declining power in a way that is, let's say, graceful and constructive for the world? Mike, do you want to begin?

Michael Desch: I think it's accurate to say the United States is declining relative to the really unprecedented and exceptional position it had between 1989 and 1993. But I would resist framing it that way. I think the better way, at least to my way of thinking, is we ought to think about America becoming a normal power again. When you say *decline*, it indicates something that's really terrible and something that we should be fighting against. And while I think there is certainly a downside to the end of *Pax Americana*, I also think there are some upsides. But in any case, the unipolar moment that we've lived through over the past 30 years or so was always destined to end. It was artificial, and the world we're moving into now is the world of normal great power politics in my judgment. I don't know what you think on that score, Andy.

Andrew Bacevich: I think I would disagree with Mike in this sense, that the notion of a unipolar order, the claim that the United States was the indispensable nation, the claim that history had reached some kind of an end—that was always a delusion. The basis of the delusion was the conviction that, with the end of the Cold War, the United States found itself in a position of unchallenged ideological and military supremacy, and that that supremacy was destined to last forever.

My view would be that was always wrong, but those expectations did become the basis of US policy from the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall through 9/11, and arguably up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. That's when I think the evidence began to accumulate showing us that the Post-Cold War expectations were always fundamentally misguided and wrong. Now, in some respects I think the question of the present moment, a question for our political leaders, our political elites, is: Have you fellows and gals come to terms with that reality? Have you come to accept that, whether we call it decline or call it something else—have you come to accept the reality that no, this is not a unipolar world, this is a multi-polar world in which the United

States is going to have to learn to live like a normal nation? And I think the answer to that question is—we can't tell you.

Desch: I agree with you, by the way, on the delusional elements of the unipolar moment, and I think I picked that up very early on in many things that you wrote at that time. But what's interesting to me is why we were taken in by that delusion? It seems to me that it's undeniable that we were in a pretty good position militarily, politically, economically, etc. at the end of the Cold War, but why we believed that that situation would persist for a long time into the future is for me one of the big open questions.

Bacevich: Because I am the senior citizen among the three of us I can answer your question. [*audience laughter*] And the answer, I think, has to do with—particularly for members of my generation and maybe for the generation older—that there was an expectation that the Cold War was going to last forever. There was an expectation that this rivalry between East and West, between Liberalism and Marxist-Leninism was destined to go on forever. It defined international reality, and then, lo and behold, it ended without a shot being fired, without the CIA even seeing it coming. And I think the shock caused people who otherwise would have known better, to lose touch with reality, and so we ended up getting all this "end of history" gibberish. Now, hard on the heels of that event—remember, the Berlin Wall came down in the fall of '89—Saddam Hussein invades and occupies Kuwait, leading to Operation Desert Storm, which is falsely interpreted as one of the world's greatest military victories. So we have both the ideological triumphalism of the actual end of the Cold War, now combined with military triumphalism. It was a relatively small, third-rate war against a fifth-rate opponent, but nonetheless, it seemed like an enormous victory. I think it's those two things that combined, particularly in members of my generation for a time, to persuade people that a new era had somehow dawned.

Desch: We'd reached the end of history, right? We were the indispensable nation. Boy, those were crazy times.

Carozza: So much of the reality of the US being the unipolar power in the world isn't just vested in the raw fact of military might, it's invested with a sort of moral aura to it. It's invested with an ideology that says we're the indispensable power, not merely to maintain order, but to maintain a good

order; an order that is directed towards democracy, to the protection of rights, to a rules-based international order in which greater prosperity will be gained by all the peoples of the world. Is that also just sort of an illusion of that time or is there something left to that? Is it still the case? Has it ever been the case that the US has a distinctive moral role to play in the power that it wields in the world, even in this changing era?

Bacevich: Well, we've always believed that we had a distinct moral role. You go back to 1630 in *The City Upon a Hill*, laying a claim to a collective responsibility that we own as Americans, that we're called upon to fulfill with respect to the rest of the world. One of the really intriguing things to me tends to center on the meaning of the word *freedom*. We are the freedom people. We manifest freedom; we spread freedom; we defend freedom. And to me, one of the most interesting things is that we also constantly redefine freedom. And our definition, we believe, is the authoritative definition at any particular time. And again, speaking as the senior citizen among us, the operative meaning of the word *freedom* is a heck of a lot different today than it was in 1947 when I was born, and in some respects the definition today is an improvement. Sadly, in some respects I think it's gone in the wrong direction; we've lost sight of what the true meaning of freedom ought to be. Regardless, we manifest freedom and it's up to the rest of the world to get on board. That tends to be, I think, a continuing theme in our politics.

Desch: I think your question is spot-on, Paulo, in emphasizing that the unipolar moment was much more than just US military and economic superiority, that there was an important moral component to it, that we won the Cold War because we're better; because we're a democracy; because we had market economies; we respected sovereignty and human rights—unless we didn't, but didn't really talk about it. The thing I keep coming back to is one of the things that makes us great as a country: an element of morality that's an important part of our national culture. But I see it as a double-edged sword, because it also can blind us to some of our own failings and our own weaknesses, and so the triumphalism at the "end of history" not only led us to think that we'd be in the cat bird seat for a thousand years, but it also led us to think that the rest of the world would want us there. We had this sort of cognitive disconnect when Madeleine Albright was haranguing the

Europeans about us being the indispensable nation. We sort of said, it's just those Frenchies who never liked us anyhow, or when Rumsfeld was dismissing Old Europe for criticizing the United States following the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003. We assumed that there couldn't be anything legitimate there because we were in the right; we were on the right side of history. Our motives were pure, we were doing good things. The laws, the iron laws of international politics, especially balance of power, just did not apply to us. There's a lot of discussion—and I know I'm maybe running a little bit ahead to Ukraine, which you were saving for the end—but for me the original sin of the period of Pax Americana was NATO expansion. The evidence it seems to me is very clear, and it's from historians, Andrew, so I'm not just bringing political science into this. In the waning days of the Berlin Wall, the last Soviet Premier, Mikhail Gorbachev, had been assured that if Germany was reunified, East Germany could be part of NATO but NATO would not expand. It was never written down anywhere, but you know the track record is pretty clear on that. And throughout the 1990s, particularly during the first presidency in Russia of Boris Yeltsin, Russian liberals were telling us that if we cared about the fate of Russian democracy we would not expand NATO. And we sort of said, yeah, yeah, yeah, but we didn't believe it. We didn't believe it because we thought, How can the Russians regard the expansion of a democratic defensive alliance, to which people were joining as a result of their free choice, as a threat to Russian security? It just didn't compute. But the truth of the matter is that, in fact, many Russians, not just the kleptocrat in the Kremlin now, but many Russians of otherwise good democratic credentials, felt that NATO expansion was a threat to Russian security. And again, we couldn't see that. We couldn't see it because I think we were so convinced that we were on the side of the angels in doing this, that if they objected to it, they had to have evil or malign intent.

Carozza: It's interesting the example you use, Mike, because it's not just that we have good intentions, but the example that you draw on also suggests a presumption of unity with Europe around that. For decades, the Atlantic Alliance was seen as a unified western bloc, right? Unified around certain values as well, but that doesn't seem to be the case anymore. Part of what seems to be both the consequences as well as the drivers of the shifting US

role in the world is a more explicit fragmentation of what was considered the West and its values and its politics. Is that right? Is that the right way of thinking about it? And if so, what's behind that and how should we understand relations with Europe?

Bacevich: Well, I write about this in my most recent book, at least slightly, and that is, I think it's time for us to ask the question: Does the West exist? It was, in its time, a useful formulation, especially during the Cold War. It was useful to think of the United States as part of the West, as the leader of the West. I don't think it makes sense anymore. I mean, we are all witnessing a massive cultural upheaval within our country that is bringing about a vast redistribution of power, of status among different groups, and it seems to me that the—I don't want to get on sensitive cultural turf here—but during the Cold War and also during World War II, there was a presumption of white preeminence. The West was a white construct. That doesn't mean there weren't people of color in France or in Great Britain, or certainly not in the United States, but as a mechanism to exercise power to pursue interests, it was a white enterprise. I don't think that works anymore. Not only does it not work, it's also not in the interest of the United States to view itself and the international order through that lens. And so, to me, it is past time for us to rethink the relevance of that construct.

Desch: I mean, you're absolutely right, Paulo, that it's a less and less useful concept. I'm not sure I'm with Andy on the social piece of it, but certainly in terms of geopolitical interests the United States has decided at least since the Obama administration and probably before, that the great power, the locus of great power politics, is going to be the Pacific, not the Atlantic world. But also, what you're seeing in Europe today, in terms of the very disparate responses of European countries to the Ukraine crisis, is again a reflection of very different interests. It's no accident, comrade, that Germany is heavily dependent on Russian natural gas, and that they would have a different view on how to deal with Russia than some other countries might have. I think this goes back to a question that Andy had touched on about whether the people today in the administration are recognizing the new world. I mean, I thought President Biden did a courageous thing in moving ahead with the withdrawal from Afghanistan and following through on the agreement that President

Trump had negotiated, so I mean I give him a lot of credit for that, especially because he took a lot of heat for things I don't think he could have really done anything about. But what worries me about the Biden administration is that in many other areas, and particularly in Europe, they think that the way to deal with the Trump interregnum is just to go back to the good old days of Atlanticism. "America is back," you know, "We've got your back," etc. etc. And in a way, it was a little bit pathetic that that's how we were seeing the challenges of the 21st century, simply to repudiate the Trump approach—which probably deserves repudiation in some respects. But not everything the Trump Administration represented in terms of America's role in the world is necessarily wrong, even if a lot of it was implemented in a pretty ill-thought-out and ham-handed way. And so, the West is no more. Exactly *why* it's no more, academics like Professor Boscovich and I can debate over sherry at the faculty club, but it's gone. He's right, we agree.

Carozza: If the West is gone, or was always just a construct that was artificial and tailored to the circumstances, then who today are the US's natural allies? I mean, we've always thought it's the Europeans. It's the other democracies. It's the Trans-Atlantic Alliance and so forth. Are there countries, are there regions that we should regard as being essential partners of the United States in a more nuanced way of thinking about the way that world order has evolved?

Bacevich: Dating back to World War II, but especially dating back to the beginning of the Cold War, when that first Cold War generation—George Marshall, Dean Atchison, George Cannon, Paul Nitza; you could name two or three or four others—formulated a new national security paradigm that they viewed as relevant to the new post-war era. That paradigm was based on the conviction that the principal threats to the safety and well-being of the American people were way out there, they were far away. They were in Europe, they were in east Asia, and the appropriate response to those threats was military power. Therefore, it was incumbent upon the United States to build up great military power held in readiness to go fight way out there. The US Army units that are at Fort Hood, Texas, are not there to defend Texas; they're there to go fight, potentially, in Poland. And that was the national security paradigm that prevailed throughout the Cold War and into the post-

Cold War era. That's irrelevant, I think. From my perspective, the threats to our well-being and our security are where we live. What should we be concerned with when it comes to national security? We should be concerned with climate change. We should be concerned with pandemics. We should be concerned with porous borders. We should be concerned with a democracy that is suffering from a profound internal crisis. So, the national security challenges that we face—this is not an argument to ignore China, it's not an argument to ignore Russia or the Persian Gulf—but the primary national security challenges that we face are right here where we live. And that says that there needs to be an enormous shift in priorities so that climate change and pandemics and borders get far more attention, and then perhaps we devote fewer resources to being prepared to go defend Taiwan or Poland. I think that's the core issue that virtually nobody within the foreign policy establishment is willing to acknowledge, because their entire mind-set is one that says, "It's threats way out there that we have to prepare ourselves to address." I think that's obsolete thinking and, quite frankly, it's dangerous thinking, because it allows the things that threaten us where we live to go inadequately addressed.

Desch: I think Andy's right, and I think the threat environment we face is much more complex. I don't think a downgrading of NATO, and a downgrading of the U.S. military commitment in Eurasia indicates that Europe doesn't remain an important partner for the United States. It does economically, it does diplomatically, it does culturally. Likewise, there are other states around the world that we are developing important connections with. India, for example, or Australia, in addition to our traditional allies in northeast Asia—Japan and South Korea. I think many people wrongly say that anybody like me or like Andy, anybody who says the United States should be less militarily involved in the world, is somehow an isolationist. I think that's a canard, and it's also inaccurate; we're internationalists. We just believe that the United States has lots of other tools in the toolbox of statecraft that it can use, and climate change is a key example. There's no way climate change is going to be addressed except as a global issue. There's nothing we or any other country can do unilaterally to address climate change.

Bacevich: And I didn't answer your question, but the countries that

are most important, Mexico and Canada—those are the two nations on the planet with whom we should indeed have special relationships. One of the things that I never get over is our collective fascination with the British Royal Family. [*audience laughter*] Why do we care about Harry and Megan and Charles and Camilla? Why?

Desch: And Prince Andrew did you say?

Bacevich: Well, why is that? Why is that appropriate for the nightly news? I think that is an example of the way in which the old paradigm, where the threats to our well-being were far away, made the United Kingdom an especially important player.

Desch: The most pernicious manifestation of this Anglophilia is the dumb bust of Winston Churchill, which is either in the Oval Office or in a box in the basement. We ought to take this thing and, if it's metal, we ought to sell it for scrap and spend the money on some of the domestic problems. Fix the potholes on Andy's street up there.

Carozza: Okay, so let's finally put some of these more general things to the test in the specific case of Ukraine. I mean, one of the questions pressing on all of us, I'm sure, is simply the descriptive or predictive question of what's actually going to happen and what is going on. I'd love to have your informed views about how you think it's going to play out over the next few days and weeks, but more importantly than that, I'd like us to get at the question of: What does the Ukraine conflict signify for the role that the US ought to be playing? What does it mean to be still a global power, an internationalist, not simply withdrawing, but in a different way, right? How does Ukraine present an example of how the US might engage the world in a more constructive way in this new dispensation?

Bacevich: Well, I fear what it's going to do is, it's basically going to hijack the foreign policy debate, and will persuade elites that we're back in 1947, and that the number one threat we need to worry about is, again, way out there in Europe. Of course, in the present moment, combined with the other way-out-there threat, which is the People's Republic of China, and that will then become a rationale for the continued militarization of US policy, for continuing to emphasize armed intervention to solve things way out there, and therefore will be an impediment to the sort of large-scale rethinking of

US policy that is very much in order. Whether or not there is a war, I think the implications of this crisis are likely to be quite negative.

Desch: There's the Ukraine crisis, but I also think the potential crisis in Taiwan, in east Asia, illustrates for me the deep moral complexities of the issues at stake. Ukraine is a weak democracy, but there's no doubt that the democratic tendency in Ukraine is towards the West. Also, the Ukrainian assertions of sovereignty are in accord with international law. Likewise, as Taiwan has become more democratic, the sentiment towards independence has grown as well. The problem in both cases is that these trends are pushing us to confrontation with nuclear-armed great powers, and so the tension between what's in our interest and what's in the interest of keeping the peace and other moral values that we hold quite deeply, is becoming more and more acute. This is a world in which we need people who don't think in black and white but who think in shades of gray, because the moral elements of these complex problems are not irrelevant. On the other hand, just saying we have the moral high ground because we're supporting democrats in Kiev and Taipei against autocrats in Beijing or in Moscow is a dangerous sort of mind-set to have going forward. America needs to be a normal nation. We weren't a normal nation during the period of *Pax Americana*, and part of the thing that a normal nation has to do is make prudential judgments about competing moral concerns, and we haven't had to do that for a long time, but we have to do it now. When you think of how the political debates on these issues are conducted, especially in our country, you have to despair a little bit. I mean, where's the Castlereagh or Metternich thinking about how to rebuild the European order that was destroyed by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars? Where are the statesmen of that sort of sophistication? They aren't in Washington, and I'm not sure they're in Brussels or other capitals in the Western world.

Carozza: Certainly the capacity to—as you put it, Mike—to make prudential judgments about complicated and to some extent irreconcilable moral questions isn't merely a problem of our foreign policy, it's a problem of our political life and our public life. Prudence is the last thing one sees at many levels. How do you see the difficulty of our public life in the United

States as contributing to this difficulty of finding a prudent and positive role for the United States to play elsewhere in the worldl?

Bacevich: That's a huge question.

Carozza: That's why they passed it on to me. That's why they paid me the big bucks for being here.

Bacevich: I'm a Vietnam veteran, so everything I think and everything I say has to somehow relate to the Vietnam War. I believe that in many respects our country is still wrestling with the undigested consequences of the Vietnam War, and one important example has to do with the definition of citizenship and the extent to which citizenship involves not only rights and privileges, but also duties and obligations. One of those core duties and obligations, in my judgment, has to do with the obligation of citizens to rise to the defense of the country when the country is in need of being defended. I'll give you a 30-second simplified overview of US military history. The preferred American military system was centered on the concept of a citizen soldier, and when the nation was at threat or when the nation was going to embark upon some wild imperial adventure, it turned to citizen soldiers to handle that task. That was true in the War of 1812, the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II; citizen soldiers. Sometimes relying on volunteers, sometimes conscripted. The Vietnam War destroyed the concept of a citizen soldier. We the people decided that the antidote is the so-called all-volunteer force, which the founders of our republic would have called a standing army. This seemed to be a way to let us as citizens off the hook. No more obligation to defend the country while simultaneously providing a mechanism for the state, meaning the central state, to raise up and organize the forces that would enable us to continue to be the world's leading power. That's what an all-volunteer force seemed to do until itself began to fail, and it failed critically in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, which we lost, both of them. So here we are, presumably the world's most powerful country—God knows we spend more on our military than anybody else—and yet we lose. I think that is a fundamental crisis that we confront as a country, and more specifically as citizens, and what we're called upon to do is to think more deeply about what kind of military system is appropriate for a liberal democracy that also finds itself a great power. Virtually nobody wants to take on that question because

the answer could well involve sacrifice, and that's one thing that the American people are allergic to.

Desch: If I could just add one other bad development in addition to the shift from conscription to the all-volunteer force. It's also been the case that Congress is pretty much hoarse to combat in terms of war powers. We don't declare war anymore. Part of the growth of the imperial presidency during the Cold War reflected some of the exigencies of life in the modern nuclear age, but the real core of the problem is that it's not in the interest of most members of Congress to make hard decisions in terms of war and peace in national security. You don't get elected, for the most part, on those issues, but you can get hurt, especially if you don't support X weapons system and it turns out to be really critical or, even more important, that it could have been built in your district. The idea that Congress would be a check on the Executive and also a venue for public deliberation about the larger interests at stake in various uses of force has pretty much gone the way of the dodo bird. We have Andy's description of the warfare state, which has been a continuous theme in a lot of his work, and I think it's undeniable. But the roots of that problem are also quite deep, and ultimately at the end of the day it's like Pogo: "We've seen the enemy and the enemy is us." I don't want to serve, I never served in uniform, I don't want my kids to serve. I'm not calling my two senators or my congresswoman everyday and lobbying her on Ukraine or other international security issues. In other words, I'm not atypical of the American public, and so our troubles are deeply rooted.

Carozza: Let's see if we can, to some extent, push a little bit harder on this question of the US being a responsible international power—a gracefully declining power, perhaps, a wiser power with regard to its existential interests. China, in the view of so many across the political spectrum right now in the United States, does represent, even more than Russia, the single biggest global threat to American ideals, to American economic interests, to American values, to American relations with others. And, to some extent, some of the dangers that are represented in China are undeniable. Whether it's industrial espionage, or genocide going on against the Uyghurs, or wholesale suppression of freedom of religion—is it then right for the US foreign policy establishment to be increasingly regarding the standoff with China as a new

Cold War between superpowers who globally, and across fundamental issues of political values, are confronting one another? And if that's not the right model, what is? What's the more responsible model that does represent a US engaged in the world in a positive way, without being recklessly overextended?

Desch: I think China presents another "end of history" overreach moment, because you know there was, for a period of at least 20 years, a great optimism that was widely shared within the political establishment that the rise of China could be managed by the integration of China into the liberal global order, meaning free markets and rules-based international politics. That vision has failed, and I'm with John Mearsheimer. I think it was always destined to fail as he lays out in his book, *The Great Illusion*. But I think we're in danger of swinging in the other direction. We had unrealistic expectations that China's rise would somehow be different from normal great power politics. We were wrong about that, but now some believe we've got to treat China as an implacable and invincible adversary. I think that's the wrong way to think about it. China poses challenges militarily, but also economically and diplomatically. Still, if I had a choice to play China's hand and our hand in the poker game of 21st century great power politics, I still like our hand, and I think again the challenge for us is to figure out what we need to stand firm on and what we need to compromise on. What worries me particularly about Taiwan, which everybody regards as the most likely flash point, is that we've gone from a position of realistic ambiguity—that I think accurately represents the ambiguity of Taiwan's position—to increasingly a position of moral certitude. That we have to do everything it takes to defend Taiwan and contain China, and again I'm not sure we can do it. I'm not sure we *need* to do it in order to advance our interests.

Bacevich: I'm anything but a Chinese hand. I worry about this kind of lazy notion of new Cold War, which implicitly compares the People's Republic of the 21st century to the Soviet Union and the Soviet Empire post-World War II. The Soviet Union had vast ideological ambitions, and their ambitions had a certain amount of appeal in parts of western Europe and in the third world. That's one of the reasons we had to worry about them. I don't see that the People's Republic has any particular ideological ambitions. They're not trying to convert Africa into a collection of Maoist states, so they're different from

the Soviet Union and we should recognize those differences. It seems to me the competition is primarily in the realm of economics, which kind of says we need to get off our tails and get to work and compete. The comparison with the Cold War might yield some use if we remember the extent to which that, even during the Cold War, we and the Soviets found ways to make common cause on certain specific issues that we both cared about, the most significant of those being nuclear proliferation and nuclear weapons. I wouldn't want to forget about nuclear weapons, but I think the comparison today is with the climate crisis. There isn't a solution unless the United States and the People's Republic of China can collaborate; that's been said a thousand times. It's easy to say, hard to do, but I think paying due attention to that issue doesn't make the other issues go away, but could perhaps open an avenue toward reducing the level of tension in other matters as well.

Desch: I do think that there is one area of ideological competition at stake between us and China, and that's determining the most successful developmental model. I think China has bet the farm on the Asian model, which is not just particular to China, and we retain much greater faith in the market than they do. I guess I'm a residual liberal.

Bacevich: Could their model be described as a production model? Our model is a consumption model?

Desch: Yes, well, that's part of it, but I think the most fundamental difference is states versus markets as the adjudicators of economic decisions. Like I said, I think I'm bullish enough on our system to think that with all its problems it's a lot better than an effort to recreate Gosplan or these great elements of economic dynamism of the communist past. But I think Andy's basic point is a really important one, and I do want to put a fine point on it. Great power politics is about competition, but it's also about cooperation, and for most of history, great powers were able to recognize both of those as legitimate and, in a way, to balance one with the other. And if I thought that our political class was thinking about China—or Russia for that matter—in both of those terms, I'd be sleeping a lot better at night than I am now, because I don't think that most Americans think that way or see these relationships that way.

Carozza: We only have a few minutes left. You've opened up so much for

us to think about and to continue to discuss, but I want to take Mike's very last point and refer to ordinary citizens and what we're thinking about. As far as I know, nobody in the room here is exercising major responsibility over the foreign policy decisions of the Biden Administration, and it's intriguing to me that so much of what you've mentioned in the conversation is about responsible statecraft. How can we as citizens of this country help to develop the virtues that are necessary for responsible statecraft to take place?

Bacevich: Well, I think we begin with coming to a realistic understanding of our own history. There's a lot of that going on these days. The 1619 Project is an example. I don't fully subscribe to the claims of the 1619 Project, but I think that proponents of the 1619 Project capture the imperative of being willing to revise our understanding of our own history, to come to some more honest accounting, and a deeper appreciation. I think that's required, not simply with regard to race, but also with regard to our role in the world. There is this prevailing paradigm of American isolationism, American global leadership—pick one. It's nonsense. The United States has never, never practiced isolationism. I think the abiding theme of US foreign policy, going back to the founding of the Republic, has basically been opportunistic expansionism. When there's an opportunity for us to enhance our power, we grab it. Let's take Mexico. Let's take the Philippines. Whatever. And that is how we became the dominant nation on the planet by 1945. But opportunistic expansionism doesn't work anymore. There's a need both to recognize the existence of that tradition, the importance of that tradition, and now the urgency of moving to something that is more relevant to the world as it exists and to our place in the world.

Carozza: Thanks. Michael?

Desch: Andy edited, and I think wrote the introduction to—was it the Modern American Library edition of Reinhold Niebuhr?

Bacevich: It was University Chicago Press, but yeah.

Desch: I think we have the intellectual resources within our tradition to think in the realistic fashion that the 21st century requires of us, and I think we have the resources to combine realism with a Christian ethics and to understand that the world we live in is a world of grays—not black and white—and that the moral choice is going to be made in the gray areas. We

Catholics know that the road to hell is often paved with good intentions. If I was going to design the epitaph for the gravestone of *Pax Americana*, I would say the road to hell the past 30 years has been paved with many good intentions, also some bad ones.

Carozza: Thank you. Hopefully these reflections can help bring us all back to what in the Catholic intellectual tradition has always been referred to as the "tranquility of order." Which has a very clear moral realism to it. Please join me in thanking Professor Michael Desch and Andrew Bacevich for such an illuminating discussion today. [*audience applause*]

Facing Truth: Capitalism and its Inner Challenges

A conversation on prosperity, opportunity, and inequality with ***Jean-Paul Fitoussi****, Professor Emeritus of Economics,* Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris*,* ***Branko Milanovic****, Senior Fellow at the Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality, and* ***Samuele Rosa****, senior economist, International Monetary Fund. This panel is moderated by* ***Anujeet Sareen****, Portfolio Manager, Brandywine Global*

Introduction

America, we believe, is the land of opportunity, a country where people of diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to make the most of their talents. But is this narrative true today? Do we truly offer equality of opportunity? Income and wealth inequality are the worst they have been in nearly a century. Indeed, the deepening unease across the political spectrum and the increasing distrust of our institutions are perhaps largely a consequence of an erosion of the American dream. These trends are similar in many advanced economies. How does America once again offer the promise of shared prosperity?

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Anujeet Sareen: Welcome everyone to the New York Encounter, whether you're here at the Metropolitan Pavilion or online. My name is Anujeet Sareen, I'm a portfolio manager at an investment firm in Philadelphia called Brandywine Global, and I have the privilege of moderating this discussion. Before I introduce the topic, let me thank Illumia for helping to organize this event. We're here to talk about economic inequality. You can see from the

title of the event that one of the challenges of capitalism is it's distributional consequences. I'm going to start by giving you a quick story from my own life that connects to this. I was born in India in 1972, but my parents moved here to the United States as legal immigrants in 1977 when I was five years old. My dad had a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. My mom had a bachelor's degree. My dad had a pretty good job at a manufacturing company in India, but they left all that and they came here for me and my younger sister. America is the land of opportunity. They thought we would have a better education here and a better life than they could possibly offer us back in India. The first year we're here, my dad pushes a hot dog cart right here in Manhattan to make ends meet. He'd eventually save up enough money to start a grocery store over on Coney Island in Brooklyn, and that grocery store would support our family for the next 15 years. We were a lower middle-income family living in Brooklyn. I went to the public elementary school, the public middle school, and eventually was able to get a scholarship to high school and college and now have a successful career in finance. That's why my parents came. That's why millions of immigrants come to the United States. It's the land of opportunity, and not just for immigrants, right? It's for all Americans, all people here. This is what we want to offer in this country, and one of the questions that brings us to this conversation is: Is that as true as it once was? Is this the land of opportunity? Do we offer this to all as we have in the past, or is it really more now available to a smaller and smaller group? The question isn't just about inequality of opportunity, it's about equality of income; income inequality, about wealth inequities. Part of the reason we're having this discussion here is because it's not just an issue for America, this is an issue that a number of countries are facing around the world. We had a couple of elections this past year in Peru and Chile, where this was the central topic that decided the election. China is confronting this in its own way, as well.

One last thing I'll say before I introduce our speakers is that in light of the theme of the New York Encounter, *This Urge for the Truth*, I would really invite you to come to this with an open mind. Income inequality is a subject that becomes partisan very, very quickly. I mean, I talk to folks who lean to the Left politically, and they have an idea of what it means, why it's the case,

and what to do about it. I talk to folks who lean to the political Right, and they've got their own narrative about this and what to do about it. I think this conversation will be more fruitful for everyone if we're open to where the dialogue leads, and not least because this is a question for each of us individually, before it's a policy/societal question. How do we put ourselves in front of the questions about economics and justice?

Let me introduce our speakers. Two are joining us virtually. The first is Professor Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Professor Emeritus at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris* and professor at the LUISS University in Guido Carli, Rome. He is also a member of the Center for Capitalism and Society at Columbia University. Since 2013 he is the Co-hairman of the HLEG—High-Level Expert Group at the OECD—on the "Measurement of Economic Performances and Social Progress." Welcome, professor. I should note, by the way, that Professor Fitoussi is joining us from Paris, where it is ten o'clock at night right now, so we really appreciate him taking the time to join us. We're also joined by Professor Branko Milanovic. He's a Senior Scholar at the Stone Center on Socio-Economic Inequality. He served as a lead economist in the World Bank's Research Department for almost 20 years. He's the author of numerous books on income inequality, the last one being: *Capitalism, Alone*. And then finally, last but not least, I have with me on stage Samuele Rosa. Samuele works as a Senior Economist at the IMF in the Development Countries area. He's carried out his career entirely in international organizations. He worked at the European Commission and the European Monetary Institute, involved the preparatory work related to the establishment of the European single currency, then moved to the ECB until the launch of the Euro. Welcome to all of you. [*audience applause*]

Professor Milanovic Branko, let's start with you. When you hear the term "income inequality," it bespeaks a certain measure. What is unequal when it comes to income?

Branko Milanovic: Well, first thank you very much for inviting me. Obviously, it is a pleasure to be here. I regret that I'm actually unable to be there physically, but hopefully some other time that will be possible. Let me actually start with the example you gave, your own story, which of course was the story of many immigrants and their families in the United States.

There was a very strong perception that the US was the land of opportunity, and that social mobility was high. But what we know in terms of facts also confirms that. For example, in the most recent work by Peter Lindert and Jeff Williamson, published only a couple of years ago, the United States pre-independence was actually much more equal than European countries, and in particular there was no hugely wealthy group at the very top, okay? Where you had a very high inequality and high wealth at the top. So the US has historically had periods where income was relatively equal, so we should not forget that. However, we know nowadays that the US is more unequal in terms of income wealth inequality than the majority of OECD countries. In other words, compared to its peers in terms of income, US inequality is relatively high, and actually is the highest among OECD countries, excluding countries like Chile and Turkey. On the other hand, we also know empirically that social mobility in the US has declined. So this is how I will put it. I think it's sufficient to say that the US currently has significantly higher inequality than the countries of Europe. And the second point is that this high level of inequality is correlated with relatively low social mobility.

Sareen: Thank you. Maybe somehow you could add to this?

Samuele Rosa: First of all, I want to make a quick comment. I'm very happy that Branko is with us. We knew that inequality was an issue in advanced economies, and the US in a sense leads this, but it's not only one. But it was not until Branko came with a huge work to put this into a narrative, anecdotal evidence into hard data, that the discussion really flourished in our profession. And because there is evidence, there is a reality that we can look at, and in a way the polarization becomes less marked because there is something we can start from.

I'd like to put some data out there, focusing now on the US. So, If you look at growth in real income of the famous one percent of the US over the last two decades or so, the growth was about 150 percent. It tripled, and this was with people already with a very high income. Then when you look at the CAO, the one-tenth of one percent—the Fortune 500 guys—the increase in income over the last two decades was 1,000 percent. It increased 10 times. It's hard to assume that it's all driven by increasing productivity, so there is a big debate in my profession. One test for that is that the increase in income

also occurred during the two big financial crises in the financial sector. It's hard to say that productivity increased when financial institutions were part of an actual *destruction* of wealth because of the crises. So there's obviously something else driving this increase in real wages, and if it's not productivity then there are other culprits out there, other hypotheses in economics that we can look at.

I want to say something about another measure of inequality. The perception of inequality seems to be growing in recent years. There is more data out there, more buzz, and so people care much more than before. Let's say we run an experiment here to make it a bit more visual. Let's say we go back to 2010, and you send me to look for the wealthiest people in the world. You want me to have their combined wealth matching the wealth of the bottom 50 percent—3.5 billions of people, okay? And you ask me, Will you prepare a room here? How big does this room have to be? How many people do I need to match the wealth of 3.5 billion people? In 2010 this was 388 people. This is Oxfam's data, and it's quite staggering: fewer than 400 people own what 3.5 billion people own. Of course, it also tells you that these 3.5 billion people own almost nothing, right? Then you ask yourself, What about today? Today it's 42 people. So, 42 people would match the wealth of 3.5 billion people. This is by any means a staggering statistic. If you think about mobility like climbing stairs, it's impossible not to understand the inequality at some point also affects mobility, okay? And we see that in the data, as Branko suggested, and it also affects social cohesion.

I want to talk about two things. First of all, trust. Over the last two decades or so, when you ask people, Do you trust institutions? the number of people saying yes dropped from 41 percent to 31 percent, which is already very low to me. But then you ask another question which is: Can a solution to our problems come from discussion and engagement with others? And this is really amazing to me: we went from close to 80 percent to barely 50 percent. Which means we'd rather talk with people who already agree with us. You suddenly understand why social media is a big, big, part of this. Thank you so much, Sareen.

Sareen: I want to move on to Professor Fitoussi, but Branko, one last

quick question. Give us a sense of time: When was the last time the US was this unequal in history?

Milanovic: Well, it depends really what measures you use, but according to some measures, if you don't look at the amount of redistribution that happened, if you simply look at what is called marketing incomes, then the US today is as unequal as it was in the beginning of the 20th century. Basically, you have to go back a whole century. If you do look, if you include also redistribution, which is now much higher because you have direct taxations, which are greater than in the past, and you have social transfers, then probably you would have to go back to maybe the 1930s.

Sareen: Great, thank you. So, Jean-Paul, when I hear the term *income inequality*, it speaks to economics, to work, to capitalism. Inequality speaks to democracy and justice. How do you think about these two worlds? How do they coincide?

Jean-Paul Fitoussi: We have done a lot of study on inequality, and have developed a full set of measures. We have used the Branko measures. We have even calculated the inequality of opportunity. And we did not understand why such a situation did not lead to a catastrophe, because the increase of inequality, as you said, is almost universal. Europe is the only region that has known for more than 30 years mass unemployment, and mass unemployment signifies inequality, even if it does not lead directly to the inequality of income, because there they have a social security system. It leads to inequality in the quality of life, it means inequality in well-being, it means inequality before death, before the divorce, before suicide, and so on. Economic insecurity is changing life in our countries because it is increasing. The only way to understand is to consider the comprehensive system in which we are living, and to make sure we are living in a system that I call "market democracy." What is market democracy? It's a system that is combining two principles of organization that are contradictory, totally opposed. The principle of democracy—one person, one vote—and the principle of the market—one dollar, one vote. That's why democracy is a debate on the norms of justice, because it has to look all the time for compromise between these two principles, which are in conflict with one another. There was an American judge who said you can have democracy, or you can have money concentrated in few hands, but you can't have both.

And what Samuele said is exactly that. We have half of the income on our planet concentrated in 42 people. That means it's unacceptable. As a twist on democracy, we also have the fact that universal suffrage does not exist anymore. When you have the richer people owning all of the newspapers, TV channels, research centers and the funding of research—then they have an influence worth 1,000 more votes than the rest of us. I said 1,000, but I don't know, it could be much more. With a journal, I can influence a lot of people. That's why the election campaigns are grounded in the media. The market system can work only if no actor has power over another actor, which is the assumption of atomicity. And if that's not true, that means we are not in a perfect market. We are in a system that is leading to market failure. So I was wondering—wait, why am I going on so long? [*audience laughter*]

Sareen: No, no, no, no, no, no, professor. There's so much richness to what you're talking about.

Fitoussi: I'm wondering about one thing. What happened that made us to choose the *homo economicus* over the social being? We have worked as if the neoclassical theory was posterior to Keynesian theory, and we have acted as if the neoclassical theory was the modern theory and the Keynesian theory was the reaction theory. I'm not saying that because I'm a Keynesian, because of a fairly different way of these two theories to consider the global system. In the neoclassical theory you have *homo economicus*, people who are not caring about others, they are just seeking self-interest, and so everything that happens is due to their own merit. This means that inequality is totally justified; inequality is a good thing. There are some economists who have written the President of the Economic Association a paper called *In Defense of Inequality*, because they thought that inequality is a way of giving incentives. Keynesian theory, as a contrary, understands people as living in a world populated by situations. For example, wages are paid in money, and so the best system is to have wage rigidity, monetary wage rigidity, to avoid total chaos.

Okay, I finish here. [*audience laughter*]

Sareen: Thank you, thank you. The thing to me that's just so striking is, even though inequality is as bad as it's been for nearly a century, it's not the driving force of our political discourse. We remain a very divided country.

You go back 100 years ago when inequality was this bad, and you're talking about the rise of trade unions, the robber barons, the roaring '20s, *The Great Gatsby*, Great Depression, a massive political swing to address this injustice. That's not as apparent today in our political dialogue. I'm not saying there aren't people who are advocating it, but we're split. Why do you think that's the case if the inequality is so large? Anyone?

Fitoussi: I have an answer. [*audience laughter*]

Sareen: Please jump off, go ahead.

Fitoussi: Well, it's not true that inequality has not had an important effect on the evolution of our system. First, you have the rise of extremist parties everywhere, and you had Trump in the US, no? And the second you have a rise in abstention, meaning that half of the people are voting out the political regime, you have violence. And we have a rise in violence, not only in schools, but the political debates are becoming more and more violent everywhere. And especially in the United States you have violence between people. The United States is a clear case, but it is also true in France, for example. It's also true in Europe, and the reasoning is very simple to understand. A man can say, "If my life is valued at zero, then why should I value your life more?" Violence will be the consequence of this kind of reasoning.

Sareen: I think that's a very interesting observation. Branko, you want to add to this question?

Milanovic: I actually agree with what, with the points that he made. Individuals are different; some people are more interested or they have greater knowledge, and others less, and so on. Rich people are really controlling the media nowadays, as Jean-Paul mentioned, so essentially you cannot express yourself. You have an inherent difference in power to start with. That's one of the reasons why wealth inequality so important. Such huge levels of wealth inequality necessarily translates in huge inequality in political power. The second element I think is important is to realize why we are less politically active on the issue of inequality compared to 100 years ago. Socialist ideologies, for example, have declined in importance. There are many reasons for that, not only because of the end of the Soviet Union, but also because of the trade unions that in the past used to be much more important than they are today. I think there are two reasons: one is ideological, the second is the

huge accumulation of wealth in the hands of very few people. And the third point is the indifference. In the last election, you really had to live under a rock not to realize that there was election and 40 percent of the people did not bother to vote. So, these are the three elements: ideology, accumulation of wealth, and indifference, which is maybe due to the very fact that people know that their effective power is much less than it should be.

Fitoussi: Can I say one word about what he said? The political system did not solve problems for this population, so the understandable wonder, What is the reason for voting?

Milanovic: Yeah, I agree with that.

Rosa: I want to say something here on the positive side. Jean-Paul put on the table the question of what the human being is about. Is he a social being defined by meaningful relationships towards improving social life? Or is he just a self-centered profit maximizer? It's only through the force of ideology that we are led to disregard how important our being together actually is. An example. There have been a number of Nobel Prizes in the last 10-20 years that actually unraveled and challenged this idea of the *homo economicus*. This data indicates that, given the opportunity taking into account the well-being of others, of the worker, of the company, of the environment—people would do so, particularly young people. So, on one hand, there is a disaffection for democracy and active participation. On the other hand, there is a big demand out there for building a better world. This shows two things. First of all, whatever we're told, even if the *homo economicus* might be a technical trick, it's fundamentally a lie, and people are actually social beings. But secondly, that politics nowadays is not able to intercept and frame that demand, right? So people say, "I don't trust this institution." They really mean, "The way this institution takes into account my desire for a socially engaged life doesn't respond to me." But there is a huge market out there for a more engaged consumption and investment life.

Sareen: Branko, maybe you can help us think about this more historically. You've looked at the data going back quite a ways through history, and one of the narratives that I often hear is that there's a trade-off: if you decide to make a society more just on this basis, then you tax the wealthy and give to the poor in whatever form you do that, and this comes at the expense of growth.

That you, somehow, you're disincentivizing those who take risk and build businesses, and therefore growth is diminished even though your society is more equal. It is a very common critique I hear of Europe versus the US, for example. Is that trade-off true, is that necessary? Is that a false trade offer?

Milanovic: Many people argue, as you said, that if you redistribute more, the incentives will be less, and economic growth will be less. Empirically, that's kind of hard to show. The empirical results are at least ambivalent, and some of them actually argue that the opposite is true. But even if you do not 100 percent subscribe to this view, I think there is also the issue of short-run versus medium-run or long-run. Even if it's true that you would have some losses in the short-run, they are more than offset and balanced by the gains that you get over the medium-run from the ability of people to actually acquire better education, to be healthier. People who are not healthy cannot work, so this is a very important issue not only in poor countries, but even in rich countries. Then on top of that you can actually introduce other elements like equal opportunity, like social mobility and political participation. I actually think that equality and growth can be mutually reinforced.

Sareen: Let's go back to something you just mentioned, and I think all three of you mentioned this, which is the issue of social mobility and opportunity. One of the things I hear when I discuss this topic with others in the US is that maybe it's the case, right? We have to distinguish process from outcome, that we are willing as a society to tolerate a certain amount of inequality *if* we genuinely believe there is an equality of opportunity. How do you think about this subject—social mobility, opportunity? How are they related to income inequality, and do you think this has diminished today versus the past?

Milanovic: Can I just say empirically that we do know now that higher inequality is correlated with lower social mobility? That's something we know empirically that we didn't know 50 years or 20 years ago, and I think it reinforces the argument that the reduction of inequality is not only good for the reduction of equality *per se*, but actually has many other positive effects, including a higher social mobility, allowing poor people to advance to positions that make society better off.

Sareen: Unfortunately, we're coming to the end of this event. There's a

lot here. I wish we had more time to dive into it, for these are serious issues. There are sobering data for us to consider, I think, as a society. I mentioned China earlier. China is a country that is dealing with inequality as well, and their response to it is going to sound very draconian. What they've done recently, just in the last six months, is they've banned all private tutoring companies because they give an undue advantage, they argue, to those who are rich. Now that's not a solution we would pursue here in the United Sates, but it just highlights that wealth inequality begets income inequality, right? There are advantages that you want as one becomes more wealthy; that's the self-fulfillment aspect. Anyways, we've got to stop there. Please join me in thanking all three of our speakers. [*audience applause*]

Can We Ever Know What is Real?

A conversation on the erosion of trust in science and the price we pay, with ***David Brooks****,* New York Times *editorialist, and* ***Francis Collins****, Senior Investigator, and former Director of the National Institutes of Health*

Introduction

Until recently science has been regarded as a human undertaking in which, to everybody's benefit, an objective truth could be sought. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. The erosion of trust, or its misplacement, has damaged the social standing, with the consequences we all know. This is why a renewed commitment to truth and reason is more necessary than ever. Dr. Collins has dedicated his entire life to scientific research, while Mr. Brooks has extensively studied the relevance of trust in the social fabric.

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Riro Manuscalco: Well, I'm supposed to introduce these two friends. In a few words I'll give you a summary of what they've been doing and what they do. For the long version, which will keep you occupied for a couple of days, you can go to the New York Encounter website and find out everything about them. David Brooks became an ad columnist for *The New York Times* in 2003 and is currently a commentator on PBS NewsHour, NPR's All Things Considered, and NBC's Meet the Press. He's the author of various books, his latest one being *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*. Mr. Brooks also teaches at Yale University and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Collins is a Senior Investigator in the

Intramural Program of the National Human Genome Research Institute, previously served as the 16th director of the NIH, the National Institute of Health, appointed by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the Senate in 2009. In 2017, President Donald Trump asked Dr. Collins to continue to serve as NIH Director. Then President Joe Biden did the same thing in 2021. And then when Monday comes, Dr. Collins will become the acting Scientific Advisor to the President. [*audience applause*] I leave the floor to them.

David Brooks: Thank you. So, a few years ago I was at Princeton, and I was walking down the pathway with another guy I'd met at Princeton, and so I said, "What department are you in?" And he said, "I'm in astrophysics." And I said, "Well, what work do you do?" And he said, "I'm the guy who discovered the age of the universe." And I said, "I'm probably never going to meet another guy who did that." [*audience laughter*] Francis is the person who led the massive team that decoded the human genome, and we're not going to meet another guy who did that. [*audience applause*]

Now as amazing as that achievement is, we're here on a slightly darker subject, which is reality, which is a constant theme at the New York Encounter. My first time I was here, the theme of the conference was *Reality Will Not Let You Down*. Reality is constantly letting me down, but yeah. [*audience laughter*]

But so we're here to talk about truth and reality, and a world in which truth is suddenly a matter of contention, or at least a lot of people's connection to reality is tenuous, and so I guess from your experience bascally over the last couple years, as one of the leading public health officials responding to Covid, what's it been like to practice in a world where our connection to truth is sometimes tenuous?

Francis Collins: I didn't really dream that it would be this hard. When the virus first appeared in Wuhan, China, in the last days of December 2019, and when we found out what the sequence of that viral genome was a few days later and started in the most aggressive, organized, scientific effort that had ever been mounted to build a vaccine, I hoped and prayed that this would work. That we would come up with something as quickly as possible that could save lives. And in fact, the way in which science came together—industry, academia, government, the regulators—this thing called Operation

Warp Speed was truly an amazing enterprise. No vaccine had ever been developed and approved for human use in less than about five years; in this instance it was 11 months. [*audience applause*] I remember the evening the results of the blinded Phase Three trials were going be revealed to me and to Tony Fauci, my colleague, and I held my breath because you don't know until you see what happens. About 30,000 people had taken part in each of these trials and they are heroes. They were willing to say, I'll sign up and I'll get a shot and I won't know whether it's the vaccine or whether it's just salt water, and I'm going to give all the answers to what happens to me over the coming months and we're going to see what happens. We thought if that vaccine had efficacy of 60, maybe 65 percent, that would be fantastic, and if hopefully it didn't have any bad side effects, *that* would be fantastic. And that evening we saw no serious side effects in those 30,000 people, and the efficacy was 95 percent. I had prayed about it all year, and I will tell you, I cried that night about as hard as I've cried in a long time, and it was tears of gratitude, tears of joy. That was November of 2020. But something's happened here. Yes, we have saved millions of lives with that vaccine and hallelujah for that, but we've also lost a lot of lives from people who for one reason or another got information to make them wary, fearful of taking advantage of this. I'll tell you just one story because sometimes the stories are more effective than the statistics.

Josh Tidmore was 37-year-old Alabama father of three, and kind of a jokester. He's the guy who showed up at family parties wearing a dinosaur suit. They were near the beach, and he was always photo-bombing couples on their honeymoon. His grandparents had started an evangelical church that he and his wife Christine were part of, and as the vaccine began to be put forward as something you might want, they started hearing things—about how perhaps this wasn't safe. Josh looked at some of that information. He saw an article on social media about this guy, Tony Fauci, that maybe he wasn't to be trusted, and Josh decided he didn't want this. And Christine decided she didn't want this. Then in July of 2021 they both got a cough, and Christina got well pretty quickly, but Josh got worse and worse. Then he was in the hospital. And then he was in the ICU. On August 11th of last year, Josh Tidmore died, a father of three, aged 37. No prior medical conditions and

he was gone. That death did not need to happen, and it's one of probably a hundred and fifty thousand deaths in this country alone that did not need to happen, involving people who decided the vaccine was not for them, even when it was readily available by last summer. That is the deepest heartbreak you can imagine, when you see how our culture wars, which have set people into these tribal views, many of which are attached in very unfortunate ways to public health messages, is costing lives. Our culture wars are killing people. And that is the starkest possible example about how our loss of the anchor to truth is placing our whole society at risk. We could talk about other ways too; we could talk about climate change and the denial of that. We could certainly talk about where we're going as far as a democracy, in terms of how people are viewing information about whether elections are safe or not. If we don't figure out how to get ourselves back to the point where objective facts actually carry more weight than loudly expressed false opinions, I fear for the future of our nation and our world. I didn't see this coming. I'm a guy who thinks rationality will always win out. I guess I was a bit of a Descartian, and I should not have been, because Descartes was wrong. You and I have talked about this. Maybe I should have read a little bit more of Hume, but I didn't expect it would get to this level, where people could actually look at the evidence of those more than a hundred thousand people who have died unvaccinated—almost everybody who's died since last summer have been unvaccinated—and still say, no, it's not for me. The ability of our cognitive bias to find its way into life-saving decisions is so much stronger than I thought it was.

Brooks: Yeah, we've been on a series of calls over the last couple of years, Zoom calls. When Francis is facing a complicated genetic issue he'll generally call me. [*audience laughter*]

Collins: And he never lets me down. Thank you.

Brooks: I remember the first time you told our little group about the efficacy of the vaccine, but then over the ensuing months, and especially in the middle of 2021, I saw your mood really drop. What was it like to go through that trajectory? And secondly, to get back to the Cartesian point—what did you learn? After the financial crisis—this may be a bad analogy—Alan Greenspan said, "I always thought people were rational and self-interested, but I guess maybe not."

Collins: Maybe not. Yeah, I learned that, and I was pretty naïve, I think, until this. I thought up until May of last year that people would eventually come around. There's a lot of people saying, "I'm not sure; it was developed too fast; I'm going to watch and see what happens." But then it just didn't get any better. Starting last summer, those who had pretty much said, "I'm not interested," they stayed not interested. Even as the death count continued to rise, and it's still rising, most of those folks are still really dug in. So the ability to sift through information based on whatever it is—your "web of beliefs," as the philosopher Quine has written about it—is so strong that if you have incoming information that threatens one of the nodes in your web of belief, you're going to send that off in another direction and you're not going to allow it to actually get purchase on your thinking. I didn't realize how strong that was, and maybe it wasn't that strong in some other situations, at least as far as medicine until now, but medicine has gotten wrapped up in everything else that has divided us, turned us into warring tribes, and that means whatever information you're getting about your health is automatically going to be seen through that lens of who is your tribe, and what do the rest of them think about it. And I'm sorry, politicians have made this a whole lot worse by entering the space of public health in a direction that has largely, I think, harmed the truth, and I didn't see that coming, either.

Brooks: But now let's talk in a little more detail about what got us here. You mentioned the culture war, and there's sort of a tribal grouping, and there are probably charlatans out there who are feeding bad information. There was a section of the Media Industrial Complex that was endorsing bad information. What do you think caused this kind of remarkable situation?

Collins: I think you've thought quite deeply about what's happened to the fabric of our society over the course of the past many years. It's convenient for some people to say, Well, it was just the former president, and the way in which truth seemed to be constantly a little bit under attack in the way every issue was approached, but that's much too easy. I think he took advantage of what was already there, which was an undercurrent of a suspicion of elites, a suspicion of experts, and a sense that they're out to get you. But it goes back a long way—maybe all the way back to Goldwater, but certainly back to Pat Buchanan. And what came after that was a sense that politically you

need to be against what is actually happening in the academic hallways, the government is not necessarily on your side, etc. A lot of it is the way in which other anchors in our society have gotten pulled up. Anchors like belonging to your community, your church; we can all look at the statistics of how the flight from the churches has left a lot of people without the kind of anchor that they might have had 10 or 15 years ago. But what would you say? How did we get here? It wasn't just Donald Trump.

Brooks: Yeah, I don't think it's an intellectual problem, I think it's an emotional problem. The brain and the body are part of one system, and the brain can't think rationally when the body doesn't feel safe. And when the body feels unsafe, that's what's in control. And over the past 40 years, there's been a group of people—of whom I'm the epitome—highly educated people who live on the coasts, who go to fancy colleges, who marry other people, who raise their kids, invest huge amounts of resources so they can also go to fancy colleges, and then they move to New York and San Francisco and Washington, they marry each other, and so we've had it, we've created an inherited Brahmin meritocratic class, and that class has economically drifted away from the rest of the country. They have excessive influence on the media, on the universities, on the culture, and a lot of people look at this class and say, Those people have too much power and they don't respect me—screw them. That attitude led to distrust in the media, and unfortunately distrust in scientific expertise got swept up in that. If someone tells you facts that are wrong but stories that are right, they will believe the story.

Collins: Exactly.

Brooks: There's a lot of truth to that story, unfortunately, and that speaks poorly of people in my class. We had a Brahmin class in the 1960s but they actually knew the country; they had served in the military. But now it's really about social resentment. And the problem is, once you tip over into social resentment, then you start disobeying the laws of your craft, and even my craft. We want to get people in those communities to work at our newspapers and magazines and TV stations, but if they're not going to follow the rules of our craft, then it's hard to do that. And so we're stuck in this situation that is an emotional problem, a social emotional problem, not a cognitive problem.

I imagine as you look back on the last two years, there are some things

you are proud of, there are some things maybe you and Tony Fauci and others wish they could've done differently, and maybe there are some things you learned. How do you assess all that?

Collins: We didn't always have the efficacy of message transmission that we had hoped for. I think I would have told more stories and maybe had less lectures about statistics, which is hard for a scientist because we're always suspicious about anecdotes. If somebody's trying to convince me something about how cell biology works, I don't want to hear your anecdote about this cool thing you saw at 2:00 AM this morning, where this one cell did this one thing. I want to hear about the whole range of observations you made, and what kind of statistical tests you did to say that this was unexpected. But that's not very compelling to people who are trying to understand something about a public health emergency. So I think we should have done a more effective job of telling stories about personal matters that people could relate to instead of making it sound a little off-putting, a little academic. I think we would have been better served right from the beginning to say, right now, we are studying this virus but it's early, and we really don't have a whole bunch of answers that we wish we did. So we're going to give you our best hope for what the right answer is for today, but we're potentially going to be wrong; in fact, we will definitely be wrong, so this is going to change. Don't be surprised if three months from now or three weeks from now we say, Oh, well, what we said then that was the best we could do, but now we have new information we're going to have to change. Whether it's Mass guidance, or social distancing, or what you're going to do about getting a booster, or not getting a booster—all those things are going to need to change. Just like you would want your stockbroker to give you a current estimate about buying a stock on today, not on what you had a month ago. I don't think we did a very good job of that. And so when things did change as far as the recommendations from the CDC, or Tony or I would be up on the television describing that, the immediate reaction was, Hey, wait a minute; that's not what they said before. These people don't know what they're talking about. We didn't do a good job of explaining that the science is going to evolve.

Brooks: The one thing I've learned from politicians, or at least what I can say is the conventional wisdom about politicians, is there are two things

you must never say: "I don't know" and "I was wrong." And the argument is that if you say I was wrong, then your friends feel betrayed, and your enemies sense weakness and they pounce on you. There was a time when George W. Bush was at a town hall in his re-election effort, and the question came from somebody, What's a mistake you made? And he did the politician answer: my mistake was, I love this country too much, something like that. But he went up to her right afterwards and said, "I just can't do that." It's an ugly reality that we live in such a partisan world that to say, "We don't know" invites others to say, "Well, your job is to know." It's complicated to endure that.

Collins: Science gets caught up in that sometimes, too, and I don't think scientists are perfect in admitting their ignorance about things. Science—somebody said this the other day, I can't remember who it was—science is not itself the truth, science is a path to the truth. And sometimes you go down the path and you make a wrong turn, and you have to figure out, Oh, I missed that one. The beauty of science is it is self-correcting, it will eventually get the answer if it's something that really matters. But sometimes it's wrong on the first pass, and can even be wrong for a while before somebody figures out what the right answer is. But science can't do what it does without believing there is something as clear as objective truth. It's our job to discover it. I don't know any scientist who would really be a post-modernist and say, "Your experiment is your opinion; I've got my experiment over here and that's my opinion." No, it doesn't work that way, so we do believe, therefore, that it is a noble activity to really uncover how the universe is put together.

Brooks: When you were in these jobs with Tony, you were not only a sole individual, you had a gigantic organization you were leading, and that organization is also tied to a network of scientists around the world. Now, as you were being a public spokesman, what are they all saying to you? Is that an extra pressure point, are there multiple pressure points, are they telling you opposite things?

Collins: Some of that. I mean, we tried really hard within the US to be sure that all the people who were trying to give out public health information were at least talking to each other and knew what the facts were. So, Dr. Walensky, the head of the CDC, Tony Fauci, myself, Vivek Murthy—we would meet every week and have a deep dive into what's new now, and if

you're going to be on the Sunday show what are you going to say, because let's be sure we're all saying something that sounds almost the same with perhaps some personal twist, because you don't want to confuse people. From the outside world we were also really connected. There's still a Sunday call every week with South Africa to find out what's happening there, because their pandemic has always been just a little bit ahead of ours and we've learned a lot from them. Likewise with Israel. Likewise with the UK. Science by its nature has been international all the way along. Pasteur made that point, "Science belongs to no one country," and he's right, because what we learn is often applicable everywhere. I think that part played out pretty well with a few exceptions. Sometimes WHO seemed to have a slightly different view of the world than the rest of us, but they were well-intentioned.

Brooks: On our TV shows, we all had different doctors giving their own opinions. There was a guy who seemed very impressed with me, Dr. Zha, I think was his name. How would that cloud of witnesses interact with you? Was that a problem or were they generally helpful?

Collins: They were generally helpful with a few exceptions, a few who were kind of rogues. Several times during the course of the year we would try to have a session with all sorts of docs who were in the media sphere, and nobody else. Let's really have a back and forth: What are the questions they think we're not answering effectively? What is it they think that we have not properly explained that maybe they could help with? It was mostly helpful, collegial, friendly.

Brooks: Now let's wander a bit into the faith world. You're a professing Christian as well as being a leading scientist, and you were sent out to Evangelical radio stations and probably Catholic radio stations. Was that encouraging, discouraging?

Collins: Let me just say a word about my own trajectory, because it's a little unusual. I was an atheist as a teenager, as a young graduate student in physical chemistry. I went to medical school trying to apply science in a more human way, and discovered I was unprepared for sitting at the bedside of people who were dying, and I was trying to understand what that meant and what I would do if I was in that bed. I decided I'd better learn why people believe, because my atheism was not really based on any real examination of

the evidence. It was based upon what I wanted the answer to be, because then I didn't have to be responsible to anybody. I engaged in a two-year process, which was pretty intense, trying to shore up my atheism, and it didn't work. [*audience laughter*] It totally didn't work, and I gradually found myself seeing atheism as the least rational of the choices, because the assertion of a universal negative, as Chesterton said, is a very daring dogma indeed. I gradually began to recognize that agnosticism wasn't going to do it, either; it was sort of like stopping halfway without really making a decision.

The evidence from science, which I never really thought about, was actually pretty compelling in terms of there being a creator: the Big Bang and what happened after; how did the universe come into being like that? There had to be some means of that, and you couldn't get there with another kind of natural event, so you had to have a supernatural event to explain it. I think that's pretty compelling. Then I looked at the way the universe is put together. This is astounding. It follows mathematical laws. Why should that be? Gosh, there's an amazing mathematician or a physicist at work here. Then when you look at those laws, they have constants in them, you all know about this—the way in which those constants, like the gravitational constant, or the speed of light, or the strong and weak nuclear forces—you can't determine from theory what the value of those constants are. You can write down the equation, but you've got to do the experiment and find out exactly what they are. If you take any one of those and change its value by as little as one part in a billion, then the universe doesn't work anymore. You don't have the ability for anything interesting to happen. Some particles would fly apart for a long time, or maybe come back together in a big crunch, but there would never be anything complex possible, unless you had those very precise settings, like someone set the dials. This forces you into a multiverse hypothesis, which you'll never be able to confirm experimentally, making it a pretty big leap of faith. Or, there's an amazing creator with an intellect and a knowledge of physics that none of us will ever figure out because God created that. That got me to a deist god, but I didn't get to a theist god until I started thinking about morality. Why do we as creatures, who are, according to the scientistic approach, driven solely by evolutionary arguments—why do we actually have a drive to commit things you might call radical altruism, maybe

even sacrificing our life for somebody we don't know because it's the right thing to do? That is a scandal to evolution, and that made me realize there's a signpost there and it looks like it's a signpost towards a god who's not just made the universe kind of cool but then went off to do something else, but who actually cares about me. Then I had to figure out what to do with that, and I got increasingly uneasy, because there is a god who cares about me and therefore knows me and all of my flaws, and all of the ways that I'm not very lovable. How am I going to fix that? Well, you all know the answer; the answer is Jesus.

Jesus came to be one of our species, to know all about that, and to be able to understand my shortcomings and be able with grace to allow me to be forgiven by his sacrifice on the cross. It all made total sense. And all the things I've just said to you, if somebody had said that to me when I was 15, I would have said that's total gibberish. But it suddenly made perfect sense, so I became a Christian at age 27. People said, Your brain's going to explode now because you're a scientist, you're a physician, you want to study DNA—and you're going to be a Christian? Oh no, that's never going to work. And you know what? I never have seen a conflict at all, not at all. If you want to try to read Genesis 1 and 2 as if it was written as a science textbook, you're going to have some issues there about seven days of creation. The people for whom that was written would certainly never have thought of it as a science textbook with a literal 24 hour day, so there's not an issue there. But read John Walton, who is, I think, the most impressive Old Testament theologian of our age. I've enjoyed enormously this ability to look at questions that can be scientific or they can be spiritual, and I don't have to put a wall between those as long as I'm careful about which kind of question I'm asking. This all fits together in a lovely harmony. I'm joyful as a Christian, and I'm an Evangelical Christian.

I look around me and see what has happened to us. I would have thought that Evangelical Christians and Catholics would be on the forefront at a time like this, when truth is under attack. We know what Jesus said in John 8:32. "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Are we being set free now by all of the distortions, all the ways in which these kinds of lies, conspiracies, have shifted into the foreground, and the truth has kind of left the stage? It's not actually the case that Christians are doing better

than non-Christians. Evangelical Christians, the group I'm a part of, are the most resistant to vaccines of any demographic group, the white evangelical Christians. It's just astounding. Because I think they've been caught up in this really weaponized version of politics, and pushed into these tribal groupings where they end up in a space where what's really driving people's decision-making and their cognitive bias has nothing to do with the foundations of faith, but rather has everything to do with all of the other messages that they've been deluged with. My heart goes out to these people. These are good God-loving people, and they've been talked into something that is not just unfortunate, it's threatening their lives. [*audience applause*]

Brooks: Let's stick to the question of faith and then get back to the question of how America is screwed. [*audience laughter*] I was at a dinner with an astrophysicist, and he was dismissing the existence of God. He said the reality is that there's an infinity of universes, and somewhere in one of those universes there's a dinner party just like this, with people just like this having the same conversation we're having now. I was like, That's your parsimonious alternative to the existence of God?

Collins: Had he heard of Occam and his razor? I don't think that quite works.

Brooks: As you were describing your faith journey, you presented it as a series of deductions, and I think we've all had that. I mean, I'm not a scientist, but I interview a lot of scientists who study the brain, and when you learn about the brain, the super-abundance of it, the structure of it, the function of it—it's mind-boggling. Three pounds of meat in your head creates consciousness. How does that happen? And I tell my neuroscientist friends that until they can figure that one out, don't be dismissive of faith. But—and I'll speak personally as someone who came to faith in middle age—that was enough to open the door. There was a different kind of knowledge that sealed the deal. And I would say for me, the phrase I use I borrowed from Chris Wyman: *To be overawed by reality*. It's a sensation, a sentiment, but not a deduction. Would you say that's also a piece?

Collins: Absolutely. I probably made it sound all very precise and rational but it was not. For me, the rationality had to be there to get me to the point of the possibility. I knew I wouldn't find a proof. If somebody has found proof,

please tell me, but I don't think that's what God's plan was. It had to get me to the point of plausibility, and then revelation had to take over, because reason just couldn't get you across that final leap. The revelation was really much more a sense of a calling, of a spiritual closeness that you couldn't really quite describe, and in that sense—C.S. Lewis had a big influence me —the sense of these moments of joy that you couldn't identify, but which seemed to be moments of glimpsing the kind of spiritual relationship that you longed for, and then saying, I want that. I'm willing to take a chance on this not being a proof, not being fully, rationally defensible, but it is a revelation that I am now taking on board.

Brooks: I asked that because it suggests there are different epistemologies to understand, not only faith, but the world. I personally do not think the epistemology of that sense of transcendence is opposite the epistemology of reason, but is interspersed in the way emotions and reasons are interspersed. We used to have a sense that reason is separate from emotion, so if your passions are high, then your reason is low. But there's a guy named Antonio DiMarzio at USC who studied people who can't experience emotion—they have brain lesions and are not super-smart Mr. Spocks. They can't make decisions because they can't value anything. Our emotions are how we assign values to things. So our emotions are generally to be trusted, and that kind of emotional knowledge and the task of forming your emotions, strikes me as one of the elemental tasks of society that we do very badly. Those two epistemologies—do you experience them as opposites, or Monday to Wednesday, and Friday here, Tuesday and Thursday there?

Collins: No, I think much of them is harmonious and integrated. I'm not a fan of Stephen Jay Gould's idea about the non-overlapping *magisteria* or the non-overlapping epistemologies. I think they have to be integrated within your personal experience or you're going to find it very frustrating to go through the day. Philosophers write about this; the epistemology that's *a priori*, where you know it on rational bounds, versus *a posteriori*, where it's something you've experienced which may or may not be entirely rational but is meaningful. It is something that has affected who you are. They're both in there, and philosophers will debate about exactly which one is more reliable or more meaningful to people, but you can't say they're not both important.

Brooks: I would say that one of the things we're learning is, we used to think we saw the world via a passive process of opening our eyes, letting things come in, then we thought about the world. Thinking was the really complicated part. But I think now we're learning that the seeing is the complicated thing, that our seeing is not passively taking stuff in, it's predicting what we think we'll see top down, and then checking bottom up to see if it's accurate, and constructing a world. A friend of mine, Lisa Feldman Barrett, is an earth scientist at Northeastern, and she writes about rainbows. Rainbows have no color; they're just light waves. And rainbows have no band; there's a continuum. But we see bands and we see color, and we Westerners see seven bands, but Russia has two words for blue: light blue and dark blue, so they see eight bands. It reminds you that there is an objective truth out there, but our matter of perception is extremely subjective. Your brain is basically a Polaroid camera in the black skull trying to figure out the world, a really complicated thing. And so when I read all this, these research findings, I'm not surprised that people see different realities. I come away thinking we have to work really hard as a culture to form people so they can doubt some of their perceptions, so they can doubt some of their subjective reactions, so they can understand how their trauma or fear is interfering with the world they think they see. Because we've basically treated people as too innocent, we assume people are basically good and we don't need to form them, and therefore you get all sorts of epistemological problems—and I would say moral problems. We as a society do not do formation as well as we used to.

Collins: I know you're maybe the person who primarily promotes the idea of epistemic modesty, and maybe this is a good example of just that. But David, how do you avoid problems by focusing so heavily on the fact that our perceptions really do have an influence on what we see as reality? Some will take that all the way to the extreme of saying, well, that means there is no reality, right? You would resist that I hope?

Brooks: I would resist that, or they wouldn't let me in this Encounter. [*audience laughter and applause*]

I think there are hard constructionists and soft constructionists. Hard constructionists think everything's a social construct. I'm a soft constructionist. I believe that if terrorists kidnapped me on the way back to the hotel, I

would be terrified, and in some sense that's a subjective experience; yet being kidnapped by terrorists is objectively terrifying. But I do think we only have subjective access to the world out there. As I said, your brain is in a dark vault and has very limited ways to make sense of what's going on. We're speaking in sentences up here. If you heard the individual words we're saying without the context, you would not be able to understand 50 percent of those words. Because we're really good at detecting patterns, we can hear the words and understand each word. The amount of active construction going on in the brain that we're not aware of is astounding, and so to be aware of that is to be epistemologically humble. But humility is not a trait we have done a great job of as a society.

Collins: Oh, I don't know, I'm very proud of my humility. [*audience laughter*]

Brooks: I'm in the world of journalism. It's rare that pundits say, you know, "I said this, but the evidence proved me wrong." It happens, though. I'm impressed by the number of real independent thinkers on Sunstack who do it. They are carving their own path. [*scattered applause*] The shareholders of Substack are in the back. [*audience laughter*] But my impression of science is that it's a pretty honest game; that if the data come out the way Mr. Big Scientist does not believe, he says, "I've got to rethink this." Am I being too naive about how big science works?

Collins: No, you're not naive at all. I think the greatest harm that one sees done to science are people who will intentionally distort their data. Those are the things that cause people to really say, How could you? How could you be part of this profession? I'll tell you a sad personal story. Twenty-five years ago, an incredibly gifted PhD student in my lab turned out to be fabricating data over the course of several months. I didn't catch it; the post-doc who was working with him didn't catch it. Finally, it turned up in a submitted paper. There was something wrong with one of the figures, one of the reviewers caught it, and then it all fell apart. And this was just an incredibly talented young man who knew what the answer was going to be and didn't want to actually do that experiment one more time, so he just faked it. It was the most devastating, dark thing that's ever happened to me as a scientist, to imagine that somebody could intentionally take the most fundamental principle of

science, which is you're searching for the truth, and throw it all out. I think those things do occasionally happen, and they're incredibly distressing when they do. I think for a young scientist, or even an emeritus scientist, one of your greatest hopes is that you're going to discover something that is going to completely destroy conventional wisdom. That's like, wow, if I could do that that's going to make my name; it's going to make the whole field undergo a rethinking. That's what you want to do, you want to be a disrupter, but a disrupter with the truth and not with a lie.

Brooks: One of the puzzles for me in your field is about intellectual property. I read this book by Walter Isaacson about the creation of CRISPR with Jennifer Douna and the Broad Institute, and it seemed very hard for me to define who did what. And yet, intellectuals' lawsuits are trying to settle who did what to figure out where the money should go.

Collins: It is almost impossible in almost every situation, because science doesn't just pop up out of nowhere. Every discovery that you talk about is built upon the shoulders of decades of research. Take the mRNA vaccines, which I think have been one of the most amazing developments of the last many decades for infectious disease, and we will probably give many prizes going forward to those who did it. But if you look at that story, which goes back at least 25 years, involved work done by people who are somewhat obscure trying to figure out whether you could put RNA into a cell and get the cell to treat it as something it wanted to make a protein from. Finally, Cataline Carrico figured out what to do to modify the RNA so it would work. But there will be, I'm sure, lots of intellectual property on mRNA vaccines and it doesn't capture all of that. And in a certain way, that's not really fair, but it's whoever basically gets to the point where they can say, "I invented this" and convince the patent office. Then something happens.

Brooks: Yeah, our intellectual property system is probably the worst there is except for all the others. [*audience laughter*] The idea was to try to be sure that if somebody made a discovery that would benefit the public, that there was this limited monopoly so there would be investment in bringing this forward to a product and not just an idea. It's mostly worked, but certainly nobody would look at it and say it fully recognizes the contributions of all the people who played a really important role.

How should we think about Big Pharma in this? Not the most popular industry on earth, but when I think of the last couple years, Moderna and Pfizer in particular seem kind of impressive to me. How do we think about their profit motive, their quality of their science, how they interact? I assume they're interacting with all the other scientists in the world?

Collins: Absolutely. This is one of the things I really worked hardest on for my 12 years as NIH Director: making sure that if there was a really important scientific effort, we could develop a partnership with industry in the pre-competitive way, not something that was going to get into intellectual property. Let's get everybody around the same table, let's work on it together. Let's get pharma to help pay for it and not just have the taxpayers cover the cost. We've been doing that with diabetes and Alzheimer's and rheumatoid arthritis and Parkinson's and a whole host of things, and it's worked great. It has advanced things much more rapidly. The people I work with in pharma are the chief scientific officers. They're amazingly talented, gifted, morally-driven people. I don't talk to the businesspeople, so maybe that's part of the reason I'm going to stick to the positives. I mean, look at Pfizer and what they've done with vaccines. Look at their antiviral, Paxlovid, which really works if you are unlucky enough to get Covid-19 and you really need a therapeutic. This is going to be a pretty amazing alternative to everything else that isn't working so well.

Brooks: The new technology in these two vaccines; how much is that going to change the treatment of other diseases going forward?

Collins: A lot. Look at cancer. People have been working on cancer vaccines for 10 or 20 years. It hasn't gone very far very fast, partly because the cycle time for making the vaccine was so long that by the time you had the vaccine for that patient, they already had a very far advanced disease. With mRNA, you could do this quickly, so the idea of an individual cancer vaccine is now very much on the table; that's a big advance. Some of those infectious organisms that we've had a really hard time with: HIV, malaria, tuberculosis; everybody is now throwing mRNA at those because you could do this in a much more rapid way, and try out a thousand different things instead of having one trial every five years.

Brooks: Let's get back to you as a person of faith in a scientific world.

I mentioned I teach at Yale because I only teach the schools I couldn't have gotten into. [*audience laughter*] I've been doing it 20 years, and I would say 20 years ago it was very uncool to be religious. It was like you had acne. [*audience laughter*] About 10, 15 years ago, it sort of became a sign of spiritual depth, and there was some cool factor, even. In my class I draw a disproportionate number of religious kids, so it was probably 30 or 40 percent in the seminar. There was a young woman who'd never encountered faith. We were reading the book of Exodus and she said, "Can you believe anybody takes this seriously? People used to really believe in this, and now we find it so repugnant." And there were three guys in the class with kippahs on their heads, so maybe she should have looked around the room first. [*audience laughter*] Two of my students who were evangelical were: a) the smartest two students in the room; and b) the best-looking students in the room. And they said, "No, we believe that stuff." They took her aside and had coffee with her. She didn't become a believer or anything, but she learned a lot from them. So, my perception was that it was becoming acceptable. I would say in the past 6 years that's all turned around. When you were first named head of NIH, I know there were some people who said, Oh, we got this crazy Christian. What's been the trajectory of your experience as well?

Collins: That's a really interesting question. Right before I became NIH Director, I started a foundation called Biologos, basically trying to provide a place for serious Christians who are also seriously interested in science to talk with each other in a civil way. It's been a wonderful organizational structure. You can go to *biologos.org* right now and join the millions of people who are engaged in really thoughtful conversations about this. Over the course of the past 13 years, I had to step away to be NIH Director, so I just watched and cheered. Their enthusiastic support steadily grew up, up, and up, and was going well until the beginning of Covid. Then it became all about that. There was a crisis of "Who do you believe?" with believers often going down the path of being skeptical. Biologos did a lot to try to counter that; they ran podcasts with people like Tom Wright, the remarkable New Testament theologian, or Tim Keller, the pastor of Redeemer here in New York, maybe trying to convince people that you can actually be a serious Christian and trust science on the vaccines. But it was a tough slog. And I think because

particularly in the last four or five years, evangelicals have been seen by people in a place like Yale as denying the facts of science, it's just harder for students to see why they would want to self-identify that way. That's heartbreaking. It's one more casualty of the culture war we're in the middle of, and it's a terrible one. I mean, look at the reports from the surveys that are done by Pew or by Barna. You can see this impact on what's happening with young people in the church.

Brooks: But I assume at NIH people got used to you.

Collins: They did. Like, "Oh, here he goes again. He's going to talk about Christ, oh boy."

Brooks: The big crucifix on the top of the NIH building is fantastic. We've got nine minutes left, so now we're gonna have to fake it and pretend we know how to move forward. We have this problem of reality, problem of truth. What do we do?

Collins: According to your column, we're in a dark century, so we're probably in a place where we ought to try to get some light into this. I've thought a lot about this, and I think that anybody tries to tell you there's just one thing that you're going to do and it's all going to be better, don't believe it. This is such a complicated, multi-factorial situation. I mean, at every level there are things that governments should be doing, there are things that non-profits should be doing, that community groups should be doing, the churches should be doing. But I think mostly it's going to come down to the individual, because that's really how these things happened, and that's how they may ultimately get turned around. That's going to mean a lot of people deciding not to go along with the current crisis and not to buy into the divisive approaches to everything. I think—tell me if you think this is right—I think there are a lot of people sitting in the pews at Mass on Sunday, or in some evangelical church, just feeling like, "Something's wrong here." They've maybe been drawn into this mind-set of "We're under attack, we have to be fearful, and those liberals are going to try to do us in, and we have to defend ourselves"—but they're thinking to themselves, "This doesn't feel right. This doesn't feel like what we were called to do: following the Sermon on the Mount." I'm going to do a little scripture here. Proverbs, Chapter 6: "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him.

Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a person who stirs up conflict in the community." Does that sound like anything you've noticed? These are the things the Lord hates, and I think in our churches there must be people feeling like, wow we're on the wrong path here. If we could figure out a way to turn that into more of a revival of what Christianity is really all about, and I know there are people working on that in significant ways, maybe we could lift ourselves out of this. But I think it's going to have to be a ground-up movement. I don't know that the top-down is working very well, what do you think?

Brooks: I would say two things. Viktor Frankl went to Auschwitz, wrote a book I hope everybody's read: *Man's Search for Meaning*. I write these books about morality, and people say, "Isn't that a luxury to be able to think about spiritual growth and morality?" And I say, "We've been to really poor countries in the world, and they really care." Viktor Frankl said that when he was in the camps and most people were dying, most of the topics of conversation went away and the interest in sex went away. They talked about two things: food—the food they were not eating—and purpose and meaning. The religious instinct was heightened. Far from being a luxury in human life, it's a foundation of human life. People need meaning, and they need a purpose in life. The Gospels give a purpose to grow in grace to become more Christ-like. That is a moral system that has not been taught, and it has been replaced by a different moral system which is: I'm going to be the righteous defender of my people against our enemies. And that the line between good and evil doesn't run down every heart, it runs between groups. A lot of people I meet, both on the right and left, feel a wonderful sense of righteousness. It just doesn't happen to be a morality that involves any internal conflict or internal struggle, and that's a very seductive morality. To me, to replace that moral system with a moral system that is internal and elevated is a big moral problem. It creates what I've come to think of as a desert of humanization. We live in a world where all the forces of humanization—whether it's faith, the liberal arts, the theater—those are all in decline and the forces of dehumanization are on the front.

The second thing—and again this comes from reporting around the

country—is we have an epidemic of blindness. So many people tell me they don't feel seen. Republicans and Democrats look at each other with blind incomprehension. Rural people feel that urban people don't see them. Black people think that their daily experience is not understood by whites. Lonely kids think no one knows them. The Bible is filled with dramas of recognition: Are you able to see? The disciples do not see the risen Christ. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, a lot of people see the injured guy by the side of the road, but they don't *really* see him. Only the Samaritan sees him. The failure of seeing is not a visual failure, cognitive failure—it's a failure of the heart. The project I've been working on is about what exactly the skill is in making people feel seen, heard, and understood. I'm working on a book, and I'm in the middle of it, so I have no idea. [*audience laughter*] But one trait, the one trait that's most consistent with making what they call theory of mind, the ability to see—is verbal intelligence. It's the ability to ask the right questions and listen carefully to the answers. I can say to all of you in the room here, how good are you at knowing what's going on in other people's heads? I don't know all of you, but you are not as good as you think you are. The people who research this find that if we're talking, and I assume I know what's in your head, on average I'm right 22 percent of the time. If I'm really good, I'm right 50 percent of the time. A lot of people are right zero percent of the time, and they think they're right 100 percent of the time. To me, what's important is this granular, social, and emotional skill of really getting to know another person. To be beheld you have to be willing to behold. You have to know how others see you. We have failed to teach these basic social skills, especially in a world of plurality, pluralism, indifference. That's my riff. [*audience applause*]

Collins: We now have a minute left, so just a bit of hope that I think may give us a better outcome in the long-term. Václav Havel says, "Truth and love must prevail because lies and hatred can't." But of course, he was in prison a long time before that prediction came true. I think even though we all have these contentious beliefs, many of which are now influenced by false information and yet we hold them close because they're part of this web of belief that we've built for ourselves—that web rests upon these pillars that we all really still have in common. Pillars of family, faith, and freedom. Pillars of love and of truth and of goodness and of beauty. I don't know that

those pillars are that much at risk of being chopped down. It's just what we put on top of them. When you bring people together and they really have a chance to talk to each other, even if they think they're from different tribes—Braver Angels does this all the time—at the end of the conversation, what do they say? They say, "I guess we're not that different after all; we are not that different after all." We have been, I think, seduced by messages, many of which are self-serving; by voices that are making a buck off of it, or getting political capital out of it, and sooner or later we have to figure out that that's not the way to build on those pillars. I'm just enough of an optimist to think that that can happen and that people of faith are going to lead that effort. [*audience applause*]

Brooks: One final thing to say. I got a very good email from a veterinarian in Oregon. I was complaining about how hard it is to teach morality in the classroom, and he says, "Never forget that what a wise man says is the least of that which he gives; what gets communicated is the small gestures of his actions." He said the message is the person. I've come to believe that's largely true: the message is the person. When Pope Francis became pope, a lot of people, secular or not, just admire a person who lives like Jesus and the message is the person. They didn't have to believe in the faith, they knew the message was a person. Having been accompanied by you a little in the last several years and working so closely to decode the genome as we did, [*audience laughter*] it's just been a privilege to watch you go through this, and sometimes endure a lot, and you've stayed a nice guy through it all, which is amazing. So—Francis Collins! [*audience applause*]

Collins: And David Brooks! [*audience applause*]


The Sign in the

Does Truth Matter? And How Can We Reach it?

This year's Encounter offers questions through Fr. Giussani's eyes, on the occasion of the publication of To Give One's Life for the Work of Another, *with* ***Michael Waldstein****, Professor of New Testament, Franciscan University, Steubenville, Ohio*

Introduction

Our Christian life, our faith, and our concrete morality, the set-up of our lives is determined either by current ideologies or by the factuality, the supremacy of our existence, of things as they happen, of things as we come across them, of things to which you react in a given way, of facts: facts as events.
~Fr. Luigi Giussani, *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, MgGill-Queen University Press, 2022

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Riro Manuscalco: Good morning. To reflect on the theme of this year's Encounter, *This Urge for the Truth*, we knew we needed somebody with heart and mind, and that's why we invited Professor Waldstein, a good friend of the Encounter, a good friend of Father Giussani, and a good friend of mine. I'm sure that Michael will help us understand the magnitude of the theme, and will help us through it in light of a new book by Fr. Giussani—it sold out already but will be restocked soon—*To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*. It's also the way in which we try to live the Encounter as volunteers, giving our life for the work of another.

Just a few biographical notes about Professor Waldstein. He is a Professor of the New Testament at the Franciscan University in Steubenville. Before this, he was the Max Seckler Professor of Theology at Ave Maria University, where he became the first endowed chair of that university. He also served as the founding President of the International Theological Institute in Gaming, Austria. He is the author of various books, the most recent entitled *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh: Saint John Paul's Theology of the Body*. Let us welcome Professor Waldstein. [*audience applause*]

Michael Waldstein: Thank you very much. Bishop Christoph Pierre, fellow bishops, my friends on the path of the charism of Don Giussani, I'm happy to be here and share with you. Yesterday, by accident, I bumped into Bishop Pierre and it was a stab of joy for me. He remembered that 20 years ago we presented together *The Religious Sense* in Uganda, and I remember the deep humanity and clarity of his analysis of problems in Uganda. What a name: Christoph Pierre, Christ-carrier, close to Peter. That's where we want to be. Your sermon reflected this perfectly, so I thought the best way to give my lecture would be in one word: *ditto*. [*audience applause and laughter*] Though I promised that I would do a talk, and so the second best will have to do.

Why does truth matter and how can we reach it? Taking off from the book, *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, here's an overview of the chapters. There's an introduction. I'll talk about what Giussani calls "the sign." His testament in a way, the brief formula: *Veni Sancte Spiritus. Veni per Mariam*. It's like a dense jewel that needs to be unpacked. The rest of my talk is an attempt to unpack it with the help of that recent book. Then a brief personal testimony from me. Then the main part of the talk is about that sign, that diamond that Giussani left us. That bluish screen [*points to a video screen behind him*] will appear every time we transition from one section to the other, so you know where you are in the talk.

This is what Don Giussani says about this diamond: "I have applied in recent times, I have discovered in recent times with all my heart deeply moved, the most complete formula that can be conceived from the Christian point of view: 'Come Holy Spirit, come through Mary. *Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni per Mariam*.'" Now you could say, Where's Jesus in this "Come Holy Spirit, come through Mary"? Jesus comes through her. [*slide of a painting*

appears on the video screen] A painting that portrays the moment of the Holy Spirit coming through her, into her, in the Incarnation. Close up, if you look at this angel, a substantial angel, it's like a 500-ton interstellar battle cruiser coming down, spiritually speaking of course, and here the coming of the Holy Spirit in a stream of light. Look at the wild hairdo of the angel, it's remarkable. And look at the dignity of Mary. There's a sense of "Do not be afraid." There's no panic, no fear. She draws her veil in front of her face, leans back her head a little bit, but there's a tremendous sense of composure at the same time, of peace.

This is what Giussani says about *Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni per Mariam*. "Virgin, pure and beautiful. Beauty is the sign and Jesus as it were, a sacramental sign of the beauty of which (by which, because of which, for the sake of which) God made the world. So then I'm glad to have left you a reminder of this rising always, rising glory of our Christian life, the *veni sancte spiritus*."

You'll see the key terms of my talk are going to be sign, beauty, and glory. In Bolivia, the Jesuits had founded in the jungle, in the villages, many communities that were extraordinary in their development. They taught them many, many things, among them music. Because of the avarice of Portugal, of Spain, and of other powers, those villages were destroyed. The old women in the villages preserved sheets of music. I don't know if after a few generations they knew what it was. There was a Polish priest, a musicologist, who went through the jungle, befriended these old women, and collected these pieces of music that hadn't been heard for several hundred years, many of them composed by Indians. I want to give you one example of that. It's on the beauty of Mary.

music plays

For me, this resurrection of texts kept by the old women for centuries is a symbol of what Giussani did: take the texts of the past and render them alive in the present. He quotes Saint Augustine: "In our hands, our books, in our eyes, facts in our hands are books but we would not know how to read them without the other clause. In our eyes are facts, present facts in our eyes."

Of course, Augustine is also thinking of Jesus. The Gospels talk about Jesus. That's a fact in our eyes through the text, but I think he means the present also. The presence of Jesus is nourished, comforted, proved by the reading of the Gospels in the Bible, but it is assured, it becomes evident among us through a fact, through facts that are presences. Maybe Archbishop Dolan thought of presences as one of those obscure terms, though it's something very simple. You are presences to me now. You're here, I see you. Your reality impresses itself upon me.

So the next section: Nietzsche and Giussani on reason. This is part of the topic that has been assigned to me. "One day the wanderer slammed the door shut behind him, came to a halt, and wept. Then he said, 'This penchant and urge for what is true, real, unapparent, certain. How I hate it!'" Nietzsche, the son of a Lutheran pastor. There's a lot of irritation and anger there, but he points out the inevitability of this search. In the same book, much earlier, there's another aphorism that complements this one, and I find that a fantastic effort aphorism. "Most people lack intellectual conscience. They don't find it despicable to believe this or that and to live accordingly without first becoming aware of the final and most certain reasons for and against. What is the good of being good-hearted, subtle, even brilliant, if those who have these virtues tolerate limp desires." Fabulous expression: *limp desires*. "In their beliefs and judgments if they do not recognize the desire for certainty as the innermost desire and deepest need. Among some people, I found hatred against reason and I respected them for it, and this way at least, their bad intellectual conscience betrayed itself. But to stand in the uncertainty and ambiguity of Christianity, of human existence, and not to ask, not to tremble with the desire and thrill of asking; this is what strikes me as despicable. What I look for first in every person is this desire." When I first encountered Giussani, I was struck exactly by this, by the intensity of his desire, raising questions and pursuing certainty.

This is from *To Give One's Life*, on page 53: "We cannot start off except from a love for reason, from a trust in reason, and this has made us perceive the value of reason as the first thing to clarify." Which he does in *The Religious Sense*. If you look at these angels in Titian's *Annunciation*, if you look at these two faces here, they're profound faces, thoughtful faces. They look down at

the event of the arrival of the Holy Spirit with the Incarnation of the Son of God with reverence, but it's not a superficial feeling. There's depth and permanence of thought in their faces. Interestingly, there's also one angel here who seems to be somewhat distracted. Also, he's quite ugly; the others are beautiful, but I think this is a way for Titian to generate contrasts. From *The Religious Sense*: "Reason follows different methods, develops different paths, depending on the object. The method is imposed by the object. Reason is life, a life faced with the complexity and multiplicity of reality, the richness of the real. Reason is agile, goes everywhere, travels many roads." This is maybe my favorite text from *The Religious Sense*: "The only condition for being truly and faithfully religious, the formula for the journey to the meaning of reality is to live always the real intensely without preclusion, without negating or forgetting anything." This amazing angel is an event, an encounter that she did not exclude. Reason is awareness of reality according to the totality of its factors, as is often repeated in *The Religious Sense*, but also here in the new book, in many places. "Reason for us is the need for a total meaning. It is openness to reality according to the totality of its factors, that God is all in all."

Now a brief testimony about how I met Giussani and became involved in the Movement. But it's not an image of the Madonna but I love it. [*shows photo of Giussani*] I was at the University of Dallas in 1981, finishing a doctoral thesis on beauty, the philosophical kind of beauty according to Hans Urs Von Balthasar. And at the University of Dallas, there was nobody who really knew Balthasar very well. I studied philosophy to prepare for biblical studies, so in the fall of '81, Susie my wife and I, we had one child then, and one on the way. We moved to Rome, and I wrote a letter to Balthasar asking him if there were any people in Rome who know his work, and he gave me two names: Jacques Servais, who is now head of the Casa Balthasar, and Mark Ouellette, who is now Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops. So I became friends with these two men. They led me to Santa Maria Trastevere, where the Mass of the Movement took place on Sundays. We were absolutely amazed by the vitality, the beauty of the service, and then afterwards in the piazza everybody gathered and there was a lot of talk. And there we met Massimo and Carmen Borghese and became friends with them. They accompanied us

as Massimo took me for the first event with Giussani. I remember it exactly as if it were yesterday. He spoke about building one's house on rock rather than sand. And I remember he knocked on the table—bang! bang!—to indicate the solidity of rock. Of course it was wood, but with his words it sounded like granite. It made a huge impression on me. We went to a number of events from '81 on, but Rome is very difficult. Often America is called the land of unlimited possibilities. Susie, my wife, taking children to the doctor, filling out forms, etc., came up with the expression: Italy is the land of unlimited *im*possibilities. In the spring of '84, I was admitted to the doctorate program in New Testament at Harvard Divinity School. And in the same year, '84, there were spiritual exercises with Giussani in Fuji, south of Rome. I talked to him, and he said that they were sending Chiellini to Boston, Washington, and New York, so I offered to help them get settled, and we began doing a School of Community. It's been 41 years now and it's been worth staying. An important factor for me in those first years was that Giussani had sent Italians over to the United States, and he visited here frequently to give talks. And since I knew Italian, I was the one who usually translated for him. I would sit next to him. He said a sentence, then I would translate it into English. I fell in love with him; that's the only way to say it. Beauty is maybe not the right word, and falling in love is maybe not the right phrase, but that's what it was. I wanted to remain in contact with the sign of life that I saw in Giussani, to live the real more intensely.

Now for the testimony. The sign has been reduced in our scientific technological culture. In a key text Descartes—and he expresses the spirit of the age—says this: "It's possible to reach knowledge that will be powerfully useful to life, and instead with the theoretical philosophy that is now taught in the schools we can find a practical one, by which knowing the force and the actions of fire, water, air, stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us as distinctly as we know the various skills of our artisans, we can employ them in the same way for all the uses they're fit for, and so make ourselves"—these words really have to sink in—"masters and possessors of nature." That was the great ambition. Now if that is the ambition, making oneself a master, certain consequences follow. Leon Cass, in an important book, spells them out very clearly. "Seek knowledge and knowledge will give

you power, but it would be more accurate to say that the new science sought first power over nature, and derivatively found a way to reconceive nature that yielded the empowering kind of image. Seek power and you will devise a way of knowing that gives it to you and that knowledge, not surprisingly, is mechanics." Francis Bacon, who was also one of the main proponents of this revolution, says Aristotle said it best: "Physical observation in mathematics generates practical knowledge or mechanics. Now mathematics deals with quantity, with items that can be set in quantitative relations, and in a new approach to knowledge what can be grasped mathematically tends to stand out as clearly known and objectively real, whereas, what can't be grasped mathematically tends to be seen as a mere subjective impression, as a mere appearance projected like a movie onto the indifferent screen of nature." Because nature looked at mathematically is indifferent.

Here's Giussani's analysis of the phenomenon: "The reduction that takes place for man, insofar as he gives in to the common mentality, is a division, a separation, the struggle between sign and appearance, and as a consequence the reduction of the sign to appearance. The more we realize what a sign is, the more we understand how vile and disastrous it is to reduce a sign to appearance." Goodness, beauty—this is me speaking now—life, knowledge, love, male, female, the divine; none of these can be grasped mathematically, and many people take account of that by saying those are not facts, those are values, and values are personal or social preferences. And the axiom very widespread is you can't argue from facts to values. For example, biological sex signifies nothing, for gender is a social construct or a personal preference. There's a Jewish prayer that has come under some attack. Maybe I'm misunderstanding it, but I understand it differently. "Blessed are you, HaShem." This is the name they don't pronounce; we say *Lord*, they say *HaShem*. "Blessed are you, HaShem, our God, King of the Universe, for not making me a woman." If you look at that statement from the point of view of identity politics, it's a put-down. But when I thought about this prayer, I thought, What if I were a woman? Then I would probably be married to a man and that doesn't attract me in the least. The apparent gender euphoria in that statement is not a euphoria about the male sex but about the feminine sex, because men are oriented towards women. On the day of our wedding

this was the image of my wife. [*shows photo*] That's what I was attracted to, that's where I was glad not to be a woman, because I wanted this woman and I wanted to have children with her. [*shows photo*] These are the first two children in the background; you see our first and, in the foreground, our second child, and since then the number has grown considerably. The oldest on the left is 41 years old and the youngest on the right is 21 years old, and they do various things. But in the middle is my wife, and I still think she's immensely beautiful. I wanted children with her because she was beautiful and attractive, and there they are.

The sign now in Giussani is to give one's life for the work of another, so I'm going to approach it from a standpoint you're more familiar with, namely, encounter and mystery. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, you have this exchange. Juliet: "If the measure of thy joy be heaped like mine, let rich music's tongue unfold." Their encounter is an event that contains in itself the promise of a rich future. It takes staying with the event to discover that future, of course—Romeo and Juliet both die. Also, what Juliet says is fantastic: "Conceit"—where conceit means not illusion but imagining something future—"more rich in matter than in words. They're but beggars that can count their worth, but my true love is grown to such excess, I cannot sum up half my sum of wealth." That's the nature of encounter: *it promises*. Sometimes our confidence in that promise can wane, but it's there.

In Shakespeare's *Tempest* there's a similar scene. Prospero, the main character, has a daughter, Miranda, and he hopes she'll fall in love with Ferdinand, because that would reconcile much. "Fair encounter of two most rare affections. Heavens reign grace on that which breeds between them." Ferdinand asks her, "Wherefore weep thou?" Here again you see the nature of an encounter and its future: "At my unworthiness that dare not offer"—what a desire to give, namely, herself; that's what she wants to give—"much less take but I shall die to want."

A text of Newman comes very, very close to Giussani. "The outward exhibition of infinitude is mystery. And the mysteries of nature and of grace are nothing but the mode in which infinitude encounters us and is brought home to our mind." There's something finite but it contains, it expresses, a depth that's inexhaustible.

Here is a different image of Mary. [*shows photo*] We're going to focus on the beauty of Mary. This is the great image of the Assumption of Mary in Santa Maria Glorios at the Ferrari in Venice. I have here a series of Giussani texts; they're hard, so bear with me. I think they're the central part of the new book. Mystery, in other words, God and sign. He begins the sentence, then he has a parenthetical remark, then he returns to the sentence: "Mystery and sign, in other words, contingent reality, in as much as it always recalls something else. Even the tiniest stone, in order to be itself, has to be conceived of as made by God, has to be a reminder of the source of being. Mystery and sign, in a certain sense, coincide, in the sense that the Mystery is the depth of the sign. The sign points to the presence of the deep mystery of God the Creator, and the Redeemer of God the Father." In looking at this image, you could raise the question, Well, what's the representation of God? And you can give two answers, I think. The light that comes from an immeasurable distance; it's a tunnel of angels that goes back and back and back, till you lose sight of the end, and then, in the foreground, is the dark figure of the Father. It seems to be our representation of the divinity. Mary is presented at the moment before she sees. She doesn't see yet. She looks in a different direction; she would have to turn around to see God. The sign indicates the presence of the Mystery, of the deep Mystery. Mystery is the depth of the sign. It points out to our eyes the presence of something other. Presence? Easy; it's there, I encounter it. Of the deep Mystery in all things, the sign points it out to our eyes, to our ears, to our hands—an echo. The First Letter of John, right at the beginning: "The Mystery becomes an experience through the sign."

Here is a painting by Titian. It's a very tall painting, and most of the drama takes place in the heavens. You see the lightning coming down and the flow of blood and water from his side. So, Mystery and sign in a certain sense coincide and the mystery becomes experienced through the sign. This explains to the Christian the value of the sacraments. When he discovers that the whole of reality—another key word for Giussani, close to presence—reality is what you can actually bump into. It imposes itself by its presence, is built of this method of God the Creator. Reality comes from the Creator, having within it a reference to the Creator which it demonstrates in the intimacy of our relationship with things, it brings out the perception of another, of

something other. You see this in the stretching out of the disciples here at the bottom of the picture. James in orange on the right, John in orange on the left; they're similar in color to Mary.

Here is another text from Giussani, and it's something of a hard text. "So, Mystery and sign in a certain sense coincide, and the Mystery becomes experience through the sign. This explains to the Christian the value of the sacraments when he discovers that the whole reality is built of this method of God the Creator. Reality comes from the Creator, having within it a reference to the Creator, which it demonstrates in the intimacy of our relationship with things. It brings out the perception of an Other. Sacrament is different from all the other signs. The sacraments invented or created by Christ have the purpose of generating a new people in the world, so that it might flow like a river into the waters of the sea of mankind as the initial revelation within history of the infinite Mystery that man goes to meet at the end of his days. It is the beginning in history of the eternal, in the sacraments created by Christ, by the God-man, by God who became man, Jesus of Nazareth. He was the one who made them. He was the one who suggested them. In the sacraments, the sign reaches the point of complete identity with the Mystery as in the Eucharist. How much our spiritual life has to be disposed according to the sacrament. In fact, what has changed under the impulse of the light and the tenderness of baptism, and the other sacramental signs, is called Church, Mystical Body of Christ. So, reality made as a sign of God leads everything back to the vision of Christ. Treating creation well means knowing Christ in order to know God. This is the beginning of a change in man." The stretching up of these disciples—it's a huge change in them and the beauty of Mary is central. And in one of the talks of Giussani, he reports that John Paul II said to him that the method of the Movement is also the method that he, John Paul, embraces.

Let's go back to the Giussani text explaining this jewel, *Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni per Mariam*. "Virgin, pure and beautiful. Beauty is the sign and Jesus, as it were, a sacramental sign of the beauty of which God made the world. So then I'm glad to have left you a reminder of this rising always, rising glory of our Christian life, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*." The first manuscript page that was in John Paul's *Theology of the Body* is this. In the left corner, you

have AMDG: "*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*"—to the greater glory of God. In the right corner of that first page you have: "You're all-beautiful Mary," quoting from the *Song of Songs*, where it's not Mary but my friend. It's the antiphon for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. One of the most remarkable things about the human body is its expressive power. But even if we look at each other, we see each other look. The spiritual inner reality is accessible to us. It's not true that matter is a neutral screen onto which we project things. The sense of interiority in that face is overwhelming, so John Paul says: "The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible; the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer invisibility into the visible reality of the world, the Mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus, to be a sign of it. In man, created in the image of God, the very sacramentality of creation, the sacramentality of the world, was thus in some way revealed. In fact, through his bodily visibility, through his masculinity and femininity, man becomes the visible sign of the economy of truth and of love." I wrote a book, *The Glory of the Logos in the Flesh*, on Pope John Paul's *Theology of the Body*, and it's permeated by the insights of Giussani that I learned.

First, the purpose and structure of the Gospel of John. "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book." This is at the end of the Gospel, where he states the purpose of the Gospel: "But these signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Signs are central; the book itself is a writing down of signs. That's the first purpose: signs lead to faith, and faith leads to life.

Now an image of the outline of the Gospel of John. It begins with a week, it ends with two weeks, the Passion week, and then the week of the Octave of Easter. On the right side, you have what John calls in a very particular sense, *signs*. The first sign is wine at Cana, then come healings. The fourth sign is bread, then comes a healing and a raising. The seventh sign is the blood and water from his side and the unbroken bones of the lamb. The Paschal lamb, the flesh of which is to be eaten. Do you see the Eucharistic arrangement of this order of signs? In the prologue, the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us, which is something we rightly say when praying the *Angelus*.

And he dwells among us, because in Greek, pitching your tent means you live in it. He doesn't break down the tent. And we have seen his glory—glory as of an only-begotten from the Father, full of gift and truth. There's a bridge between that verse in the prologue and what the Evangelist says at the very end of the first sign in Cana, turning water into wine. "This Jesus did as the beginning of signs in Cana, of Galilee, and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him." Glory is light. The sun looks down on everything with its light and the work of the Lord is full of his glory. This light is communicated but it remains mysterious; the brightness was like the sun. Rays came forth from his hand where his power lay hidden. There you have the sign; you have something in the foreground that suggests something deeper. It has power to transform. We are transformed into the same image. It's close in meaning to beauty: "Jerusalem put on forever the beauty of the glory from God." It outweighs everything; the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with that glory, and it's inexhaustibly rich because the love of Christ surpasses all knowledge.

"I'm the true vine; stay in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it stays in the vine, whoever stays in me and I in him, he is the one who bears much fruit. If anyone does not stay in me, he withers. If you stay with me, in me, and my words stay in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you." What is it that we wish? We wish for happiness, fullness of life. This is what Jesus holds out as the promise at Cana and Golgotha. Cana is the first of the signs, Golgotha is the last of the signs, and the amazing thing is, John constructs these two scenes exactly in parallel. If you look on the left, you first have the place and the persons present. On the third day there was a wedding in Cana; the mother of Jesus was there. Those are the only two scenes in the Gospel of John where the mother of Jesus is present, so she's already there and Jesus is invited. She's like the bookends; she remains at the end. "When the soldiers did this, standing near the cross of Jesus where his mother and his mother's sister Mary." Then comes an introduction to Jesus's words. "When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They don't have wine.'" "Then Jesus said, 'Woman, behold your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother.'" In Cana, Jesus said to her, "Woman." In all of Greek literature there's not a single example where a son addresses

his mother as "woman." To address one's mother as "woman" is quite strange. But *woman* is the name Adam gave according to the *Septuagint* to Eve.

"My hour has not yet come." The hour of Jesus is the hour of his Passion, so Jesus seems to understand the invitation of providing wine as the arrival of his hour. At Golgotha: "From that hour the disciple took her into his own." "Then his mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you." And this is what Jesus does. "After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, so the scripture would be fulfilled, he said, 'I thirst.'" You have the water jar, six stone water jars were standing there. A jar full of sour wine was standing there, there's good wine, there's the previous wine that ran out, and there's the sour wine of the Passion. For the Jewish rites of purification, each jar held 20 or 30 gallons, which is a total of about 1,000 regular-sized wine bottles. If you have a wine cellar of that size, you have a lot. Jesus said to them, "Fill the water jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. These themes of fullness return in the parallel. There's a jar and he drinks from it. "They put a sponge full of the sour wine on a branch of hyssop, held it to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the sour wine, he said, 'It's finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave over the Spirit."

Then comes Pilate. But the end is important: "You've kept the good wine until now." "When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs." That's interpreted as being he is the Paschal lamb, the bones of which are not to be broken. The flesh eaten, yes, but the bones not to be broken. "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once came out blood and water." It seems apparent in this parallel that the good wine, in a way, is a pre-announcement of the Passion, just as the Mass now is a memorial. Cana is a pre-memorial of the Passion. "This Jesus did as the beginning of signs in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in Him."

One more item from the slideshow, which is decisive for Giussani: namely, the unity of the Church as sign. In chapter 17, Jesus prays twice for unity, patterned in exactly the same way as the commandment to love in chapter 13. Let's take a look. "I do not ask you for them alone but for those who believe in me through their word, that all may be one." Pay close attention what being one means here; it's not simply a horizontal unity between human

beings. "That all may be one as you Father are in me and I in you, that they too, may be in us." So being in us is the mode of union. But then this: "That the world may believe that you sent me." The unity of Christians is to be a visible sign, a persuasive sign, a missionary sign for the world. It radiates out so that the world may believe that he sent us. That's a desired result that the Father will bring about in good time, but there's already something present: the glory you have given to me, I've given to them, that they may be one, as we are one. And now again, observe exactly what the relations are: "I in them and you in me." It's a descending line, the Father and the Son, the Son in us; that's Christian unity. And John formulates the commandment to love in exactly the same way, following the same structure—these two "that" clauses sandwiching the "as" phrase and then the consequence: "I give you a new commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. That you, too, may love one another. In this all will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another."

Thank you very much for listening. [*audience applause*]

"Without Truth, There is No Reconciliation" (Bryan Stevenson)

*A face-to-face conversation with **Bryan Stevenson**, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, moderated by **Esmeralda Negron**, assistant public defender*

Introduction

"The individual is more than the worst act he/she committed." This is one of Mr. Stevenson's most famous and challenging statements. What journey brought him to this conclusion? Why would it be true and what implications would it have on the judicial system? What can facilitate a similar journey, especially for young people? What is the relationship between individual and structural or systemic changes in society? What comes first and why? These are some of the questions that will be addressed during the conversation.

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Esmeralda Negron: Thank you. I was telling Bryan that he's used to these Madonna mics but I'm not. Anyway, I welcome everyone here with us at the pavilion and everybody watching online. I'm very happy to be here to discuss this very intense topic: *Without Truth, There is no Reconciliation*. My name is Esmeralda Negron, I'm a lawyer, an Assistant Public Defender in Palm Beach County, Florida, and I've been practicing criminal defense law since 2017. I first came into contact with Bryan's work through my boss, who requires a reading of his book, *Just Mercy*. Bryan Stevenson is the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative and is a giant in the criminal defense world, so I feel I'm before him in awe and with a little bit of fear and trembling. But he's such a

gracious man that I'm actually quite looking forward to this conversation and not as nervous as I thought I would be. His accomplishments are many. In my view, his biggest accomplishment is the substance of his person and his heart. I heard a colleague of his say on an HBO special called *True Justice* that Bryan is the work. So we're here to talk about that work and what it means.

Bryan Stevenson: Can I break protocol?

Negron: Absolutely.

Stevenson: I want people to know how thrilled I am to be here, but I'm especially thrilled because the folks I think of as "my people" are in this space: a group of people sitting on the front row, here from a place called Joseph House in Florida, and they are people [*audience applause*] who know firsthand the problems created by our criminal legal system and the challenges, and I'm honored to be in this space with them. I'm especially honored to be in this space with one of my beloved clients, a man I've known for several years. He was 13 years old when he was sentenced to life in prison without parole in the state of Florida, and spent some excruciating years in adult prisons, navigating violence and abuse and trauma, but he has this beautiful, beautiful spirit. That prison was violent and abusive but it could not take away his beautiful spirit. He and I have been in prison cells and laughed and embraced one another, and he represents the joy, the humility, the humanity that I want everybody in the world to see in the clients I represent, the people I represent, so I'm especially honored to be here with my brother, the beloved Joe Sullivan. [*audience applause*]

Negron: Bryan, you can break protocol anytime you want. I want to begin by simply telling you that a few weeks ago, Alberto and I went up to the Legacy Museum; I drove up from West Palm Beach to Gainesville, and then we made it a day trip up there. And what I want to say is that I while I was there I felt embraced and welcomed, even in front of all the really hard things I had to look at. You know, you begin with the history of racial injustice, which begins in the 17th century, you walk in and are overwhelmed by the gravity and depth of the horrors that is our sad history of racial injustice. Then you're carried through the different periods—segregation, desegregation, lynchings, some incredibly poignant panels and short films—and then you get to mass incarceration and you wonder. But when I walked out of there, I

didn't feel crushed and destroyed, I felt hopeful, really hopeful. Hopeful that there's a way to move forward. Some people might say, Why look back? Why not simply look forward and begin from now? The civil rights movement, affirmative action, all of these gains that we've made—why look back? How is it possible to confront the truth of our history of racial injustice without fomenting a greater divide? And I felt that; I didn't feel that there was a divide there. I felt identified with what was in that museum.

Stevenson: I think the only way you can heal a wound is if you diagnose the nature of the wound. We have an understanding in this country that to get past high blood pressure or diabetes you have to first make a diagnosis. You have to first understand what that means. Nobody's going to sign up for chemotherapy or radiation treatment unless there's been a diagnosis that there is a cancer that could kill them if they do not address it, and I think injustice operates in the same way. If we do not acknowledge the ways in which we have become compromised by inequality and injustice, we will ignore it, it will fester, and it will kill us. The truth is that we've never really acknowledged the harm created by our history of racial injustice. We are a post-genocide society in this country, and it doesn't matter whether you live in Florida or California or Oregon. No matter where you live in this country, you live in a space where the atmosphere has been contaminated by this long history of racial inequality, and a lot of people have argued that these contaminants will eventually dissipate. I don't believe that. I believe we're going to have to do something to change the environment, and that means talking about things that we haven't talked about. We have never really talked about the fact that we are a post-genocide society. I think what happened to indigenous people when Europeans came to this continent was a genocide, because we killed millions of native people through famine and war and disease. We made them leave, we kept their land, we kept their words. Half the states in America are native words, but we made the people leave and we did not acknowledge the suffering and the violence. We were crafting a constitution that talked about equality and justice for all, and at the very same time were denying basic humanity to millions of indigenous people. We reconciled that by creating this narrative of racial difference, and it was that narrative that then made us tolerate two and a half centuries of slavery. I just don't think we've ever

acknowledged it. We haven't talked about it. We haven't understood the way in which it created harms for everybody. I don't think the great evil of American slavery was the involuntary servitude or the forced labor, I think the real evil of slavery was the narrative we created to justify enslavement, because people who were enslavers didn't want to feel unchristian or immoral or unjust, so they created this narrative that black people aren't as good as white people, that black people are less human, less capable, less worthy, less evolved, and the narrative that facilitated this ideology of white supremacy has never really been acknowledged. We passed the 13th amendment, which ended involuntary servitude except for people convicted of crimes. But it didn't say anything about this ideology of racial hierarchy, and because of that we then lived through a century of terrorism and violence and lynching, where black people were pulled out of their homes, beaten, tortured, drowned, lynched—sometimes on courthouse lawns—and the presumption of dangerousness and guilt that was created by that narrative continued and it continues today.

That's why somebody like Joe Sullivan could be wrongly convicted and spend decades in prison for a crime he didn't commit. That's why even I as an attorney can go places. I argued the cases at the Supreme Court that resulted in these wins, was going around the country enforcing that ruling, and I would go to courtrooms in the Midwest, I'd have my suit and tie on, I'd be sitting at defense counsel's table and the judge would come in and get angry—you've been in these courtrooms, you know what that's like—the judge would say, "Hey, hey, you get back out of here; I don't want any defendant sitting in my courtroom without their lawyer." I'd have to stand up and say, "Oh, I'm sorry, your Honor, I didn't introduce myself. My name is Bryan Stevenson. I am the lawyer." The judge would start laughing, the prosecutor would start laughing, and I'd make myself laugh because I didn't want to disadvantage my client, who's more vulnerable than I am. We'd do the hearing, and afterward I'd sit in my car and think about the fact that I'm a middle-aged black man, I've got all of these degrees, I've got all of these honors, I've got all of these awards, and in 2022 I am still required to laugh at my own humiliation to do justice for my clients. That has to change, and that is the vision behind the museum.

When you go to South Africa, there's an apartheid museum that documents the horrors of apartheid. When you go to Germany, to Berlin,

there's a Holocaust memorial that documents the horrors of the Holocaust. You can't go 200 meters in Berlin without seeing markers and stones that have been placed around that city to make sure everyone knows they are trying to reckon with the Holocaust; and as a result of that, there are no Adolf Hitler statues in Germany. There are no memorials to the perpetrators of the Holocaust, the organizers of the Third Reich. But in this country, we haven't done that, and I live in a region where the landscape is littered with iconography dedicated to honoring those who were the defenders and perpetrators of that. So the museum is an effort at truth-telling. But you're right, the goal is not division, the goal is redemption. I'm not trying to talk about this history because I want to punish America, I'm talking about this because I want to liberate us, and people of faith understand that there has to be confession and repentance if we're going to get to redemption and restoration. As we say at the end of the museum tour, the purpose of the museum is to create a world where the children of our children are no longer burdened by the legacy of slavery and racial injustice and racial hierarchy, but to create that world. We've got work to do. [*audience applause*]

Negron: I've seen it in the courtroom with colleagues who are black, who are asked the very same question you were asked. It's difficult to watch that. I'd like to talk a little bit about your history, because I think that as I've gotten to know you through books and different talks that I've heard you give, you talk a lot about your family and rightly so. You talk about your parents, your brother and sister, and you also talk about your grandmother. I was quite moved by a story that you told, and that I'm going to let you tell, but the question I have is about your lack of an ideological spirit, you don't have a divisive spirit. How are you able to foment such hopefulness? Where does that come from? Where is the source of your hope? And I can't help but go to the beginnings, right? Your family. Can you talk a little bit about how they've influenced you?

Stevenson: Oh, absolutely. When I was younger, I didn't talk about it as much, but as I've gotten deeper into the work I've had to examine those same questions about what will sustain me, and I have talked a lot more about my family because when I think about their lives and what they've done, I find a truth that I need to hold onto. My great grandfather was enslaved,

my great-grandparents, James and Victoria Baylor, were enslaved in Caroline County, Virginia. And despite the fact that anti-literacy laws made it illegal for an enslaved person to learn to read, you could be sold, you could be killed, you could be imprisoned. My great-grandfather learned to read while he was enslaved as a teenager because he believed that one day he'd be free, and I think about that because there was nothing about life in Virginia in the 1850s that suggested freedom was right around the corner, yet he had that belief. And from that I draw the conclusion that I have to be willing to believe things I have not seen if I'm going to make progress, if I'm going to push forward. After emancipation, my grandmother told me how people would come to their home every week and my great-grandfather would stand on the porch and would read the newspaper to formally enslaved people who didn't know how to read. It made her so proud that he had that ability, and she would sit next to him and of course she demanded he teach her how to read. There wasn't a lot of formal education, and she became a reader.

My people were poor. She moved to Philadelphia, she had 10 children, she worked as a domestic her whole life, but she made sure all of her children were readers. My mom was the youngest of her 10 kids. We grew up poor in a racially segregated community, but she gave us books. My mom went into debt to buy the World Book Encyclopedia so that we could see a world bigger than the world we could see outside our door, because outside our door there were outhouses and poverty and people working in poultry factories as if that was the only option. I take from that that there is something powerful we can give to one another and it is rooted in love, and it is rooted in the idea that we can create a better world. I used to ask my grandmother, "Why did you have a 10 children?" That's a lot of children. And my grandmother would say, "It's because I had so much love to give, and when you have love, you have to give it. I don't want to leave this place without having given away the love that I have." There's something powerful in that idea. The people around me who were poor, who were disfavored, who were marginalized, who were excluded, who were often told that they weren't good enough to go through the front door, who had to endure the humiliation of all of that signage and Jim Crow, the people around me who had to carry the burden of that—they still had an amazing capacity to show love to anyone they encountered.

When integration came to our community, my grandmother started doing this thing where she would come up to me, I was about nine, and she'd come up to me and she'd give me these hugs and squeeze me so tightly I thought she was trying to hurt me. [*audience laughter*] Then she'd see me an hour later and say, "Bryan, do you still feel me hugging you?" And if I said no, she would jump on me again. So by the time I was 10, I had learned that every time I saw my grandmother, the first thing I would say is, "Mama, I always feel you hugging me." And she'd smile this smile. I didn't appreciate what she was teaching me. As I said, she worked as a domestic her whole life. She lived into her 90s, but when she got into her 90s she fell one day and broke her hip, and then she was diagnosed with cancer. I was in college at the time and my grandmother was dying and I just couldn't imagine being in the world without her. She was just that precious to me. I went to go see her and they told me this would be the last time. I remember going and sitting next to her bed and holding her hand. Her eyes were closed, and I just started talking. Somehow, I got it into my head that if I kept talking she couldn't die, and so I just talked. I talked and talked and finally they came in and said, "Bryan, you have to go." And I remember being just heartbroken. Just as I stood up to leave, I remember my grandmother opening her eyes and squeezing my hand and she looked at me, and the last thing she said to me was, "Bryan, do you still feel me hugging you?" And then she said, "I want you to know I'm always going to be hugging you."

I'll be honest: I feel the embrace of the people who came before me, I do. I feel like I'm being encouraged by people who had to suffer through slavery, who had to endure the humiliation and the violence of lynching, who had to navigate the complexities of segregation, and there is a strength in that. When we opened the National Memorial, the space that honors thousands of victims of lynchings, I was preoccupied—as a lawyer you'll identify with this—you want to control everything, you want to make sure everything goes exactly the way you've imagined it. We were opening these sites and 25,000 people came to Montgomery, and I was trying to manage, manage, manage. And on the morning of the dedication of the memorial, the clouds were dark and ominous and I kept thinking, Oh, it can't rain, it can't rain. I was looking at the sky, and just before I was supposed to get up and speak, right before the

end, the clouds just opened up and started pouring down rain. I was sitting inside that memorial, looking up at the names of thousands of black people who'd been lynched, whose names have never been spoken or acknowledged, and all of a sudden it was like getting one of my grandmother's hugs. All of a sudden, it didn't feel like it was raining on that memorial. All of a sudden, it sounded like all of these people whose lives had been crushed by violence and bigotry, who had been torn away from their families, who had been tortured and killed—it sounded like they could finally cry tears of joy because someone was acknowledging the value of their lives, the importance of their witness, and it created a different relationship to that rain.

I stand on the shoulders of a generation of people who came before me who did so much more with so much less. The people came before me, they would put on their Sunday best, they'd go places to push for the right to vote, for an end to segregation, they'd be on their knees praying, knowing that they were going to get beaten and battered and bloodied and they still went. And when you understand that, that kind of spirit has given voice to what you're trying to do, it's impossible to become hopeless about your capacity, it's impossible to turn around given all that we have been given. It doesn't mean that we don't have to talk about it and think about it and focus. It doesn't mean we don't get overwhelmed, that there won't be tears, that there won't be agony, that there won't be pain, because there will, but I feel really fortunate to do what I do. And I do feel lifted up by all of these people who have come before me. I feel embraced by people like my grandmother, and there is an assurance in that that can sustain, and it absolutely energizes me in the work that I do.

Negron: What about your relationship with Stephen Bright? Can you talk a little bit for those that don't know, can you explain who Stephen is?

Stevenson: Yeah, Stephen Bright at that time was the Director of the Southern Prisoners Defense Community. It was an organization in Atlanta, Georgia, and the back story is this: as result of integration and lawyers coming into our community to open up the public schools, I got to go to high school, I got to go to college. I loved college, and was very engaged with music and sports and I was a philosophy major. Toward the end of my college career, somebody came up to me one day and said, you know, nobody's going to pay

you to philosophize when you graduate from college,. I hadn't really thought about what came after college. I started looking into graduate programs in history, and English, and political science, and I realized that to get admitted to those programs you have to know a lot about history, English, and political science. I was very intimidated by that. I kept looking, and to be honest, that's how I found my way to law school, because it became clear to me you don't need to know anything to go to law school. [*audience laughter and applause*] So I signed up. However, I was very disillusioned at Harvard Law School because it didn't seem like anybody was talking about race, or the poor, or social inequality, and I left after my first year. I went over to the School of Government to get a degree in public policy, but I didn't feel good about it. It seemed like they were teaching us to maximize benefits and minimize costs, but it didn't matter whose benefits got maximized and whose costs got minimized, so I went back, and I was really having an existential crisis.

I took a course that required me to spend a month in Atlanta, Georgia, working with these human rights lawyers and Steve Bright, who met me in North Carolina. We flew from North Carolina to Atlanta, and he modeled along with the other lawyers there a different kind of lawyering. These were lawyers who got up early in the morning, they worked hard all day. You could tell their lives were animated by the work they were doing, and that just showed me that it was possible to integrate everything that I was feeling in my heart, and everything that was pushing me from my history, with the practice of law. Steve modeled for me this idea that you create justice in the world not by the ideas in your mind, but by the conviction in your heart. I graduated, and I went to work with him. I was making $14,000 a year. I couldn't afford a place to stay. Steve let me sleep on his couch. I think he thought I was going to be there a few weeks; I was there a year and a half. He saw that as part of what had to be done to meet the needs of people on death row, who were literally dying for legal assistance. The needs were so overwhelming. This was in the '80s. We would get calls on a Tuesday about somebody who had an execution date on a Friday, and we'd have to intervene. We just believed we had to do whatever it took. I think Steve and SPDC modeled something that became what I've tried to do, which is a law practice that is client-centered, where you prioritize the needs of the people you represent over your own needs, because

basically, the people you represent are so much more vulnerable than you're going to be. So, yes, it would be nicer to live here and have this and do this, but if that's going to block you from doing the things you need to do, then you need to do these things. It was a really important, really necessary lesson, and I'm grateful to him and the community of people around him who also had that spirit of service, which I think is so essential if we're going to actually advance justice.

Negron: As you were talking, all these things—getting up early in the morning and working, doing for our clients and really wanting sometimes to have the temerity to try to fix them somehow, or make their problems go away—how do you not despair? And I ask this question for myself. How do you not despair in front of doing and doing and doing, and then hearing that someone is going to be executed?

Stevenson: I think it's better to prepare yourself for moments of despair than to try to function in a way where there will never be despair. You know, when we first opened our office in the late '80s, I got a call from someone who was scheduled to be executed. We hadn't even received books and computers yet. It was literally the first day the phones worked, and this man said, "Mr. Stevenson, I'm scheduled to be executed in 30 days. Will you please take my case?" And I said, "Look, I'm sorry, but I can't take any cases. I don't have staff, I don't have books, I don't have anything. I don't think I can help you yet." He didn't even say anything, he just hung up. It unnerved me. I didn't sleep that night. I came back the next day and he called me again. He said, "Mr. Stevenson, I know you don't have your books, I know you don't have your computers, I know you don't have your staff, but please take my case. You don't have to tell me you can win. You don't have to tell me you can get a stay of execution. But I don't think I can make it these next 29 days if there's no hope at all." And so I said yes, because I didn't have the capacity to say no. And we tried really hard to get a stay of execution, but every court we went to said, "Too late." One of the problems with our legal system even now is that we have a legal system more committed to finality than to fairness. And so every court said too late, too late, all of these issues should have been presented. On the day of the execution, I found myself going down to Atmore, Alabama, to be with this man. This is when they executed people by electrocution, and

when I got there, they shaved the hair off of his body, which was one of the most brutally humiliating things I've ever seen happen to a human being. We started talking and it was really emotional, it was really intense. We were praying. We were holding hands. And then he said to me, "Bryan, it's been so strange. You said all day long people have been saying what can I do to help you? When I woke up this morning, the guard said, What can we get you for breakfast? Then they said, What can we get you for lunch? What can we get you for dinner? All day long people have been saying, How can I help you? Do you want stamps for your letters? Do you want coffee, do you want water?" And then he looked at me and said, "Bryan, it's been so strange. More people have said, What can I do to help you? in the last 14 hours of my life than they ever did in the first 19 years of my life." And I was thinking, Yeah, where were they when your mom died when you were three? Where were they when you were abused at seven? Where were they when you were dealing with the drugs? Where were they when you came back from Vietnam traumatized?

They pulled this man away, strapped him into the electric chair, and executed him. There was a part of me that didn't think I could ever recover from that, but there was another part of me that understood how important it was to have fought for this man, to have made the argument that his life has value, that his life has purpose, that he is not beyond hope, he is not beyond redemption, and to put that in the world, to put that in the record before someone executed him. I think about him, I talk about him a lot, and that experience has pushed me to find and to fight. That's the thing about despair: it's sometimes when we are overwhelmed with the weight of a problem that we begin to think differently about what we're going to do to deconstruct this problem. That's the process that gives rise to innovation, to new strategies, to new solutions, and I think we have to prepare ourselves for that.

I've been doing this a long time. I know that there will still be times, there will be days when I'm going to be overwhelmed, I'm going to see something painful that breaks my heart; but I've gotten this consciousness that tells me that if we persevere, if we push on, maybe we'll get on the other side of that. I think about that in relation to the people I represent.

I'm going to talk about Joe because he's here. The first time I met Joe was at a Florida prison where they did not treat people well, and they moved

him to the visitation room and put him in a little cell. He's in a wheelchair. They put him a little cell and then they couldn't get him out, and what they did was just painful to witness. I didn't think we'd get past that. And then we started talking and I realized he was a poet, he was someone who had this amazing laugh, and there was nothing I wanted to do more than to get Joe Sullivan out of prison because I knew he did not belong there. We kept fighting every court we went to in Florida, and every court we went to said "Denied," till eventually the United States Supreme Court granted *certiorari*. I remember being in front of the United States Supreme Court, arguing that it is cruel to say to any child of 13 that you are only fit to die in prison. I was thinking about Joe Sullivan, then I remember saying how unusual it is that we shield children from drugs and alcohol. We don't let them do all of these things, but we're willing to put 13- and 14-year-old children in adult prisons and condemn them to die. I don't think it's possible without a kind of despair that pushes you, and ultimately, we won that case. That's why it's so precious, even magical, to be on this stage talking to you here in New York City and to have him sitting a few feet away. [*audience applause*]

But I say that as a testament to what happens when you push through despair; when you push through everybody saying no; when you hear people keep saying, Sit down, and you still stand up; when you hear people keep saying, Be quiet, and you still speak. It is exhausting. But I am now really privileged because I've been doing this long enough to see the fruits of that, to know that truth crushed to earth will rise again. I don't think that what we have seen is what we will continue to see forever, and that is the hope, that is the faith, and I get encouraged along the way when things turn out the right way. But I think you have to prepare yourself for moments of desperation and despair, and I tell everybody who comes to my office that there are going to be some days when there's going to be tears. This is not a tear-free life. I think when you understand that, you navigate those moments differently, with a conviction that they do not end your effort, they're just a part of your effort.

Negron: We have all of these seemingly insurmountable big problems. Yet I'm sitting here in front of you with Joe over there, and there's a relationship there, and it's about a person, a man with a first name and last name. How can we educate young people—and not so young people—to not allow the

circumstances that continue to exist with racial bias and injustice? How can we educate an entire society? Can we change the society collectively? Is that even possible? Does the question make sense?

Stevenson: Yeah, it does. And I absolutely think it's possible. I mean, in many ways the existence of the museum and memorial we created is a testament to some progress, because I didn't have the capacity or ability to even imagine something like that at the start of my career. We can do something like that now, and when you look at what we've done on other issues I am persuaded that we can do better here. There was a time in this country when we did not think domestic abuse was a big deal; we would not arrest people who were engaged in domestic violence. Women would call the police and police would show up, but they're not going to arrest the man for abuse. There was this false idea that if you married someone, somehow, you're just stuck with whatever you experience. We started working on the narrative and we started telling stories. We gave names to the victims of that abuse. There was a film, *The Burning Bed*, with Farrah Fawcett. It was just a way of naming and dramatizing the experience of that, and the narratives began to shift and now we're in a very different place. We still have a lot of work to do, but we're in a very different place. We tolerated drunk driving for a long time. In my lifetime, when I was a teenager, there were no severe penalties for people who got in cars intoxicated; and so many children were killed on roadways by intoxicated drivers. Then this group, Mothers Against Drunk Driving began, naming their children, and they got resources and they started doing campaigning and commercials and it changed the comfort of policy makers with that issue. You see that in a lot of areas, but we just haven't made that kind of effort when it comes to race, and we've allowed false narratives to create this world that we're now dealing with in our criminal legal system. I mean, the false narrative that was rooted in what I call the politics of fear and anger. We had politicians saying that people who are drug addicted and drug dependent are criminals; we're going to use the criminal justice system to deal with them, when, in fact, people who are drug addicted are drug dependent and have a health problem, and we really need to be using the health care system to respond to that. When people are governed by fear and anger, they tolerate things that they shouldn't tolerate. They'll accept things that they

wouldn't otherwise accept, and that's what has been behind this punitive era in American society. Politicians were literally competing with each other over who could be the most punitive. I represent people who are serving life without parole sentences for writing a bad check for under a hundred dollars because of habitual felony offender laws. We had this false idea come into our policy-making that we could put *crimes* in prison, and that's the way legislators and policy-makers debate them. Oh, *that* crime. I hate that crime, let's put that in prison for 50 years. Oh, I hate *that* crime even more, let's put that in for a 100 years. We allow these policy-makers to function as if you can put crimes in prison when in fact you cannot put a crime in prison. You can only put a *person* in prison, and people are not crimes. That reality got lost, and so part of what has to change is we have to get people to understand that there are people behind these behaviors. So yes, I absolutely believe it can shift.

It's only since the 1970s that the prison population started to escalate. Throughout most of the 20th century it was relatively stable and we did not have you know, hundreds of thousands of people in our prisons with these kinds of long-term sentences. But it will take a lot of effort to kind of change that, and that's why I think it is important to engage people in this broader conversation about what does doing justice require? What does loving mercy require? What does a relationship with people who you care about require? But I'm absolutely persuaded we could actually reduce the prison population today by half and it would have no adverse impact on public safety. I'm very, very confident about that. We could let half the people in our jails and prisons out and it would not have any adverse impact on public safety. We just have to find the will to understand that being the country with the highest rate of incarceration in the world is nothing we should be proud of. That indicts our commitment to democracy and justice, it is a stain, it is a blur on our human rights identity, and if we're going to make progress in the world then we're going to have to deal with that. [*audience applause*]

Negron: I heard you say once that you go to these communities that are very poor and very segregated and talk to young men who tell you that their expectation is that they're going to go to prison someday. Talk to me about

what we can do to educate those young men and women who are hopeless, because you have hope.

Stevenson: I think it's a threefold problem. First of all, everybody else in society has to care more about the plight of people who are marginalized and excluded. When the Bureau of Justice projected in 2001 that one in three black male babies born in this country is expected to go to jail or prison, and one in six Hispanic boys is expected to go to jail or prison—that was shocking. But what was more shocking was the collective silence that surrounded that. There were no convenings, there were no pandemic-like interventions. We did not talk about what we're going to have to do to prevent this horrible thing from happening; we just sort of accepted it. That tolerance is part of the problem. I want to say to the rest of society that we do not show our commitment to children by looking at how well we treat talented kids and gifted kids and privileged kids. If we really want to know how we're treating our children, if we want to know what we're doing for children, we have to look at how we're treating poor kids, neglected kids, abused kids, kids in detention, see? That's where you understand a society's commitment to its children. The second thing is that we have to deal with this epidemic of trauma, because that's behind a lot of these really problematic outcomes. The truth is we've got zip codes all over America where 60, 70, 80 percent of the kids are going to end up in some kind of system, because they're living in spaces where too many are born into violent families, they live in violent neighborhoods, people are always shouting, there's too much gun violence, there's too much domestic violence, there's too much police violence. When you're surrounded by that you develop a trauma disorder just like our combat veterans. If somebody came in here and threatened to kill all of us, each of us would start producing cortisol and adrenaline, because that's how we cope with threat. If that threat were eliminated some of us would get back to normal in a couple of hours; for some of us it would take a couple of days. For some of us it might take weeks, depending on our prior exposure. What happens when you're constantly being threatened like our soldiers, the brain just starts producing those chemicals all the time, and even when you're not being threatened you're in this hyper-reactive state, this hyper-kind of vigilant state, and that's what the problem is when our veterans come

home. And the way you treat that is you try to create an environment where someone feels safe. And you make them feel safe long enough that the brain starts producing those chemicals. We've got children in this country born into these violent spaces, and by the time they're four or five they're in that traumatized state. We send them to schools, we have teachers in the schools that talk to these young people like the teachers are correctional officers, we have principals that run the schools like they're prison wardens. We threaten them with expulsion and we threaten them with suspension. We threaten and threaten and threaten, and when you're dealing with a trauma disorder, that just aggravates the conditions that you're dealing with. When you get to be eight and somebody gives you a drug for the first time, and says, Hey, take this, we know what you're going through and you'll have a few hours where you don't feel threatened and menaced—you take the drug. And what do you want? You want more of the drug. When somebody comes along and your ten and says, I know exactly what you're feeling, that's why we have this gang, and we'll help you fight against the things—you join the gang. We have to understand the sociological and the psychological conditions that are pushing these young kids to think what they think. And then lastly, I want to say to the kids that you are strong enough, you are talented enough, you are beautiful enough; that despite all of these things, despite the indifference of the larger society, despite all of these threats, you can still find a way and we want to educate them about the people that came before them. You have to be engaged in creating a society where all children have the opportunity to be healthy and to live and to thirst, and then we need to stop spending billions of dollars to put people in jails and prisons and start spending money on creating a kind of intervention that helps us deal with the challenges of trauma, mental illness, and poverty and despair that is so epidemic in too many communities in this country. [*audience applause*]

Negron: One of your most famous quotes is: "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done." What exactly is that "more" in each of us that makes you able to say that statement?

Stevenson: I think that every person has the capacity to move toward redemption; I believe that. Every person has the capacity to move toward love. I've represented a lot of people; I've never represented anybody who

just wanted to be in prison, who just wanted to commit crime, I've never represented anybody like that. And for me, it's not really hard to see the other things you are, right? The other things that people are. What's hard is when we judge people so harshly that we don't allow them to be anything else than the label we give them. I just wrote a letter about this.

Newspapers do this all the time when they report on people who are in the criminal legal system. They'll actually use labels like convicted *killer*, convicted *rapist*, *burglar* or *gang leader*, as if that identity describes entirely who that person is. The problem is, of course, they don't do that for people with status. If a police officer is accused of a crime, they get to stay a police officer even while they're being prosecuted. If somebody with means is accused of something, they keep their identity. When you read in the newspaper that juvenile killers are trying to get out of prison, it creates rage and resistance, and so I have to keep preaching that we are all more than the worst thing we've ever done. I don't think it's something I want people to hear as me talking just about my clients, I want them to hear it for themselves, too. I believe everybody here is more than the worst thing we've ever done. I think if somebody here has told a lie, it would be tragic if they could forever only be known as a liar. Most people have told lies and it would be tragic if we take took away from them the opportunity to be anything other than a liar. I think if someone takes something that doesn't belong to them, they're not just a thief; I think even if you kill someone you're not just a killer; and I believe that because it's what my lived experience in jails and prisons over some 30 years has taught me. But beyond that, it's what my lived experience with human beings in a variety of settings has taught me, even the people who have engaged in horrific bigotry—that judge I mentioned.

It's so interesting when we open the sites. We've got a lot of people visiting, and people now come to Montgomery and go to the sites. A lot of them have read the book and they come to the office and are like, "I want to talk to Bryan Stevenson." It's wonderful, but I can't come and talk to all the people we've had, thousands of people coming, and so my receptionist is now very skilled. One day, this man came and he was saying he wanted to talk to Bryan Stevenson, and she gave him the same rap and he just started crying in the lobby; a middle-aged white guy. He just started doing all of these things

and my assistant finally said, Bryan, I don't know what to do. This guy is here and he's saying he has to talk to you and so I said all right. I went down to the lobby and this man ran over to me and gave me a hug, and I could tell he was crying, and he just started saying I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I didn't know who he was. I stepped back, and that's when I recognized him: it was the judge who got mad at me for being in the courtroom a few years earlier. He says I treated you unfairly, what I did was wrong, it was racist. I realized it, and I'm just so sorry. What's interesting to me about that is, I like people to know that even when we engage in acts that are bigoted and violent and destructive, we have the capacity to get past that. We have a horrible history in this country, but I'm not afraid to talk about this issue because I also believe that we can be something better. I think there is something better waiting for us in America, I do. There's something that feels more like freedom, feels more like equality, feels more like justice, and it's waiting for us. But for us to get there we have to acknowledge when we make mistakes. We have to learn how to say, "I'm sorry." Our culture does not like "I'm sorry," and our systems *really* don't like "I'm sorry." Our politicians don't like saying "I'm sorry." They think it makes them look weak, and I think it is an obstacle to becoming strong. If we want to build lasting, enduring, and loving relationships, we have to be willing to acknowledge when we make mistakes. You show me two people who've been in love for 50 years and I'll show you two people who've learned how to apologize when they've offended one another. It doesn't make them weak, it makes them strong, and that's why I keep saying we're more than the worst things that we've ever done, because if we create a society where you are reduced to your worst acting, you can never escape that, and we create a society that is hopeless. If we want to evolve, we want to get to a better place, we have to embrace this notion that we're all more than our worst act.

Negron: You said something about your own brokenness that really moved me, because I think about my own every day. It's what gets me out of bed in the morning to go to court and deal with watching the chain-gangs of mostly black men walking like penguins into my courtroom. I'm never going to get used to that, and the day that I do I'll stop doing what I do. Talk to me about that.

Stevenson: I have kind of created a new relationship to the work that

I do, and it began when I was working on a case where, again, I got a call from somebody who had an execution date in 30 days, and the person had already been through the appeals process. It would be very hard to get a stay of execution. I did discover that he was intellectually disabled, and our court had banned the execution of people with intellectual disability, so I went to the court and said, You can't execute this man, he's intellectually disabled. Every court said too late, too late, and I once again found myself waiting for a ruling on the day of the scheduled execution.

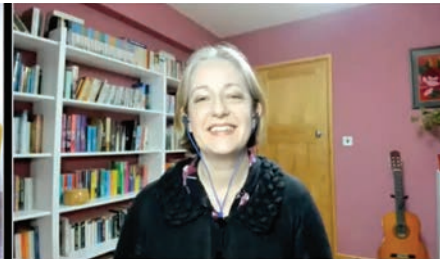
About 45 minutes before the execution was supposed to happen, the court called and basically said our motion for a stay had been denied. The hardest thing I have to do is to talk to someone on death row and say what I said to this person. I had to say I'm so sorry, but I can't stop this execution. And this young man, he did what I dread the most when I'm in that situation, he just began to cry. Before I could say anything, he was sobbing on the other end of the phone. Then he said, "Mr. Stevenson, please don't hang up. There's something really important I have to say to you." And I said, "Of course." Then he tried to say something to me but he couldn't get his words out. In addition to being intellectually disabled, he had a speech impediment. When he got really nervous and stressed, he would begin to stutter and he could not get out a single word. He kept trying to say something to me but he couldn't get his words out. He kept trying, he kept trying, he kept trying, and the more he tried to speak and failed, the more he was just ripping my heart apart. I already felt crushed that we couldn't stop the execution, but the next thing I knew, I was holding the phone and tears were running down my face. And it was so overwhelming that my mind actually wandered, and I remembered how, when I was a little boy, my mom had taken me to church one Sunday, and I was talking to my friends. This little kid I'd never seen before was standing there, and I turned to this little boy. I said, Hey man, what's your name? And this little boy also had a speech impediment, and he couldn't get his words out so he stuttered, and when he couldn't get his words out right, I remember doing something really ignorant: I laughed. My mom saw me laughing at this little boy and she gave me a look I'd never seen before. She came over and grabbed me by the arm, she pulled me aside, she said, "Bryan, don't you ever laugh at somebody because they can't get the words

out right. Now I want you to go back over there and tell that little boy you're sorry." I took a step, then she grabbed me by the arm and said, "Wait. After you tell that little boy you're sorry, I want you to hug that little boy." I sort of rolled my eyes, I said, "Okay, mom," and I took a step. She grabbed me by the arm again. She said, "Wait. After you tell that little boy you're sorry and you hug that little boy, I want you to tell that little boy you love him." I said, "Mom, I can't go over there and tell that little boy I love him." [*audience laughter*] She gave me that look, and I remember going over to this little boy and saying, "Look, man...well, you know, I'm sorry." Then I sort of lunged at him and gave him my little boy version of a man hug, and then I remember trying to say as insincerely as I possibly could, "Look, man...you know, well... you know, um...I love you." And what I'd forgotten until the night of that execution is how that little boy hugged me back, and he whispered flawlessly in my ear, "I love you, too."

I was thinking about that when finally my client got his words out. He said, "Uh, Mr. Stevenson, I just want to thank you for representing me." And then he said, "I want to thank you for fighting for me." And the last thing this man said before they executed him, he said, "Mr. Stevenson, I want you to know that I love you for trying to save my life." They pulled him away, strapped him to a gurney, and they executed him. When I hung up the phone, I thought, I can't do this anymore. It was just too much, too much. I was thinking about how broken he was. I started reflecting on the fact that all of my clients are broken. I represent broken people, broken by poverty, broken by neglect, broken by abuse, broken by addiction, broken by trauma. Then I realize that I work in a broken system, because the people who have the power are unwilling to do the things that need to be done to create healing and justice and redemption. In that moment, I just said, I can't do this anymore. I remember sitting down, thinking about that, and something said, "If you're not going to do this work anymore, you need to think about why you do what you do." I started thinking about it, and that's when I realized something I hadn't really realized before. What I realized that night is that I don't do what I do because I've been trained as a lawyer. I don't do what I do because somebody has to do it. I don't do what I do because if I don't do it no one will. What I realized that night, that I'd never really

realized before, is that I do what I do because I'm broken, too, and the truth is there is a community of broken people, and we know something about what it means to be fully human. And it persuades me that you don't have to be perfect, you don't have to be flawless, you don't have to have an unblemished record, you don't have to be this or that; you just have to have this belief that even in struggle you can say something. Those are the people who have persuaded me.

So I can't stop doing what I'm doing because I am part of a community of people who understand the need for justice, the urgency of justice, the power of justice, and I don't run from the moments that shake me. It's when we're broken that we sometimes understand what grace feels like, what redemption feels like, what healing feels like. I'm saying more and more that I'm feeling hopeful and determined and energetic, because I now know I'm living by grace. I'm living with injuries, but those injuries are incapable of keeping me from something better. When I was a little boy, I used to play in a church, and the people who had the hardest, most painful testimonies would always end their testimonies by singing this song: they'd say, "I wouldn't take nothing for my journey now." That's what I feel like singing almost every day. I wouldn't take nothing for my journey now. [*audience applause*]



Body and Identity

A presentation on gender theory and its social implications with ***Abigail Favale****, Dean of the College of Humanities, George Fox University, and* ***Helen Joyce****, Executive Editor for Events Business at* The Economist*, moderated by* ***Holly Peterson****, Principal of Nativity: Faith and Reason School in Broomfield, Colorado*

Introduction

The so-called gender theory has caused widespread confusion and bewilderment. Thus, its content needs to be known and carefully tested against reality to the benefit of young people, parents, and educators. This critical assessment is all the more needed because of a general inclination, nowadays, to stop thinking about complex issues and go with the flow of the group one identifies with. Speakers have dedicated several years of their careers to studying the origin, content, policy-making consequences, and larger societal implications of the gender theory.

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Holly Peterson: Good evening, everyone, and welcome. My name is Holly Peterson. I'm really graced to be with these two beautiful women today to share their stories. Our remote guest is Helen Joyce. Helen is in Cambridge, England, right now. She's the author of *Trans*, published in 2021. In 2005 she joined *The Economist*, where she works presently. She's their British Editor, but she's also been their editor in Sao Paulo, Brazil; an International Editor, Finance Editor, Executive Editor for Events, etc. She's also published in a journal called *Plus* for the University of Cambridge,

and was the founding editor of the Royal Statistical Society's magazine, *Significance*. She resides in Cambridge with her husband and two children. I also have here Abigail Favela. [*audience applause*] Abigail, you've got fans out there. Abigail is the Dean of Humanities at George Fox University, where she also teaches seminars in theology, philosophy, and literature. Her award-winning writing has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *First Things*, *Church Life*, and other literary academic journals. Her memoir, *Into the Deep: An Unlikely Catholic Conversion*, was published in 2018. Her academic background is in both feminist and gender theory, and her latest book, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory*, will be released by Ignatius Press in about a month or so. Abigail lives in Oregon with her husband and four children. Please welcome both of our guests today. [*audience applause*]

My first question is for you, Abigail. Gender theory: Can you help us understand what it is? And can you also help us understand what is meant when we say sex and when we say gender?

Abigail Favale: Well, that's not a simple question, right? What is gender? I think that's the question of the moment, and it's difficult to answer because, depending on who you ask, and maybe what time of day you ask, you'll get different answers. There are a lot of different definitions of gender that are on offer right now, and one of the difficulties in talking about this tricky topic is that people will be using the words *sex* and *gender*, but meaning very different things, and sometimes even mutually exclusive things. What might be helpful would be to give a quick and dirty historical overview of how the concept of gender developed in the 20th century. I'll hit some of the highlights—or low lights, depending on how you look at it.

I'll start with feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, who wrote *The Second Sex*, published in 1949. The most famous line from that book is: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." That statement really is the seed of gender theory. Simone de Beauvoir is making a distinction between woman and female, so she's saying there is this biological facticity of femaleness, but then there are all kinds of social and cultural interpretations of what human femaleness should look like that are layered onto it, and that she calls woman. What's interesting, however, is that she doesn't use the word gender. You'll notice it's called the "second sex"; it's not called the "second

gender," and that's because the word gender was not used in this context yet, and did not enter the scene until psychologist John Money began using it in the 1950s. He was the first person to coin the term "gender role," for example, which has now become so common. He had a theory of pretty extreme social constructionism: he thought that there's biological sex, but then gender or one's social role, and that the social expressions and role of one's sex were completely, socially constructed and socially shaped, completely malleable, at least in the first three years of life or so. He was the first one to really introduce this idea of gender as something distinct from sex. Unfortunately, he had the opportunity to test his theory on two twin boys, one of whom had a botched circumcision as an infant, and so his genitalia was basically obliterated. His parents brought the twins to John Money to say, Well, what do we do? And he's like, Don't worry about it. You know, sex really doesn't matter. We'll just kind of, you know, shape this kid up, raise him as a girl. It'll be fine. He won't even know the difference because gender identity is a complete construct.

This experiment failed pretty catastrophically. The boy eventually rejected his imposed identity as "Brenda," and then tried to eke out a normal life as an adult before he killed himself in 2004, two years after his twin brother committed suicide as well. Both subjects in this experiment died. Unfortunately, this tragedy took decades to play out.

In the interim, and especially in the first decade or so as he began this experiment, he was publishing widely about his gender experiment being a success, and so the concept of gender then took hold in the humanities, social sciences, and feminist theory. It comes from Money, but then second-wave feminists take this concept of gender as a way of critiquing the ways in which womanhood has been expressed culturally and socially, right? So that's when you get the classic second-wave feminist split between sex and gender. Sex is biology, and gender is a kind of cultural and social meaning imposed on biology.

The next important part of the story would be Judith Butler, who begins writing in the 1980s. It's difficult to overestimate the influence of Butler's theories in this discussion about gender. We already had this new idea, taken as dogma now, that you have sex and you have gender. Gender is a social construct, sex is biological. Well, Butler was the first person to actually come

out and say that gender is a social construct and sex is too. Butler's coming from a perspective of anti-realist, post-modern philosophy, right? Her work is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, so for Butler there is no such thing as reality. Any truth claims we make, anything we describe as real, is ultimately not only a construct, but it's a social power move, right? Any categorizations that we make, anything that we say is real, any claims of knowledge, those are ultimately exercises of power. And for Butler, her whole goal as a theorist was not to reassert some other version of the real, but to question the idea of the real itself and to be this perennial gadfly to poke at categories, reveal exceptions, and just kind of dismantle norms and categories. Her work is where I think we began to get this latest iteration of what gender is, even though I think it actually contradicts what Butlerian philosophy looks like, because now we're in a cultural moment in which the reality of sex is denied; sex is kind of seen as a construct, right? But then gender has become almost the sex of the soul, or the psyche, that is asserted as something real. So that gives you a little bit of a sense of kind of how the concept of gender has changed over time, and also how relatively young a history it has. Because it's not attached to any kind of material reality, it's like this post-modern juggernaut that can really take on almost any kind of meaning you want to ascribe to it.

Peterson: You mentioned in one of your talks that there's a reification happening today, and you define that as a sense of making real something that's not real. In this issue, what does that look like?

Favale: We get this idea that gender and sex are both social constructs, that they aren't real from Judith Butler, from philosophy that's very anti-realist at its foundation; but the problem is, human beings don't think that way, right? I mean that's what the whole New York Encounter is about—the urge for truth. Human beings are always going to reach for what is real. They're going to reach for what is true. I think the way that Butler's theories have trickled down through the academy, and through the education system, through pop culture, social media—has resulted in young people kind of seizing onto the idea of sex and gender being social constructs. That's pretty freeing, they think, but then a pivot happens and new categories of sex and gender are very much asserted as real.

The average teenager coming out as trans is probably not thinking there is no such thing as reality. They are seizing onto this concept in order to express something that they believe to be very real. That's what I mean by this reification turn that I think is happening on that level, but I think there's also a way in which activists are aware of the fact that they're making linguistic assertions in order to reshape our understanding of reality. Both of those things are making, or reifying, making real, what is fundamentally based on a denial of reality.

Peterson: All right. Thank you. Welcome, Helen. I want to ask you more or less the same question. You've often noted in your writing that there's a huge detachment of language from reality.

Helen Joyce: It was an absolutely fascinating, brief but comprehensive trot through an incredible history. I would say more about the distinction between what's happening in universities, and what's happening in schools, and on Tumblr, and on social media. It's exactly as Abigail said; that what's feeding through into the popular culture isn't this rather sophisticated theory— I mean, in my opinion it's completely fallacious but at least it's sophisticated—about everything being socially constructed. Gender has come to be seen as this self-perpetuating thing that didn't start anywhere, and that we can shape, and we can play with, and I mean, why bother? But at least that's a sophisticated sort of thought. Meanwhile, what's happening on Tumblr or in schools is people are saying you have something like a sexed soul. And that sexed soul is real, but your body is what I've heard called "meat Lego." It's a thing that you can chop bits off of, you can sew other bits on, you can change it, and you're something like a homunculus living behind the eyes of some meat robot, and the real thing is the thing in here. Unfortunately, we feed this by the way that we have moved into a very virtual world. I mean in some ways it's great. Here I am in Cambridge, England, chatting to you lovely ladies, and I wish I was with you; but since I can't be, at least this is second best.

But then the kids are sitting in front of screens all the time and they're changing their avatars and, you know, playing with being male, female, as an animal, being 10 feet tall, 2 feet tall, whatever—and that feels real to them; it increasingly feels real to all of us. They're forgetting what their bodies are,

and the fact that they were created, they were born, they were inside their mothers for nine months and then brought into the world, and that they will live and they will die, and they will live in only one body, this is the only one body that they have, and that body has been completely sidelined. It's been turned into words. And that is about power, because the "post-modern turn," as they call it, is that words create reality. And of course words do to some extent create reality. When you say, "I thee wed," you turn two people into a legal couple. You've just performed words that have created some reality, but there's something bedrock beneath the words we use. Now that's been erased, and now the words are everything. The words create reality and that's a power play, so you must alter the words if you want to alter reality.

The final thing I'd say about that is, people may wonder why there is such viciousness and vitriol poured upon anyone who disagrees with the modern way of looking at things. It's because the words make reality, so when you silence people, you are stopping them from doing the only harm that's possible. Namely, by naming what they see and bringing into existence a reality that the activists don't want to see, and so it's an extraordinary maneuver. It's taken some decades, but we've arrived at a really strange place where words are real, but bodies aren't real. Where, you know, words are violence, but actual violence is just standing up for oppression or the oppressed people. It's surreal. [*audience applause*]

Peterson: In your book *Trans*, you begin by saying this is a book about an idea, one that is simple but that has far-reaching consequences. Is this a cultural phenomenon we're entering into?

Joyce: I see it as an American movement that's something like a neo-religion. It's maybe not apparent to people in America how much this is something that's come out of American campuses in particular, and been exported around the world. It arrives at places that are culturally closest to America first, so here in Britain we're experiencing it, in Canada they are, Australia and New Zealand, but much less so on continental Europe, and hardly anywhere, anywhere else. The idea is that what makes you a man or a woman, or indeed a boy or a girl, is what you say you are. It's what you say you feel. It's not your body, it's not that you were conceived male or female and you grew up, it's that you feel like you're a woman or a man, and you say

that, so you bring that reality into existence by words. And this seems minor because most people who think about it superficially assume that only a few people will do that, those people that we call trans. But they miss the fact that it's a statement about all of our realities, that every one of us is male or female, or man or woman, solely because of what we feel and what we say. That what makes the three of us women is that we say we're women. Well, why would we say we're women? Presumably because we feel like we're women, but we've denied that there's anything real about being a woman, so what is it that makes us women? We feel feminine, womanly? I mean, am I sitting here talking to you in a womanly fashion? I don't know; and was I womanly when I was painting a door earlier today? Was I womanly when I was getting a Maths PhD? You know you don't know. It's just detached our identities from any referent in our physical selves, or indeed in our social selves, not even our social selves anymore.

Peterson: Thank you. I've had people even in this room ask me, "Why are we talking about this issue? It's a very personal issue." So, my question for both of you would be, Why should we be talking about this in a room full of people if it is a personal issue? And what are some of the ramifications of this issue on those topics I mentioned? Do you want to start with it first, Helen?

Joyce: People don't think about this so much anymore, because we don't distinguish between men and women in ordinary, everyday life the way that we used to. It used to be that women couldn't vote and men could, or that men could get mortgages and women couldn't; but nowadays all those unnecessary distinctions have vanished, and what we're left with is not many distinctions between men and women, but where there are distinctions, it's because of our sex. We separate the sports, we separate sporting competitions for men and women because men's and women's bodies are different. We have separate changing rooms, separate domestic violence refuges, separate rape crisis centers, separate toilets—because both male and female people are more comfortable, more dignified, in separate facilities, and in the case of women they feel safer, because most violence and indeed almost all sexual violence is committed by males. We don't distinguish between men and women except where we really have to, and it's sex. So if you dissolve the idea of what sex is and you replace it with something else, well then, you change the reason why

you separate the two sexes in these circumstances. It's not about sex anymore, it's about what people say they are. Then you realize this impacts other people as well. In the book I say that gender self-identification is a misnomer. It's actually a demand that other people identify you as the gender you say you are, so that when I go into a changing room where I expect to only see female people, I might now see male people as well, because those male people say they're female. That impacts me.

Favale: That's a really good point. The sex-segregated spaces that still exist in our society are related to concrete material conditions that differ between the sexes, and primarily benefit women, right? Women's changing rooms are separated not because women are a particular threat to men, but because vice versa. And in all these spheres, the one that concerns me the most is prisons, because the argument here is not that trans people are predatory, but that you'll have some bad actors in prison. If we create a very gameable system in which a male sex offender can simply check a box on a form and then be transferred to an all-female facility—it's not like the women can just leave, right? So, the prison situation does concern me quite a bit because that's a very vulnerable population, and a very gameable system.

Another thing I'm increasingly concerned about is the medicalization of gender non-conforming children. One of the beautiful things about humanity is that we're unique individuals. I mean, each person is a completely unique instantiation of being human, right? We're talking about sex differences here, but there's also a common humanity and individual differences. Three layers of differences that I think all need to be part of the picture of when we talk about human identity. Because gender and sex differences are—here's my scientific way of expressing, like, a bimodal graph—they're kind of like these intersecting humps, right? You will have individuals here in the middle, men and women who are maybe like women, whose femininity is more analogous to a typical masculinity, and that kind of thing. But what's happening now, because gender is no longer rooted in the body, the only real ground for gender now is in stereotypes. There's a regressive irony in that a lot of the stereotypes we'd progressed beyond are now once again being made real, or being reified. Let's say there's a girl who's a tomboy, who loves rough tumble play, loves to play sports, hates girly things. No longer is she just sort of okay,

now she's invited to question her very identity. Like, "Oh, you must really be a boy." Or a boy who loves art and My Little Ponies, he's now under scrutiny like maybe he's really a girl. Identity in childhood and adolescence is still so fluid. Who's the priest who started CL? I'm just learning about this.

Peterson: Father Giussani.

Favale: Thank you! That's something that Father Giussani writes about, right? There's something so exciting about adolescence, because everything's so intense, and everything's so passionate, and everything's so full of possibility. And people, young people, are discovering who they are, right? But now we're in a cultural moment where young people are being put on this road to a lifetime of medicalization. Young people have all kinds of different experiences, different kinds of suffering or anguish, and it's being stamped with a very a simple framework like, "Oh, you must be trans. Here's the way you solve it. You scapegoat your body. We'll stop your puberty, we'll put you on puberty blockers, then cross-sex hormones and then, when you're a little older, you know we can amputate your breasts and then you'll be happy." I think though, the quickness and enthusiasm with which this way of treating people, this kind of therapy—or what I see is really self-harm repackaged as self-care—I think it's very disconcerting, because young people are being allowed to make irreversible decisions. They end up sterile, for example. And then when, let's say, they change their minds later, then sometimes that's impossible to do. I worry about how much money can be made from this, because if you commit to a medical transition, then you need to be on cross-sex hormones for life. There are very serious physical consequences and risks to that that no one's really articulating. That is the thing that I get the most worked up about.[*audience applause*]

Peterson: Just to play devil's advocate: there are many people today, scientists included, who say that sex is a spectrum, or that gender dysphoria is a real thing because of sex being a spectrum, that I'm not one or the other. Can the two of you help us understand where this fits into the question of gender theory?

Joyce: Shall I start?

Peterson: Yes, sure, thanks.

Joyce: The "sex is a spectrum idea" is old, too, and it runs historically

along the same track as the one that Abigail talked about, and it dates back to about the 1920s and 1930s, and maybe even a little earlier. The idea was that it was actually gay people were somewhere on the spectrum. The idea was that if you were gay, you were a man's brain in a woman's body, or a woman's brain in a man's body, and you were somewhere on the sex spectrum. And then when they started to think about people actually being members of the opposite sex despite what their bodies looked like, they sort of cannibalized this idea, this quite false idea, and reused it, repurposed it. One of the things you notice when you start digging around in the history of gender identity and of trans ideas, is what a cannibalistic or magpie movement it is. It picks up ideas from race, from about sexuality, all sorts of things like that, and it mixes them all up along with things that it's borrowed from other cultures. They don't tend to sit together terribly well. If you think that sex isn't real, then how are you thinking of sex as a spectrum? These things don't sit together. If sex doesn't exist, then it isn't a spectrum. Anyway, no, sex is not a spectrum. We are one sex or the other, and intersex conditions—as they're called—are not actually a disproof of that. Intersex is a rather old-fashioned umbrella term for about 40 conditions that are developmental disorders, or differences of development, of the gonads and genitalia, and they happen to male people or female people. They don't make you something in between. Most people who have a DSD, as they're now known, are clearly recognizable as either male or female at birth. A few of them have some ambiguity of the genitalia and have to be investigated further by the doctor, and in the end the doctor will diagnose the specific DSD that the child has, say whether it's a boy or a girl, and what treatment the child needs, because some of these conditions are very serious and can be life-threatening. So, the intersex issue is just a bit of obfuscation.

I don't know if you've ever heard of a "gish gallop." It's a debating technique named after a particular person whose surname was Gish, where you just throw all sorts of unrelated facts in very quick succession at the person you're debating, and there's no time for them to respond to each individually. And, while they do that, they're missing the thread of what you're actually saying. So these things like intersex people, and sex as a spectrum, and all that stuff, it's just obfuscation. We all know that we come in two flavors, male and

female. We all know that. We all know that what you can tell when you meet people, you can tell it by looking at their face, you can tell it by looking at their general body shape. So yeah, we all know it's nonsense. It's odd to me that such nonsense has managed to get such wide traction.

Favale: I would echo that and say that DSDs, or intersex conditions, are best understood as variations within maleness and femaleness, not as exemptions from the reality of sex. I think that's really important. In fact, I think the way that certain activists have tried to use the existence of these kinds of conditions as a way to uproot the reality of sex, does a lot of disservice to people who are born with these conditions, because I never hear intersex conditions brought up in a discussion except to serve as some kind of validation for the idea of the sex binary not being real. It's not really a discussion about what intersex people need, and how can we talk about that in a robust way. There's actually a tension I see between these two movements, so I really think conflating the two is not helpful. It's obfuscating, like Helen said, but I also think it's really dehumanizing to people who have variations in sexual development.

Peterson: The next question is for you, Abigail. As a Christian, you have said in many public settings that you have a particular view of the person, and being Catholic, you obviously believe that body and soul are connected. So the present concept of gender has for the most part driven a wedge between body and soul. Can you help us understand the implications of that?

Favale: Christianity is very much a system of seeing the world and all that is, and it affirms the dignity of the body, the dignity and the goodness of the body. If that's not true, if a Christian understanding of the anthropology of a human being as a unity of body and soul isn't true, then all the central mysteries of Christianity make no sense. The Incarnation doesn't make any sense, the Resurrection doesn't make any sense, the Ascension doesn't make any sense—like, why would Jesus take a body back up to heaven if it's just his meat Lego suit or whatever?

Right. It just doesn't make any sense. A framework has emerged for explaining a range of different experiences, and the people who get caught up in this framework deserve our compassion and attention and respect, but I think it's very important that we really take a good look at the framework

and realize that what's being offered here is a radically different vision of reality, of the human person, of freedom, of the body, than the Christian understanding of reality. I think there's a spiritual dimension here, and that's the sacramentality of the body. In the Christian understanding, there's a way in which everybody has a sacramental function; the body reveals the person, right? One of the desires you can see that's good, that's expressed by people who identify as trans, is a desire for their body to express their person, right? That's a good desire. That's something we can pay attention to. But the problem is there's a lie or a deception that says your body doesn't already reveal your personhood. Rather, your body is a project you have to complete it in some way, or change in some way, in order for it to reveal your personhood. So here we see the distortion of the sacramentality of the body. If we lose sight of the importance of the body, then that creates a lot of very real problems, not just philosophical and theological problems, but problems that then have to do with how we live and be in the world.

Peterson: I'm going to step back just a little bit. Gender theory seems like it came out of nowhere, right? I'm an educator, I work in a school. I have somebody coming from a public school into my school saying, Hey, I want my kid to get into your school because she's in fourth grade, she's nine years old, she's learning that she needs to either be gay lesbian or bi. This is actually a curriculum change in the school next door to my school. I mean, it seems like this came out of nowhere. Ten years ago, I didn't even know what gender theory was, right? And now it's become the thing that's driving people away from public schools. Where did this come from? You're almost a bigot if you ask a question these days, so we don't talk about it. Can both address that?

Joyce: I think it's been a fringe movement for decades, something that was only in gender clinics and so on. Various activist groups had worked their way through various other activist purposes—getting women the vote, ending Jim Crow laws, gay marriage in the 2010s—and this pattern was seen around the world. A lot of groups needed a next cause, and the idea that trans was the next cause really fit in so neatly: the next oppressed group that needs our attention. In some ways that's a good impulse, but on the other hand, it was also activists looking for a way not to have to disband, and to keep very large and very well-funded charities and NGOs running. I think that that's

one of the reasons it launched into the public consciousness. It was there, but it fit into a place we had in our society for oppression narratives, for liberation narratives, for a way of thinking about people that was already popular as identities: what race you are, what ethnicity you are, what sexuality you are. Now there's another aspect of your personality, and why are we not talking about it?

Partly because it's such a mess of a theory, if you're allowed to talk about it all falls apart. That's why they have to stop you from talking about it. But it's also a very linguistic movement, and language is power. Language creates reality, in their view, so if you're allowed to talk about it you are actually altering reality in ways that the activists don't want you to, so in silencing you they are carrying out a very good act in their eyes.

Favale: I would add, too, that since about 2014 or so there's been an exponential rise in the number, especially of young people, who present to gender clinics wanting transition. Classically, it was a very, very small number in the population who would seek transition, and it was almost always men, almost always men in middle age, right? But then two huge shifts happened about, I don't know, 8 or 10 years ago. The demographic shifted in two ways: more women began presenting and the age shifted way down. We're talking about a 2,000 percent increase. The gender clinics were flooded, and so new gender clinics began popping up all over the United States. Planned Parenthood offers "gender affirming care"—I think that's what they call it—giving you cross-sex hormones. I could just walk into a Planned Parenthood clinic today tell them, "I think I'm trans," and walk out with a prescription for testosterone immediately, without any kind of assessment by a doctor.

Even if I said, "Yeah I'm suicidal, I have an eating disorder, I struggle with depression," it wouldn't matter. I would still get to walk out with a prescription. I think the immersive online digitization, especially of youth culture, has played a huge part in this for reasons that Helen mentioned. People then saw how much money could be made from medicalizing healthy people for life, and so I think those things are feeding into it. But there really is a kind of social contagion element happening.

Peterson: Thank you, thank you both. We have a lot of parents in this room, a lot of educators in this room, a lot of doctors in this room, as well

as teenagers. What kind of advice would you give to parents and educators in responding to a son, a daughter, a friend, or a patient who has gender dysphoria or who wants to transition? How can you help us understand how best to help friends and loved ones deal with their struggle? Do you want to go and start, Helen?

Joyce: It's a huge question. I don't like to give the impression that I could swan into somebody's house and in three minutes sort out what is obviously not that simple. But the first thing I'd say is that everything gets turned into being about trans now. One of the things about those teenage gender clinics is that the teenagers turning up at gender clinics are very, very overrepresented by children on the autistic spectrum, children who are self-harming, depressed or anxious children. These kids often are trying both to express their bodily unease through the medium of gender, through trans identity, but they're also looking for a panacea because it's sold that way. When I wrote my book, I talked to a girl, a de-transitioner—because sadly these are becoming more common now—and she said that she had been so ill with an eating disorder that she was hospitalized for the sake of saving her life. When she was 18, she searched online to see if it was possible to get somebody to remove your breasts without you having cancer. She discovered trans chat boards, and a week later she believed that she was a man. And the gender clinic said to her that the reason you have an eating disorder is that you were meant to be a man. Your curves are making you uncomfortable. If you get a mastectomy and take testosterone and go through transition, your eating disorder will go away. Her parents believed them, because you believe medical professionals. She had a hysterectomy, she had her ovaries removed, she took testosterone. By the time she was 21, she was sterile. She still had an eating disorder, and at 23 she re-identified as a woman. Children are looking for a solution to every problem they have, and they're told that identifying as trans will solve all their problems. They will have researched online for months before they come out to their parents as trans, so they produce what's called "the script." They will tell you a pages-long thing that they will have rehearsed, and possibly been coached on, and they will be primed to think you're a bigot if you don't immediately go, "Wow, that's amazing, fantastic! I'm delighted you're going to medicalize your beautiful body that I carried for nine months within me,

gave birth to, and fed, and have minded up till now!" They're prepared to hear what you say very negatively. So you've got to stay calm, you've got to bring your parenting A Game here, and you've got to say, "Tell me more." You know, slow it all down, be very low-key, and then explore what it is the child is trying to achieve, what they're trying to express with this identification. If you want to be listened to, you have to listen yourself. There's no point in just telling your child that this is stupid, or don't be ridiculous. And there's no point, either, in pulling out a book like mine and handing it to your child and saying, "Read that and it'll set you straight." I mean, I wish that would work, that'd be great. You have to listen. You have to say, tell me, "Tell me why you're doing this. Help me to understand," and then you can hope that you'll be listened to in return.

Favale: In some instances, it could be someone who's had pretty severe gender dysphoria since they were a child, right? For someone else it could be, you know, an autistic kid who never feels like she's fit in. She's a little more interested in, you know, computer science than the other girls, and so she just assumes she must not really be a girl. There could be a desire for community, a desire for wholeness, right? So I think there are some really good desires that are operating underneath it, as well as some profound suffering, so I think being patient, being curious, being calm, and being committed to an ongoing process of discernment and preserving the relationship is vital. Hopefully, it would go without saying, but definitely don't lay down an ultimatum or cut them off. That would be the worst possible thing to do.

How do respond as Catholics? To be honest, I feel fairly pessimistic about how this is going to play out in America. I think Europe will be okay. Sweden and Finland are already rolling back on childhood transition, and there's some really amazing pushback happening in the UK, which Helen is a big part of. But the US is a mess.

I worry about how politicized this is, how polarized our culture is, and how this has just become another kind of sign to plant in your yard, another bumper sticker to put on your car, another way of affiliating with your tribe. Once you've taken the party line, you immerse yourself in the echo chamber. I worry, too, about the way we have a decentralized and profit-driven health care system. I just think there's a lot of not so great things about

American society that are letting this thing run amok. But here's maybe one piece of hope: America is a freakishly religious place, and there's this value of religious freedom. I think it is absolutely vital for Christian and Catholic communities and parishes and schools to hold to the Catholic vision of reality and the human person. We need to be a place where that truth and beauty is preserved. We need to be a lighthouse in the culture. We can't be a bunker right? There are going to be a lot of people who get churned up by this ideology and who come out of it pretty destroyed. So our parishes need to be places where gender non-conforming people and people who have once identified as trans or are kind of exploring it or have de-transitioned—aren't going to be rejected. I think that is the task for Christians and Catholics. Catholics are the best prepared to do it because we have a coherent theology of the body and the human person. We have the most resources on that front. But Protestant allies, that's great too. Welcome aboard—pillage our treasury!

I really think that if America has any hope on this front it will be because Christians keep their head about this stuff and have the courage to speak about it. I would love to hear priests give homilies—the next time Genesis 2 rolls around in the lectionary—about the sacramentality of the sexed body, and then to say if you're someone who really struggles with this and you don't feel at home in your body, come talk to me, come tell me your story, we want you to be here and we want to understand you and walk with you. That would be a wonderful way to talk about it, to present the truth and beauty of the faith, and make good on that promise to accompany people as they wander around seeking truth. [*audience applause*]

Joyce: I was brought up Catholic but am not someone who still is Catholic, yet I can find no other word to express the way I feel about my children's bodies than the word *sacred*. A sort of secular sacredness, I think, is something that atheists like myself can come together on. The people we love are not interchangeable. The people we meet are unique individuals who were born and will die, and we will never see them again in this world. It's just a one-off thing, and we've forgotten that in our culture. Whether that's because of a move away from religion, or whether it's the way that we've become very technological, or that we're afraid to say things that some people might not agree with, I don't know. But this idea of the sacredness and the

beauty of the people that we love, and the perfection of them the way they are—I think that might be a helpful way to talk to a child. That they're really lovely the way they are, you've loved them since the second you knew you were expecting them, and then when you met them you fell in love all over again. [*audience applause*]


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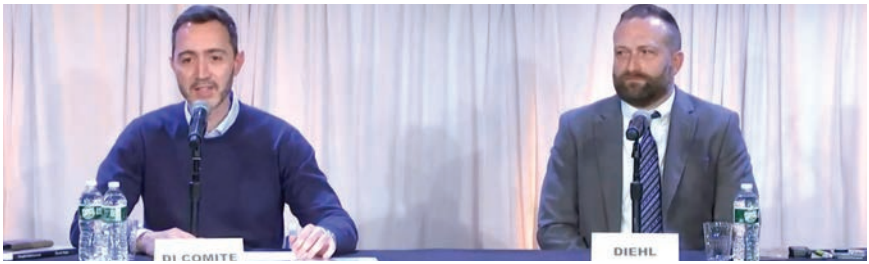
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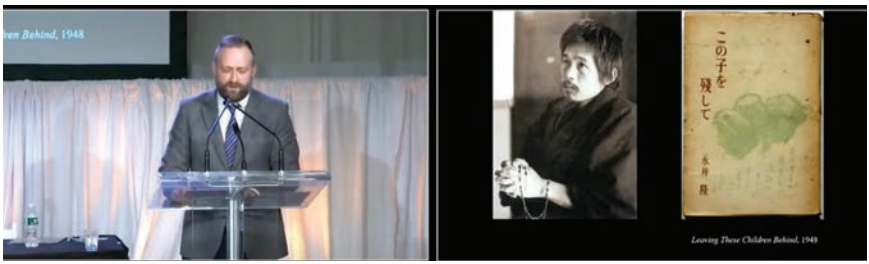
Leaving These Children Behind, 1948


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"What Never Dies" (Takashi Nagai)

A presentation on the life of Dr. Takashi Nagai and his wife Midori with ***Gabriele Di Comite****, President of the Friends of Takashi and Midori Nagai Association,* ***Chad Diehl****, Historian and Instructional Designer at the University of Virginia, and* ***Dominic Higgins****, movie director*

Introduction

During his medical studies, Takashi Nagai (1908-1951) was a convinced positivist atheist but he maintained a reason so open to reality that he was moved by the provocations of life and death, to the point of allowing himself to be accompanied to baptism by the encounter with Midori Marina Moriyama (1908-1945), a surprising example of faith and a virginal position, who would later become his wife. With baptism, he became Paul, a new creature who lives, looks, and judges everything starting from the experience of faith. On August 9, 1945, Midori fulfilled her life in the ultimate sacrifice, carried to heaven by the nuclear mushroom, while tightening her rosary. Takashi Paolo sets out on the path of a sought-after and profound poverty of spirit, which leads him to experience friendship with God in that atomic desert and to live the hundredfold of Faith which makes him an encounterable proclamation of Hope and Peace for his people. There are many who go looking for him. They call him "the saint of Urakami" because he, already ill with leukemia, is for those who meet him a true source of life and therefore the possibility of rebuilding on the ruins, as he wanted to indicate by planting 1,000 cherry trees with his first earnings.

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Gabriele Di Comite: Good evening, and welcome to the final talk of the 2022 edition of the New York Encounter. My name is Gabriela Di Comite, I'm the president of the Friends of Takashi and Midori Nagaya Association. I will be moderating this panel, and I will also be one of the speakers, along with Chad Diehl, who is here with me, and Dominic Higgins, who has kindly agreed to join us live from the UK. I would also like to thank Somos, who has supported us in this event and has made this possible.

First of all, about the two speakers. Chad Diehl is a historian and Instructional Designer at the University of Virginia, and has been doing research in the field of the modern history of Japan, especially related to human experience in the war and it's aftermath. He is the author of *Resurrecting Nagasaki*, which will be the main topic of his talk tonight. From the UK there is Dominic Higgins, a movie director. In 2003 he founded, together with his brother Jan Higgins, a movie production firm called Pixel Revolutions Films. They have produced a lot of experimental animated films and live action video. The first was *The Wolf Who Came in from the Cold*, which won an award at the International Digital Video Festival in Los Angeles and at Birmingham's TIC Film Festival. He's directed many other very successful movies, including *The 13th Day*, and a big project on the life and story of Takashi Nagai. There was a New York Encounter exhibit about Takashi Nagai in 2019, so you might have heard about him, but probably not all of you.

Takashi Nagai was a young student of medicine in Nagasaki. He came from a family that was not Christian but of Shinto origin, and he always had been strongly driven by a strong urge for truth. This is the force that always drove him. The death of his mother brought him to question his life. He immediately understood that life and death should have a meaning. He had heard a lot about the Catholic faith. He decided to understand more about the Catholic faith and went to live in Urakami. You have to remember this name. Urakami is the northern area of the city of Nagasaki, which for 250 years was the place where the hidden Christians of Japan had lived. For 250 years in Japan, there were very, very bad persecutions, and Christianity was almost completely cancelled. There were only a few thousand people living in the north in the surroundings of Nagasaki, especially in the area of Urakami, yet they were able to preserve and transmit the faith in this little area. The

descendants of the hidden Christians were there, so he decided to meet them. In the encounter with the hidden Christians, and especially with Midori Moriyama, who would become his wife, he converted himself to the faith. Midori was for him an incredible testimony of what real faith and virginity is. She was his wife, but she lived virginity in the sense of total dedication of her life to her vocation. And it was in looking at her that he understood what real faith in life is.

He dedicated himself completely to science, to his work as a radiologist, as a doctor, and as a university professor. He dedicated so much to radiology that he developed leukemia, and by 1945 was affected by leukemia in a pretty advanced stage. On the 9th of August, 1945, the second atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki, in exactly the area of Urakami, which had been the heart of Catholicism in Japan for 300 years, since the arrival of Saint Francis Xavier. Urakami was completely destroyed and his wife Midori died, along with most of the people there. He survived because he was working in the radiology department and was protected by the building. After the destruction from the bomb, he has lost completely everything. The city did not exist anymore, his wife was not with him anymore, he lost all his friends, he lost his work, his colleagues. He was already affected by leukemia, and would spend the remaining years of his life confined to a bed because of it.

He started writing books and became extremely famous. In his books, he shows the power of faith to bring life and hope even within total destruction. He became such a powerful witness of hope and peace that his books became a great success all over Japan and even beyond Japan. He earned a lot of money from the books but gave it all away because he decided to live in total poverty. The story of Nagai became so important for us, for me and a few other friends, that we decided to found the association, Friends of Takashi Midori Nagai. In these last two or three years there have been so many encounters, and probably two of the most significant are for sure the ones with Chad and with Dominic, and that's why we are here today.

I would like to show you now a short video. I think we will get a bit of a sense of who Takashi Nagai was.

video plays

Di Comite: I show the video because I would really like you to understand the situation where Nagai was living, because now, with the help of our friend John McCarthy, we will hear some readings from the beautiful book that Nagai wrote when he lived in his bed. In order to understand the magnitude of what he says, we really should keep in mind the situation in which he was living. There was nothing around him. He had lost everything. He was living in a city that was completely destroyed. He had nothing anymore. He didn't have a house anymore and he was not able to leave his bed. So let's hear in his own words how he was able to live in those conditions.

John McCarthy: "As soon as I wake up, the first thought that occurs to me every morning is that I'm happy. Again today I'm alive, even if I'm only able to use my hands and head, I find myself filled with enthusiasm, like a schoolboy eager to go on the morning of a class trip. It has been an achievement of this last period to find myself surprised every morning, as I lie in bed, filled with this expectation of joy at the prospect of a new day. I am discovering that I have in me the heart of a child. If only we were able to carry out our everyday tasks with the passion of a poet, as if composing the verses of a haiku, how much beauty would permeate the workplace. We should turn our lives into poetry. We should let the poet's attentive and admiring gaze penetrate beneath the surface of things, so as to glimpse the beauty that hides itself in each thing and allow that beauty to shape our every action and thought, whether we find ourselves toiling away in the noisy factory, or tossing on a fishing boat far out at sea, or working in a shop among people. I have finally reached this new horizon. Beating within me is a child's heart. The life of a new day awaits me; real joy in this bed of mine six feet long, and I cannot even leave, but it is life without the goad of duties and the ties of prohibitions that would stop the audacity of this heart, that every morning sets to work anew."

Di Comite: "As soon as I wake up, the first thought occurs to me every morning is that I'm happy. Beating within my chest is a child's heart. The life of a new day awaits me."

How is this even possible in those conditions? Is this guy disconnected from reality? Is this guy a fool? But if so, then why do thousands of people,

literally *thousands* of people go and look for him every day? Simple people and people from all over Japan, and then people from the rest of the world. Even the emperor went and visited him, and the pope sent him letters, and there were people from the world of culture and science. Thousands of normal people going to visit him every day in search of a glimpse of hope and peace. He was the only glimpse of hope and peace that could be found in that moment, in the entirety of what remained of the city of Nagasaki. How can he have this gaze? How can he see beauty in the total destruction of the atomic wasteland? Where is that beauty? How can he find beauty beneath the surface?

McCarthy: "The view I enjoy from my bed is by no means limitless. It's confined by the house's low wooden beam and the profile of the mountain beyond the church, yet it is just enough to allow me to enjoy the feeling of a boundless sky, clear and bright without the shadow of a cloud. I was reminded of the view of Urakami I had on the night of a full moon, a little more than 10 days after the city had been reduced to nothing by the atomic fire. That night, just like today, there wasn't a single cloud in the sky and a clear light illumined the ash-covered hills. Up until today, no light like that had ever been seen. A night without the shadow of a cloud in the sky and not a trace of a wave went rippling across the ocean's surface. A little more than 10 days before that night, here in Urakami, thousands of homes and tall buildings still stood out against the sky, beginning with a great church. When all of a sudden, tens of thousands of people found themselves wandering aimlessly and in anguished desperation, with a terrifying sound of air raid sirens filling their ears, each one clutching some object in his hands and regretting only that he was alive still. In an instant, the city was no more and everything that was human—greed, love, hate, angry recrimination—had disappeared without a trace. That evening 10 days later there was nothing living to be seen. Nothing moving, just a hill covered in ash, illumined by the moon's glow, and not a thing left standing upon it to cast any shade. That city once so rich in humanity, which had formally animated so many shadows, was now a lifeless hill on which shadows were no longer visible. As I gazed upon it, I felt in my heart the transience of human life, and it occurred to me that every craving was senseless. My beloved wife was dead. My laboratory and

my research had been destroyed, my home and all my possessions had been reduced to ashes, my health was already shot, and I knew that very soon I would no longer be able to work. Everything was gone. And yet, while I was thinking these thoughts, and as my gaze wandered out over the land boundless and unshaded, I discovered to my surprise that I felt neither regret nor sadness at having lost everything. What perishes, perishes. What dies, dies. Seeing the few remnants of all that had been lost, I realized how foolish we are, we human beings in our obsessive craving for things that die and then fighting not to let them be taken away once we have secured them. At that point I felt liberated when I realized that when I had to seek with something that doesn't die, when I realized that I had to seek the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness, a great new hope took root in my heart. The kingdom of heaven and his righteousness. These are the things that never perish, that we will never be deprived of. At that moment my heart was also flooded with an indescribable light untouched by shadows. A little more than five years have passed and tonight the moonlight spreads itself as high in the sky as it did that night. The atomic wasteland is inhabited once more. Homes are being built and the vortex of love, and hate, and greed of the human world once again appears to toss and turn, and the shadows have returned to the earth. And what about my heart now? Is it still like that night five years ago, boundless and without the shadow of a cloud? How precious was my feeling of nostalgia that night."

Di Comite: "How precious was my feeling of nostalgia that night." That is the difference between Nagai and, well, I would say almost all the other people there. In the moment when the circumstances are most dire, the worse the circumstances become, the stronger the cry of the heart becomes, and that's the point at which the freedom has to make a pure decision. Do I still want to listen, to give credit to the cry of my heart? Or do I want to give credit to the temptation that everything is hopeless, that there's no possibility for life anymore? "How precious was my feeling of nostalgia that night." That is the decision of the heart of Nagai. He realizes the preciousness of that moment. From that moment on, he realized what is true is not the life he was living before. It was his nostalgia that night. We ask ourselves how this is possible. This is the first resource that Nagai hangs onto: the cry of his

heart, which in that moment is stronger than ever before. That's why he says, "When I realized that what I had to seek was something that doesn't die, I felt liberated." But that's still not enough, because he has something else in his life. "When I realized that what I had to seek was something that doesn't die, when I realized that I had to seek the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness," he says, "a great new hope took root in my heart." He has something in his life, he has a seed of experience in his life that there is something that never dies. That's his starting point after the destruction of the atomic bomb: the cry of his heart and the evidence in his life that there is something that never dies.

McCarthy: "Five years have passed since then and our movement for peace has never ceased. We have continued without a break to proclaim the value of that sacrifice. But come to think of it, have we not missed something in all of this? Was it not we, the survivors, who misappropriated the sacrifice of those hundreds of thousands of people who gave up their lives in the atomic cloud in order to bring about peace? In order to maintain the world peace achieved by that sacrifice another new sacrifice would have been necessary. Prayers that call for sacrifices without offering any of their own are just egotism. The citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have prayed for peace, but what did they themselves offer in sacrifice for it? Have we freely offered such a sacrifice? Beginning today we must engage in sincere self-reflection and offer another new sacrifice greater than that of the atomic bomb. Let it be the day of a new prayer. Let it be the sacrifice of a change in ourselves, each for himself. A real movement for peace and justice with patience and love and with humility and determination, the sort of life of poverty that I live of my own free will. I don't live this way because I have to, but how could I alone among these people live in luxury? It doesn't matter how much money I make from sales of my books if we understand that the sole purpose that some are given so much is that they put it at the service of their neighbor. Then it can no longer be said that heaven's plan is unjust. I've been given the ability to earn dozens of times more than that old woman over there peddling food from a cart, and it would not be according to heaven's will that I spend dozens of times more than her on lavish extravagances. To my mind it is truer that I live on the same level as the peddler and use all the excess money to serve the

needs of the entire neighborhood. In this way, my heart finds peace. These are the reasons why I choose to live in poverty."

Di Comite: This is the new life that he decides to start in that moment. He understands in his experience that there is something that never dies, and he wants to give his entire life to that. That is the sacrifice he's talking about.

I would like all of us to understand this point because I think this is really the most important one. The sacrifice he's talking about is not the sacrifice of our life, of his own life. It is the sacrifice of his images, it's the sacrifice of his instincts, it's the sacrifice of what he was looking for in his previous life, to let everything go and give himself only to what never dies, which is poverty. This is the sacrifice that it starts. And it's this long journey on himself, which is the conversion of his heart, which is the source of the hope that he's able to bring to the entire city of Nagasaki. Because this is the point. What's the point of one heart like Nagai's to change, being able to experience this hope and this peace, if the rest of the world remains in the same situation? What's the point of the testimony of Takashi Nagai? Is what Takashi Nagai is showing us, is it true only for him? Or is this the truth—the one with the capital T—that must be true for us today and for the entire city of that time?

And now we come to our two speakers. Let me start with Dominic. What's the point of the testimony of Takashi Nagai in your life? How did Takashi Nagai affect your life?

Dominic Higgins: We initially were working on a documentary that touched on the bombing of Hiroshima, and while we were there, while we were researching that subject, we started to come across stories about Nagasaki. And one name—well, really one title—stuck out to us and that was "the saint of Urakami." That started us on the journey to find out just who this so-called saint of Urakami was. We discovered that he was a man who had an incredible story to tell. A scientist who has converted to Christianity, not despite being a scientist, but *because* he was a scientist. Today, Doctor Takashi Nagai is best remembered as an atomic bomb survivor and peace activist whose writing helped build a nation that had been completely devastated by war. In fact, his work led to him being honored as a national hero of Japan. Today, that legacy continues to live on in the Takashi Nagai Peace Award.

Takashi spent his final years living in a small hut in the middle of the

atomic wasteland, writing a great number of books and essays that were centered on the atomic bomb. His most famous book was *The Bells of Nagasaki*, which in 1951 was actually made into a film, and Dr. Nagai even got to watch it shortly before his own death. That book that really seemed the natural place to start our journey. We bought a copy, and I think I was about halfway through when I said, "This has to be our next project." At the time, we didn't know how we were going to do it. It was a very ambitious project to take on, but we knew we had to try somehow. We visited Nagasaki, spent time in the locations, visiting Nakoda, where he spent his final years and which is now a museum. We had the opportunity to meet and talk with several of the survivors. While we were there, we also wanted to find out more about Christianity in Japan, as this was going to radically shape Takashi's own life, and through which he would come to find meaning in the aftermath of the bombing.

Importantly, the woman who was to become his wife was a descendant of the hidden Christians. Christianity in Japan can actually be traced all the way back to 1549, when Francis Xavier first arrived in Kagoshima, which means that he actually predates Christianity in America. I mean, that was absolutely fascinating for us to learn, so we took the opportunity while we were there to visit Nara and interview Father Paul Green. While we were there, we had the opportunity to spend some time with the small Christian community, and it really did have quite a profound impact on me, which I wasn't expecting. It is very much a community held together by this shared faith. Apparently, there has been some debate as to whether this community should actually be considered Christian. After all, they had to exist for much of their history separated from the Church. But I've also read someone described them as "old Christians," and I like that. Reading and listening to their stories, some of which are still in real living memory, is like taking a glimpse into the lives of those early Christians having to practice faith and secrecy, having to live under constant threats of persecution, which was even death. It's something definitely very authentic about their faith.

While we were there, we actually attended a Mass led by Father Paul Glynn, and for some reason I felt really moved by that Mass. Maybe it's because I've come to learn their history. Remember, this is a community that's

experienced real persecution in very recent times. Takashi himself described his first experience in the church as a Christmas Eve Mass. I was feeling something—which I think you later described as a living presence in that Church—that was fascinating.

Our film project took us about five years to make, and it was a real struggle at the time. But for me it was an absolute privilege to have the opportunity to get to know Dr. Nagai and Midori, to learn their story, to learn about this part of history which was, to be honest, a complete mystery to us when we started. The Catholic Church has already honored Takashi with the title Servant of God, which is befitting a man born into a samurai family. For the word *samurai* means "to serve." He's on his first step to sainthood, but to many people in Nagasaki and our own world, Takashi Nagai is already considered a saint. We're very grateful to Gabriel for reaching out to us and letting us know about the Friends of Takashi Midori and Nagai, for allowing us to continue on this journey. I'll pass you back to Gabriel.

Di Comite: Thank you very much, Dominic. Chad has done an incredible job, and what is interesting is that he has done this research with the eyes of science, of history, and not with the eyes of faith. He was interested in understanding how the rebuilding of Nagasaki began, and he ended up realizing how crucial was the testimony of Nagai, who had been living in that hut, two by two meters. Without even going out, he was able to move an entire city by his testimony. Chad?

Chad Diehl: Good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for attending in person and attending online, and to my daughter who's attending online, rest assured as promised I am wearing the socks with the pandas on them. [*audience laughter and applause*] I'd also like to express my sincere gratitude to the organizers and volunteers of the Encounter, and to my fellow panelists for the opportunity to speak to you all this evening. I begin with a photograph taken by the United States Marines in early 1946. They called the Urakami district the "valley of death" because of its level of destruction, the presence of rotting corpses still underneath the rubble, and the persistent radiation which made even the American Marines fall ill with radiation poisoning. I share this photograph to help you get a visual idea of the devastation from which Nagasaki had to rebuild. My entire professional career began with a single

encounter. Exactly 21 years ago this month, my brother Matt and I visited the atomic bomb museum in Nagasaki and came across an exhibit dedicated to the Catholic community of the Urakami district, whose neighborhood was literally ground zero of the atomic bombing. In that exhibit was this photograph and a description of Nagai Takashi and his post-war work, writing about the city's experience. I was fascinated by the fact that Nagasaki was home to the largest community of Catholics in Japan. I was confused by the realization that a mostly Christian nation, the United States, had dropped a bomb on that community, and I was compelled to learn more about them and especially about their parishioner leader, Nagai Takashi. And so, at the museum's bookstore on our way out, I bought one of Nagai Takashi's books, *Leaving These Children Behind*, which I hoped would also strengthen my Japanese reading skills. Upon returning to the United States, I began reading the book and came across the following passage, which appears in a chapter aptly titled, "Providence." Amid his description of hundreds of dead schoolgirls whose corpses lined a riverbed, Nagai wrote: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, and let us always praise the name of the Lord. Those of us left living who saw the dead, thought that the atomic bomb was not divine punishment at all, but that it was no different from the expression of some profound plan of divine providence. That same day I, too, had become a weak, penniless person, and had embraced two small children in the fire ruins. I don't know what it was, but I believed and never doubted that this was the expression of the providence of love. I have endured three years since the bombing, but the fact that my faith that day was correct will gradually come to be proven. Because of the atomic bomb, the obstruction that was blocking my righteous path was removed and I became able to taste true happiness. Death that will come to me soon is also the greatest gift of love that I confront, I, who am God's and who increases in His infinite love." Now my initial feeling after reading this passage was that my reading comprehension in Japanese was absolutely terrible. I was sure that I was reading something incorrectly, because how could a person who had endured so much trauma and suffering interpret the bombing in such a light? I read the passage several more times and realized yes, that's exactly what the Japanese text was saying. So, my next reaction was: What?! [*audience laughter*] For me, this moment

turned into a decades-long scholarly quest to historicize and comprehend the context of Nagai's interpretation of the bombing, and the effect that it had on Nagasaki memoryscapes. I've since published a book in 2018, *Resurrecting Nagasaki: Reconstruction in the Formation of Atomic Narratives*. Nagai Takashi, of course, figures largely in my discussion. What I concluded from the 15 years of research that preceded the publication of the book was that Nagai Takashi was the most influential single contributor to the reconstruction of Nagasaki city. From 1945 to 1947, Nagai contributed first to the spiritual recovery of the Uramaki Catholic community as their parishioner leader. The atomic bombing killed approximately eight thousand of the roughly ten thousand Uramaki Catholics. Many Catholic survivors felt that God had forsaken them or that the bombing was some kind of divine punishment. Some non-Catholic believers from the southern part of the city had been saying as much; that the Catholics were being punished for not being Shinto believers. In response to this, and as a way to help process the trauma of the bombing, especially the loss of their loved ones and other community members, Nagai Takashi developed his argument that the bombing was not divine punishment but rather a manifestation of God's love for the Uramaki Catholics. Nagai, too, had lost his dear wife, Midori, and he needed to find meaning in her death and in the suffering of the survivors who lived with immeasurable trauma. Nagai took the opportunity of a mass funeral service for the Uramaki Catholic community amid the ruins of their cathedral on November 23rd, 1945, to convey that narrative of the bombing to help them make sense of the trauma and begin community and individual recovery. During the lengthy eulogy, Nagai declared: "If one considers the fact that the atomic bomb, which had aimed for the vicinity of the prefectural office in the heart of the city, but drifted to the north because of the weather and fell in Uramaki, right in front of our cathedral, along with the fact that this atomic bomb was the last act of war and fighting did not happen anywhere on earth after it, one will realize that there exists a deep connection between the destruction of Uramaki and the end of the war. In other words, the church of Urakami was placed on the altar of sacrifice as atonement for the sin of humankind, which was the World War. It was chosen as a pure lamb, slaughtered and burned. We believe this. The great holocaust that was made

in the presence of this cathedral on August 9th and duly ended the darkness of the great World War and shined the light of peace. Even in the nadir of sadness, we reverently viewed this as something beautiful, something pure, and something sacred. Let us always praise the work of the omniscient and omnipotent Lord. Let us give thanks for the church of Uramaki having been chosen out of the entire world to be offered in the holocaust. The word holocaust in Japanese is *Hansai*, meaning, of course, "a burnt offering unto God." Nagai Takashi's eulogy gave meaning to the destruction by framing it as a providential tragedy. It exemplified atonement for the sin of humankind which was the World War, and only the Urakami Catholics were the worthy sacrifice for the burnt offering or holocaust.

The bereaved took Nagai's message to heart. One community member recalled decades later, "We were convinced by Nagai's interpretation of the bombing, even the people who had thought it was divine punishment." Another member shared how Nagai inspired the Catholic community with his leadership in service, explaining, "He was such a good person that some people thought God had delivered him to us." When Nagai became bedridden with leukemia, which he had contracted before the atomic bombing, he decided to begin writing as much as he could, to leave a record of the experience and significance of the atomic bombing. This led to the second stage, so to speak, of his contributions to the reconstruction of the city.

From 1948 until his death in 1951 and really beyond, Nagai's work as a writer contributed to the physical rebuilding of the landscape of Nagasaki city. During that time, he published nine books of his own, two edited volumes of essays by other survivors, and two translations of books by western authors. He also wrote books and essays that were published posthumously. His books came at a crucial moment for the recovery of Nagasaki, when the city, and indeed all cities around Japan, struggled to secure funds for the reconstruction projects. Nagai's first major best-selling book was *Leaving These Children Behind* in 1948, which was the book I had brought home with me from the atomic bomb museum in February of 2001. In its first year of printing, the book sold 220,000 copies. A national newspaper poll in September 1949 of the most-read books over the previous year included three books by Nagai Takashi: *Leaving These Children Behind* at number one;

The Bells of Nagasaki at number four; and *Rosary Chain* at number sixteen. Incidentally, the translation of John Hersey's *Hiroshima* appeared much lower at 19th. Nagai's books earned him massive royalties. During the 1948-1949 fiscal year, when *Leaving These Children Behind* and *The Bells of Nagasaki* were published, he earned 2,176,333 yen in royalties. Even so, he never considered this enormous gain in wealth his own, rather he thought it belonged to the people of Nagasaki, and so he gladly paid around 90% in national and city taxes, and he donated the majority of the rest of the income directly to the city. When the public expressed surprise and confusion over why Nagai had to pay so much in taxes, he told one of his friends, "The payment of tax is a shared responsibility for the reconstruction of Japan; taxes are the oil for the reconstruction of our country." The popularity of Nagai's books also helped bring national attention to the special case of Nagasaki as an atomic bomb city, resulting in additional funds. In 1949, Nagasaki jumped to the top of the list, along with Hiroshima, for national reconstruction funds. Until then, Nagasaki had been 31st on a list of 41 cities slated to receive those funds. Hiroshima had already sat pretty highly at sixth.

In response to the resulting national reconstruction law, Nagai Takashi decided to donate the rest of his royalties after tax to the Nagasaki International Cultural City Construction Fund to improve the infrastructure of the city. He believed that donating to this fund directly would help the entire city, including Uramaki, to all rise at once. When a friend asked Nagai why he didn't put away more money for his children, he responded, "We must raise the general level of the area. If everyone improves, then my children will also improve. The revitalization of Urakami and the reconstruction of Nagasaki are our serious responsibilities." In other words, for Nagai Takashi, writing books was his way of working to lay a foundation for the future of all of the children of Nagasaki.

When I received feedback on the earliest draft of my book on Nagasaki, one of my mentors said that my chapters on Nagai read like an official hagiography, as though I revered him like a saint. I found her comment fair but also strange, because in the interest of full disclosure, I am not Catholic, nor am I religious, to be honest; so why did my chapters on Nagai come across as—she put it—overly hagiographic? At any rate, I wanted my book to

be as objective as possible, so I revised, rewrote, edited down the chapters on Nagai, but even after so many revisions his presence in the post-war history of Nagasaki's reconstruction remains so prominent that it might still strike some readers as overly hagiographic.

Nagai has not been without his critics, even in the present. I, too, have discussed Nagai critically from a historian's perspective, especially in regard to how his narrative of the atomic bombing has sometimes overshadowed the atomic experience of other survivors, both Catholic and non-Catholic alike. But as a historian I must also acknowledge the context within which Nagai had worked. The devastation and uncertainty of the immediate post-war period had called on him to be a spiritual leader and community advocate. For Nagai, the most important mission that he undertook at the time, I think, was keeping faith alive at all costs, because he understood and truly believed in the role that faith could play in bringing the city back from the brink of oblivion. In other words, and while my own faith has remained broken since childhood, studying Nagai Takashi introduced me to the power of faith, and especially to how faith can illuminate a path to recovery even out of the darkness of the so-called Valley of Death. I would like to end with a poem that Nagai considered a prayer expressing optimism for the future of his children, Nagasaki, and the world. The English translation is Nagai's own.

"Peace, oh peace, the bell of peace is tolling. We must keep this peace forever." Thank you. [*audience applause*]

Di Comite: I've heard a lot of talk recently about the struggle with the pandemic, and with many other issues we are going through, and the basic question is, Where is truth here? How can we restart living in such difficult conditions? He says: "Five years have passed since then and our movement for peace has never ceased. We have continued without a break to proclaim the value of that sacrifice." Then he says, "But have we not missed something in all of this? Beginning today we must engage in sincere self-reflection and offer another new sacrifice, greater than that of the atomic bomb. Let it be the sacrifice of a change in ourselves, each for himself." This is the magnitude of Takashi Nagai. He's not just what he did—there is a consequence. I mean, all the donations, the way he helped reconstruct the city, that is the consequence of the work that he did on himself, of the sacrifice of himself, to let go of

everything that dies and give his life entirely to only what never dies. It's the sacrifice of conversion.

I can only conclude this with one sentence that many of you have probably heard several times. "The forces that change the history are the forces that change the heart of a man." The transformation, the conversion of the heart of one person has been able to change an entire city on a cultural, social, and political level. And after 70 years, we are here from Japan, Italy, the UK—talking about Nagai because this is really true; the strength that changes the world, in all the struggles we are facing, is the power of faith, the conversion of our hearts in faith.

With this I would like to thank again my friends, Chad and Dominic. Thank you very much for taking part of this. [*audience applause*]