Who Am I That You Care For Me?

Proceedings of the New York Encounter 2023

NEW YORK ENCOUNTER

Who Am I That You Care For Me?

This book contains transcripts, not reviewed by the authors, of talks given at the New York Encounter 2023

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It's clear now. Two years of pandemic have shown us that the image of the self-sufficient, autonomous individual cannot stand up to the growing lack of motivation and the epidemic of loneliness, mental illness, gun violence. Likewise, the new paradigm of diversity, equity, and inclusion seems inadequate to respond to the concrete problems of division, injustice, and estrangement. Intriguing phenomena have appeared: the "great resignation," the rise of influencers, the spread of cryptocurrencies, the metaverse. And then the specter of inflation and recession. Lastly, the war in Ukraine has taken us by surprise. Its images of unspeakable violence have reminded us of the mysterious existence of evil, and of our radical inability to deal with it, either as victims or perpetrators.

In the face of all of this, a desire for more genuine connections and real community has emerged, the perception that we are somehow interdependent. At a deeper level, the more I feel uncertain, ill-equipped to face life, deceived by empty promises, the stronger I ache to be seen, accepted, affirmed by someone in flesh and blood.

I yearn for someone who is not uncomfortable with my brokenness, put off by my failures, or embarrassed by my sadness. Someone who values my deeper questions, who is certain of the meaning of life and walks with me to meet it. Someone who knows me and, inexplicably, really cares for me.

Why do I have this yearning?

But when you said: you,
to me, yes, to me singled out,
I was higher than stars,
deeper than coral. …
You gave me possession of myself
when you gave your self to me.

—Pedro Salinas, "When you chose me"


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WHO AM I
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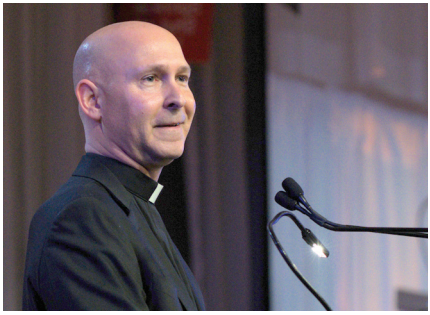
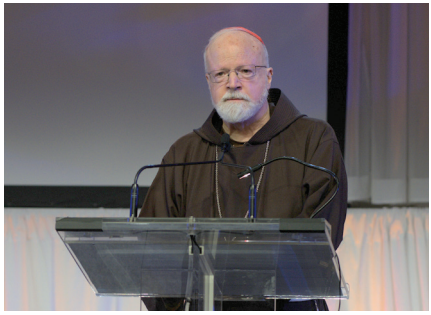
STEINWAY & SONS





“Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary” (Pope Benedict XVI)

The Encounter opens with poetry, music, and a conversation in memory of Pope Benedict XVI—with ***Stephen Brown****, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Administration and Dean of Graduate Studies at the Catholic University of America;* ***Cardinal Sean O'Malley****, Archbishop of Boston;* ***His Eminence Steven Raica****, Bishop of Birmingham; and* ***Fr. Alex Zenthoefer****, Rector of St. Benedict Cathedral, Evansville.*

Introduction

"The whole cosmos reaches a certain point of evolution, at which it becomes self-awareness: that point is called "I." The "I" is self-awareness of the world, of the cosmos, and of oneself. The cosmos is the context in which the relationship with the Mystery lives. The Psalmist asks, "Lord, what on earth is man that You keep him in mind, that you remember him?" Among all the animals and little creatures of the cosmos, man is one-hundredth, a thousandth, a ten-thousandth. But the greatness of man, the honor and glory of man, lies in the fact that man, the individual man, is in relationship with the infinite." (Fr. Giussani, *The Psalms*, Crossroad, 2004)

Accompanied by the memory of Pope Benedict XVI, we will begin our three-day journey to explore the question: "Who am I that you care for me?"

❖ ❖ ❖

Music plays
Applause

Deniz Demirer: What is Man? As is known, the first great fundamental text about man is to be found in the story of Genesis. The story of creation, with the creation of man presented with a special solemnity. The creation in which God does not only speak a word of power but even describes the mystery of man. He lets man come into being within His own dialogue with Himself. Thus man, so to speak, is from then on already integrated into God's inner soliloquy. This is again confirmed when it is said that man is created in God's likeness, as an image of Him. And the fundamental idea appears in Psalm 8, in which man is presented as the paradoxical being that is actually so miserable, so insignificant, that one is surprised at the fact that God should look after him. This experience challenges us today in the infinitely changing universe, in such a way that we discover man really as a completely insignificant particle of dust in an immeasurable world, and we ask, "How could it be that God's theater revolves around man?" What naive anthropocentrism lies behind a desire to make this miserable particle of dust on the tiny point called Earth the center of God's creation...and God's action.

We are not the first ones to experience this. The prayer in the Old Testament was also challenged by it, he who also knows man as a worm that already by the time it rises fades, and thus one cannot actually understand that he would be worthy of God's concern. Yet the psalmist experiences man at the same time as a paradoxical being, which in the midst of its quantitative insignificance has something by means of which it immeasurably outshines quantitative magnitudes, so that at the same time it can be said, "Yet you have made him a little lower than the angels." We could affirm, therefore, that this is the first great statement: man as man is an image of God.

Riro Maniscalco: Good evening. We wanted to open the Encounter, as always, with something beautiful and meaningful. That's why the choir sang Rachmaninoff's *Bogorodice*, which is Rachmaninoff's Hail Mary. That's why we picked words from Pope Benedict XVI, and it's to him that we want to dedicate this opening conversation centered on one single question, which I ask all our panelists: Looking at Pope Benedict's life, what are you grateful for at a personal level and from a cultural point of view?

And I invite you to warmly welcome our guests: His Eminence Cardinal O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston, and a very dear and precious friend of the

Encounter; Fr Alex Zenthoefer, Rector of Saint Benedict Cathedral, Evansville, Indiana; Stephen Brown, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Administration and Dean of Graduate Studies at the Catholic University of America; and His Excellency Steven Raica, Bishop of Birmingham, Alabama, another dear and precious friend of the Encounter. Thanks for being here. [*applause*] I had a plan how to run this first conversation, but it was ruled out by the speakers. [*laughter*] They will come to the podium, so I invite Cardinal O'Malley to come and share his thoughts. [*applause*]

Cardinal Sean O'Malley: Thank you very much, it's a great privilege to be here tonight. I was so lucky to be able to attend Pope Benedict's funeral, listen to Pope Francis's beautiful homily, see the thousands and thousands of people there to bid farewell to our great Pope Benedict. And after the mass I was able to go to the convent where he had lived, to personally thank Archbishop Ganswein and the *Memores Domini* for the wonderful care that they had taken of Pope Benedict during so many years.

I first met Pope Benedict almost 40 years ago when I was named a bishop. I was in a unusual situation, because I had participated in two bishops conferences in the West Indies and in the United States, so I had twice as many *ad limina* visits as bishops usually have: two every five years instead of one. But the highlight of our visits were always our meetings with Cardinal Ratzinger. He was one of the most brilliant theological minds I had ever met and the media characterizations of him as the "Panzer Cardinal" were laughable. He was the gentlest, kindest, most considerate priestly individual you could imagine. I was privileged to hear him speak on so many occasions. I loved reading his books, and it was a joy to be in his presence.

In 2005, The Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist were organizing a retreat for their entire community and they were going to have it in Rome. They got in a retreat house there and they contacted me and asked if I would be willing to preach this retreat to them with another preacher, and I said fine, I'd be happy to do it. They were Franciscans, after all, and I felt a certain obligation. But after I consented to be a part of the retreat, it was revealed to me that the other preacher was going to be Cardinal Ratzinger. [*laughter*]

Needless to say, I was quite intimidated, and I wondered if the sisters had invited me to be the comic relief in between the brilliant discourses of

the Church's premier theologian. As it turned out, even before I reached an agreement with Cardinal Ratzinger on what topics I would deal with in my talks and what topics he would preach on, Pope Saint John Paul II died. Thus I ended up giving the retreat by myself. Of course, I told the sisters that some people would do anything to get out of giving them a retreat; even getting elected pope. And probably because of a sense of guilt for leaving me alone with the sisters, and certainly because he did not hear my lousy retreat conferences, Pope Benedict named me a cardinal at his first consistory. [*laughter*]

Being an Irish infiltrator in the Bavarian American province of Capuchins, I also had a special relationship with Pope Benedict, who was very close to our friars and was born in Bavaria, right near the wonderful Capuchin monasteries where Saint Conrad of Parzham departed and lived in the famous Marian Shrine of Altötting. In my last visit there, for the ordination of a young German Capuchin, I stayed in our monastery in the very cell where Benedict always stayed when he visited Altötting. And over the door, of course, they had his coat of arms, and the room was very much like a simple friar cell, except that in one corner there was a harpsichord.

At the holidays I always sent Pope Benedict a large box of Mozart Kügel, the pistachio marzipan and nougat covered with dark chocolate and wrapped with a picture of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Benedict sent me books. [*laughter*] I was very touched when Pope Benedict published, in a book of remembrance, a letter that I wrote to him after his brother's death. As I saw the letter I had to laugh, because I'd spent hours redacting this letter, the text, and seeking help with the German and so forth. Benedict, on the other hand, could extemporaneously dictate entire chapters of a book of theology that would be ready for publishing virtually without corrections or redactions.

Benedict was a great theologian who not only knew a lot about God, but more importantly, he knew God. To use the phrase coined by Von Balthasar, Ratzinger's theology was *kniende theologie*, theology on the knees, theology learned in prayer and communion with God. In reading Pope Benedict's spiritual testament published after his death, I was struck by seeing that overwhelming sentiment of gratitude. He repeats his thanks over and over

again, his thanks for his beautiful family, for his beautiful home and the Bavarian foothills of the Alps, and for the beauty of the faith.

The *Via Pulchritudinous* is an important path in Pope Benedict's life. Certainly his appreciation of Mozart and Beethoven and beautiful liturgical music of the Church's tradition reinforced his sense of the Divine, of the presence of God in his life. In his first words as pope, Benedict describes himself in the following terms. He says, "After the great John Paul II, the cardinals have elected me, a humble laborer in the vineyard of the Lord." Behind the simplicity and humility, we come to glimpse his deep spirituality and amazing theological mind, as well as the capacity to communicate the great truths of the faith with cogency and clarity. He was a great preacher, a great teacher in the classroom, and we know how devoted his students were to him and how they would gather yearly to reflect on the great truths of the faith. Benedict was always close to Communion and Liberation, and he often repeated the same ideas that we read about in Father Giussani's writings, particularly in a very clear statement that Christianity is not just an idea or a moral code, however sublime, but an encounter, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Jesus is not a figure from the distant past to whom the Church makes perfunctory references, but rather the Living Lord who is the very source of our lives. We live and move and have our being in the body whose head is Christ. As Kierkegaard used to say, "We are Christ's contemporaries."

In his very moving homily at Monsignor Giussani's funeral, the then-Cardinal Ratzinger states that "Don Giussani, with his fearless and unfailing faith, knew that the encounter with Christ remains central, because whoever does not give God, gives too little; and whoever does not give God, whoever does not make people find God, in the fact of Christ, does not build but destroys."

In *Deus Caritas Est* Pope Benedict says, "We have come to believe in God's love. In these words, the Christian can express the fundamental decision of one's life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and decisive direction." St John's gospel describes that event in these words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son that whoever believes in him should have eternal life." The pope goes on to say, "Since God has first

loved us, love is now no longer a mere command, it's a response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us."

During the pontificate of Pope Benedict, it was heard often that people went to Rome to *see* John Paul II but went to Rome to *hear* Benedict XVI. Many scholars claim that Benedict's homilies represent the finest papal homilies since Leo the Great and Gregory the Great. They are accessible to all in the depth of their insight and in the vividness of their imagery. These homilies will inspire people for generations to come, and I have no doubt that a hundred years from now people will be reading them in the breviary.

In addition to his preaching, Pope Benedict's two volumes on Jesus of Nazareth have made an incredible contribution to the life of the Church. It's not just a matter of his fine scholarly research. In these writings, Benedict was animated by a deep pastoral concern, realizing that some contemporary scholars have raised doubts in people's minds regarding the reliability of the knowledge of Jesus. The pope recognizes how perilous this is. Benedict writes in the introduction, "This is a dramatic situation for faith, because its point of reference is being placed in doubt. Intimate relationship with Jesus in which everything depends, is in danger of clutching at thin air."

As one scholar pointed out, "Like Luke in the prologue of his gospel addressed to Theophilus, Benedict writes so that Christians may know the truth concerning the things they have been taught." For Benedict it's all about friendship with Jesus. Friendship with the Lord is at the heart of his prayer life, and it animates his ministry. Benedict also has that great capacity for showing how faith and reason complement each other; they're not enemies. To me, his address to the British Parliament at Westminster Hall, the very place where Saint Thomas More was condemned, and in his speech to the German *Bundestag*, reveal Benedict's deep understanding of contemporary culture, with all its strengths and weaknesses. In London he reminded the leadership and intelligentsia of Britain that the world of reason and the world of faith, the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief, need one another and should not be afraid to enter into profound and ongoing dialogue for the good of civilization. It was on that historic trip to England that Pope Benedict beatified Cardinal John Henry Newman, one of the great influences on his thought.

Benedict was a great gift to the Church, and as Cardinal Scola talks about in his book, *Betting On Freedom*, John Paul II said he could not be pope without Benedict XVI. Some people say Benedict's reign was very short, but his influence even before he was named pope was so great, and his influence going forward will certainly be great.

In a couple of years, 2025, we will be celebrating a new holy year. It will be the Year of The Pilgrims of Hope, and I know that Benedict's spiritual testament, which stands as such a firm invitation to live the faith, will give us an opportunity once again to relaunch *Spe Salvi*. Like Peter urges us, Benedict shared always the reasons for his hope, and he enriched all of us with those reasons and with the example of the goodness and the holiness of his life. Thank you. [*applause*]

Maniscalco: Thank you, Cardinal O'Malley. Father Alex.

Fr. Alex Zenthoefer: That's what I was going to say. [*laughter*] Last night I saw *Phantom* with some of my friends, and there was a scene that, as soon as it happened, I thought, This is it, this is the point that really strikes me about Pope Benedict—spoiler alert: everybody dies in the end. But, there's a scene where Raul's standing on this bridge and he's getting ready to jump into the mist below, and there's a kind of anticipation, then finally he leaps and disappears into the stage underneath him. When I saw that—and there was this kind of gasp—it struck me that this is what Pope Benedict saw. He saw this reality that was so deep, so profound, so multi-dimensional; it was like he was able to look at life and was able to see so much more than I could see, and every time I read him I always think, How did I not see that before? Or sometimes, there's no way I could have seen that before, because he was just so brilliant in his way of accessing those levels of reality that so often we take for granted.

I watched the play, it's nice, there's a nice plot, and it's one thing to another and it's kind of on the surface and there's, you know, there's drama to it. But...but his way of looking at reality was a way of seeing everything, recognizing that there were stagehands underneath, that there was an orchestra, that there was so much else going on at the same time that I wasn't able to witness myself.

And so for that reason I'm really grateful for his person and for his

writings, because they allowed me to really see things in a completely new way, and I think in many ways it was his childlike demeanor that that put him in front of reality in that way. He had this, it seems to me, a kind of simplicity that didn't mind allowing itself to be overwhelmed by the wonder that was in front of him, that didn't mind being captured by the unforeseen. As His Eminence was saying, this new horizon and decisive direction, it wasn't just a new perspective on the horizon—it was a new horizon. I remember in 2006 he spoke of the Resurrection as the greatest mutation in human history. This man is thinking of life in a way that I have never thought about it, and he was thinking of it in that way because of the wonder he constantly had in front of reality, the wonder of being bowled over by the the mystery that was continually unfolding in front of him. I'm grateful for that.

As a pastor I'm grateful for his, for all the homily material that he provided to me over the years. He was a real treasure, I think, for so many in the Church, but as a priest I have to say his willingness, his obedience to the Church was a tremendous gift to me. Because in the end, when he recognized that to continue serving as pope would not be the greatest gift to the Church, that in some way he needed to step away—it's not something that we in the clergy deal with well. Many of us would want to say we'd do it, but there was a tremendous freedom in seeing our Holy Father say the Church needs someone else in this moment and it's not me.

I mean, this is a man of incomparable achievements, a brilliance that was just unfathomable, and yet he says, It's not me. And I think for me that was just a tremendous gift, to witness his simplicity and his obedience and his humility in the face of that decision. So I'm grateful, most of all, for his wonder and the way that he awoke that wonder in me, to keep looking at this tremendous depth that is given to us each day in the unfathomable gift of reality. Thank you. [*applause*]

Maniscalco: Thank you Father Alex. Professor Stephen Brown.

Steve Brown: Thank you, Riro. So, this question we've been asked this evening is in some sense an impossible task. Pope Benedict XVI and his writings and teachings will be read and studied for thousands of years. He is, in my opinion, a thinker who comes along only every several hundred years. One simply needs to open at random and read any of his books, letters,

speeches, homilies, and encyclicals to answer the question we have been asked. His writings and teachings are at once accessible to someone like me—I'm an engineer—and yet at the same time culturally and theologically profound in a way that very few in the history of humankind have ever been.

In attempting to sketch a very brief, incomplete answer to the question posed this evening, I would like to tell you about a personal work of love that I undertook back in 2011. I work at the Catholic University of America, and when the then-new, and now recently retired President John Garvey was being inaugurated, he asked me and five of my colleagues to respond to the question: What does faith have to do with the intellectual life? While it may seem obvious that this question is of interest to those of us working and teaching in Catholic universities, I believe this question is a crucial and urgent one for anyone working in a university. Secular, Catholic, or any religious affiliation for that matter. It's a question that was pondered in a profound way by Pope Benedict, and in attempting to respond to John Garvey's question I began to read what Pope Benedict had to say on the relationship between faith and reason. In fact, I have been a very amateur reader of Benedict since the time when I first read the introduction to his *Introduction to Christianity* some 30 years ago; it blew me away. If you have never read it, you should. So, when preparing to answer John Garvey's question, it was natural that I began to systematically gather every address that Pope Benedict delivered in a university context since the beginning of his pontificate. Everything from his more famous ones that His Eminence mentioned, but also his address at Regensburg, the one he was delivering at La Sapienza, the one he delivered at my own university, the Catholic University of America, in 2008; to less famous ones, such as when he led rosaries with the students of universities in Rome.

As well as carrying out this work, I began to understand that the university's contribution is always both educational and cultural, and thus I also decided to gather some texts not specifically addressed to university audiences, but which contain tasks integral to universities such as those contained in his speech to the world of culture in Paris, his address to the *Bundestag*, his address to artists and the like. The collection of texts I pulled together were eventually published as a book by the Catholic University of

America press in May 2013, so the book is providentially inclusive of his entire pontificate. I eventually gave the book the title, *A Reason Opened to God*. In doing so, I tried to hint at one of the major themes of Pope Benedict as priest, pastor, scholar, and bishop—namely an openness to God as God.

Our friend Dr. Schindler, who passed away in November, spoke at a Crossroads event in D.C. in 2008 before Pope Benedict visited the United States. Dr. Schindler said, "For Benedict, for God to be God he must matter always and everywhere." For Benedict, reason is capacity for God, and freedom is being for God and for the other; thus to be a man or a woman is to be for another; that is, to love the other.

Cardinal Ratzinger addresses this very nicely in the text that was read to begin this evening's event. It is from a talk he gave entitled *What is Man*. In the conclusion of that address, he said that the message of Christ crucified is that the salvation of man takes place when he is ready to become the second Adam, that is, when he replaces egoism and self-assertion with donation. That is when one gives oneself to another. This is why Jesus is interesting for Benedict, since God no longer remains a God who is a faraway, non-personal God, but rather a God of love. In fact, I think his very last recorded words, "Lord, I love you," somehow synthetically captures what animated his entire life. For Benedict, the love of God is encountered in His Son. Just think of what he wrote in his very first volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*: "What did Jesus actually bring if not World Peace, Universal Prosperity, and a better world? What has he brought? The answer is very simple: God. It is only because of our hardness of heart that we think this is too little."

Returning quickly to the book I pulled together, I wish I had time to go through each text with you, but I will limit my remarks to point out only three nuggets in these addresses. First, what is this hardening of heart? For Benedict it is not a moral problem, but is it a problem of our concept of reason. The very first quote comes from his address at Regensburg: "What is needed is a broadening of reason and its application." And if reason for Benedict is the capacity for God, and if for God to be God he must matter always and everywhere, what is the consequence of an impoverished reason, one which is not broadened? It is simply that man does not know himself and is no longer free. As we'll see in this next quote from his speech to the world

of culture in Paris in 2008, this positivistic reduction has grave consequences for us and for our culture. He said: "The present absence of God is silently besieged by the question concerning him...to seek God and to let oneself be found by him. That is today no less necessary than in former times. A purely positivistic culture which tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm as being unscientific would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster for humanity, with very grave consequences." The search for God and the readiness to listen to Him remains today the basis of any genuine culture.

Finally, for Benedict, as we said earlier, reason is capacity for God and freedom is being for God and for the other, and thus for man to be for God implies all of life, it implies entering into the life of the Church that comes to man, and in doing so one's reason and freedom become fully human. We can see this theme of what the life of the Church brings to the world in the last quote that I simply must share with you, particularly since I work in a Catholic University. The quote is something that Benedict said at my own university in April of 2008, April 17th in fact. This quote is something I've been pondering for these last 15 years, and which I dare say I will be pondering for at least another 15 years and which I believe every Catholic university should ask itself every day. He said, "Catholic identity is not about statistics. It's not even about orthodoxy of content, it's making all that you do reverberate within the ecclesial life of faith." With all of what I've said, I've tried to hint at only one aspect of Pope Benedict's thought that I believe will have a lasting impact on us, our society, and our culture for centuries to come. Thank you. [*applause*]

Maniscalco: Thank you. Bishop Raica.

Bishop Steven Raica: Thank you, Riro, and thank you for the opportunity to be part of this extraordinary panel tonight reflecting on the life and legacy of Pope Benedict XVI. While I never had the occasion to meet Pope Benedict or Cardinal Ratzinger personally, I do recall seeing him walking across St. Peter's Square, presiding at the funeral mass of Pope John Paul II, and at the mass invoking the Holy Spirit before the conclave that elected him. I believe in moments of reflection, through his writings and witness, it is as though I've known him as a spiritual guide all along, even

though he probably couldn't pick me out of a lineup if his life depended on it. Yet the way that he personalized and witnessed faith and reason throughout his life, it is as though we came to know something about his heart, the core of life that asks the persistent questions: Why does the world exist? Why am I here? What is the purpose and meaning of life, *my* life? What does it mean to be a Christian, and belong to the body of Christ, the Church? Perhaps it was his attempt to grapple with that telling question of Jesus to John and Andrew in the first chapter of Saint John's gospel: "What are you looking for?"— and because he was able to sort through these questions and wasn't afraid to do so, he impacted my life in a concrete way as a Christian man, as a priest, and now as a bishop.

I cannot think of my life without the input of this man of faith. He took faith so seriously as a response to his encounter with Christ, and because he did so he was loved by many and was a stumbling block for others. Yet through it all, there was a simplicity, a boundless curiosity and a joyfulness that is part and parcel of the Christian life. Both popes, John Paul II and Benedict, were molded out of similar life circumstances that were difficult, complex, and unimaginable to us. What they experienced and witnessed, what shaped their worldview to prepare them for pastoring the Body of Christ. Both witnessed the ravages of the Second World War at formative times in their lives, and in what they experienced they could have easily rejected the notion of a benevolent, loving God or even the existence of God.

By the decisions they made in a time of persecution and political turmoil, they both heard more clearly the voice of Christ saying, "Follow me." Both were true sons of the Church. They came to know that their faith was not an add-on to life or a mere adherence to a set of propositions. They embodied incarnated Christianity in themselves. Quite literally, they put on Christ and couldn't conceive of their lives without him.

Pope Benedict had a way to articulate the faith in simple terms that could be understood by anyone. Even his homilies for Holy Week and Easter Vigil provided us priests with a lot to reflect upon and we did so during the Priest's Retreat every Easter week.

Yes, he was a rather shy academic who loved being around books, and relished the intellectual give and take of a good argument, explaining at

deeper levels things like *Jesus of Nazareth* or *Truth and Tolerance*, as well as a noted book on the liturgy. Nevertheless he rooted everything in Christ, and carefully and deliberately articulated a range of Catholic teaching so that one could understand even better the attractiveness of the mystery of Christ, the Word made flesh.

There was something mystical about Pope Benedict. He could advance an erudite argument about some obscure theological point, then in the next breath talk about, in simple declarative sentences, that each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary—the theme of this opening session. Even observing him at Father Giussani's funeral in February 2005 was something quite remarkable, especially how he was able to synthesize the life of the founder of the Movement of Communion and Liberation down to a memorable thought: from the start, Giussani was touched, or rather wounded, by the desire for beauty. It wasn't any mundane thing but the beauty that is Christ himself, and through it he affirmed the fact of Christianity as an encounter with Christ—a new love story, he called it. Pope Benedict also concluded that faith is culture, and creates culture, and that both faith and our own historical culture which it doesn't destroy, live together, that we live in two cultures, one exemplified by the Body of Christ and the other of our own heritage.

Contemplating my own reactions to Pope Benedict, his life and legacy, could we not say that here was a man wounded by reason, or wounded by truth? Yet in the same breath he could talk about lovem as he did in his encyclicals *Deus Caritas Est*, *Caritas and Veritate*, and *Spe Salvi*, all filled with such endearing terms.

For me the end of his life, which he lived in a Joseph-like silence, as it is purported to have occurred, best sums up his legacy for me. Of all the words that are chronicled in books, and in speeches and homilies, the best synthesis of this man was in his final breath, in which he is purported to have said, "Lord, I love you." Like Simon Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, it was Peter's simple profession of faith that resonates even to this day and was the very foundation of his life and as the Successor of Peter. I imagine the same thing happening on the shore of eternity—yes, even with a fish roasting on

the fire—welcoming Joseph Ratzinger. “Joseph, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord. You know I love you.” Thank you very much. [*applause*]

Maniscalco: We will give them another round of applause at the end of the act because there's a final touch to this conversation, and it's the closing encounter that a friend of us had with Pope Benedict. I invite Maestro Christopher Vath to come over here, tell us the story, and surprise us with something.

Christopher Vath: Thank you, thank you, and good evening. So I have to set up my story by telling you two facts. One fact was that, when Pope Benedict was elected in April, he chose a dear friend of mine, who had lived in New York years before and we had become very close, to be in his household staff. Fact number two is that in May of that same year, so one month later, I played a piano recital in Carnegie Hall. So imagine: I have a friend now in the Vatican and I just played a concert in a major hall. So, enter Italian woman number two, in New York, who comes up to me shortly after my concert. "Chris, you should play for Pope Benedict!" I said, "Great, give me a phone, I'll call him right now, you know?" [*laughter*]

But you know what? Even though I had grown up in a household with five females, I always forget the resolve of women when they, you know, when they have something on their mind. So within a few days there were emails going back and forth from New York to Italy, and it ends up where I'm on the phone weeks later and I'm saying okay, I can come to Italy on these dates in August, and she says—my friend who's in the Vatican—"Um, he's got his brother visiting. Pope Benedict's brother is visiting during those days, so I don't think it's going to happen, Chris, but I'll ask anyway. We'll see."

So she asks, and we're all expecting that this is not going to happen. What does Benedict say? "Oh, my brother's a musician. We'd love to have your friend, tell him to come." So for those of you who don't know his brother, who was also a priest—he's deceased now—he was a very famous conductor of the Regensburg Cathedral choir. Think Vienna Boys Choir, that sort of level. My friend told me, "Please, Pope Benedict really loves and esteems his brother, so be sure you listen to recordings and you know something about the brother."

So I'm on Amazon, getting CDs delivered, and in the interim we're

working out details—I was requested to speak in Italian. I was like, Wow, not my forte. And the pope would like me to stay for dinner. I said great! Now I'm thinking, What am I going to play? I had all this repertoire ready that I had just played in Carnegie Hall, so I knew it was going to come from there. I'm talking to her and I'm saying, "I did Shostakovich," and she said, "We sort of think 20th century Russian music doesn't sound like something Pope Benedict would like." [*laughter*]

I had no Mozart, which is what he really loves, so we settled on a Bach piece that was a transcription of an organ work. Surely both Ratzinger brothers knew that work very well. So, I played that. I played a movement, a part of a Schubert sonata that again I'm sure they were very familiar with. And I ended with Chopin.

So what happens is, there's sort of an episode that exposes me as a clueless American in Europe. My New York friend is with me and we're gonna go to Castel Gandolfo, which is the castle in a small, medieval town outside of Rome. We get there almost an hour early and I think, "Oh, it's a castle, I'm going to drive up to the back and tell the Swiss guards that Chris Vath's here, I'm playing for the pope." You know, the drawbridge is going to go down, we're going to drive over the moat and into the courtyard where the cars are. So we drive up to the castle and the Swiss guards say, "Get out! Get out! You shouldn't be here!" And I said, "But I'm playing for—" "Get out!"

So anyway, now we have to find parking, and again these are medieval towns with roads this wide [*gestures a small width*]. So we get stuck behind a truck, and then when we make a turn and we're stuck in traffic. The clock is ticking away. Ticking, ticking, ticking. Twenty-five minutes, 30 minutes—and the castle is right there, it's in a plaza in the center of the square, but we can't stop the car. We're texting and my friend in the Vatican is getting very nervous.

Anyway, so we get there, we're late, running across the plaza. Christine is outside, just beside herself, "I can't believe you're late for the pope! The pope came downstairs, he's waiting for you and you aren't here!"

I walk in and I'm, you can imagine, just totally frazzled, and he's there smiling, "Welcome, Chris, nice to meet you." Then he said, "Okay, here's the piano, it's a beautiful Steinway." I sit down and I'm ready. He says, "Would

you like to warm up?" He saw that I was completely, you know, just beside myself, and I said, "No, no, no, thank you, Your Holiness, I can start to play." I played the concert, talked a little bit about the pieces, and it went fine. It went fine. Luckily it was something I had done a lot of, that concert. At the end they want to come up to me, especially his brother who's a musician, and so he wants to talk shop, he wants to talk music with me, and he starts talking to me in German. [*laughter*] We had no common languages. I just sort of look at the pope like, Can you, can you help me out over here? So the pope starts translating—he speaks perfect English. So we're having a discussion about this Bach prelude, this Bach fugue, via translation of Pope Benedict. [*laughter*]

Oh, I didn't tell you who the concert was for. Don't think it was a big audience; it was 10 people. So it was his household staff, his secretary, there was a Polish nun there, a Polish priest. Then we went to dinner. They had told me that, unlike other pontiffs, he liked dinners to be really a family affair. It was a family meal. He didn't use his prestige to have state leaders and stuff coming over for dinner. No, dinner was for the family, so it was a fairly simple dinner, 10 people around the table talking. I told him I had seen him when he gave a talk in New York years before, and there a lot of protests, though not against him. He said, "Oh yes, I remember that." It was a simple talk about Communion and Liberation in New York, what I did in music, etc. It was very simple and very sweet.

At the end he said, "Chris, please excuse me but I have to go." He takes a walk in the evening and I think maybe watches the news. So he said, "We're going to have to leave you now, but thank you for coming, we enjoyed the concert." He and his brother get up to leave and he says, "Have you ever been to Castel Gandolfo before?" I said, "No, Your Holiness, I have not." "Christina, take him around on a tour, okay? Goodbye, Chris, thank you very much for coming." And that was it. It was a beautiful evening. That's my story. I was asked tonight to play something that I played for Pope Benedict, so I will play a Chopin mazurka in A Minor, Opus 17 No.4. [*applause*]

Ends with music


John
Touhey

What's Going On Here?

*A conversation on influencers, cryptocurrencies, and the metaverse with **Luke Burgis**, Director of Programs at the Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship, Catholic University of America; **Yogesh Dwivedi**, Professor of Digital Marketing and Innovation, Swansea University; and **Sazan Hendrix**, influencer. Moderated by **John Touhey**, filmmaker.*

Introduction

Recently some new social phenomena have emerged that are worth exploring, even though they seem hard to understand to the uninitiated. For example, what exactly are cryptocurrencies? Why did they become so popular so fast? Are they going to endure despite the recent crash? And what about influencers? What do their lives really look like? How much work takes place behind the scenes? Why are they able to impact the lives of so many people? Finally, what is (and what is not) the metaverse? How does it work? Should we be excited? Or worried? Or both?

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John Touhey, moderator: Good morning, everyone, and thank you for being here at the Metropolitan Pavilion. I also welcome everyone who's watching online. My name is John Touhey, and I will be hosting this morning's very exciting panel, "What's Going On Here?" Well, I'll tell you what's going on, we have three wonderful guests: Yogesh Dwivedi, Sazan Hendrix, and Luke Burgis, and they are here to speak with us about the metaverse, influencers, and cryptocurrencies. And they will be trying to dispel some of

the ignorance that at least I have. You know, my relationship with technology is best evidenced by the fact that I have all my notes on index cards [*laughter*], which I wrote with a plume pen, next to an oil lamp. [*laughter*] So…they'll be trying to dispel some of the ignorance that some of us feel, some of the uncertainties, some of the puzzlement that some of us feel in front of these three things. Here's how we'll go. I'm gonna introduce each of our speakers individually. They'll speak about the particular phenomenon they're going to talk about, and then we'll have a conversation, and it's gonna be fantastic. So Yogesh, I guess we're going to start with you.

Yogesh Dwivedi: Sure.

Touhey: Yogesh Dwivedi is a professor of digital marketing and innovation at Swansea University in Wales, United Kingdom, and is also currently leading the International Journal of Information Management as its editor-in-chief. In his career, he's cooperated with various institutions from Australia, India, Malaysia, Mauritius, Pakistan, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, and in recent years, he mainly investigates social media, knowledge management, marketing, and supply chain. He's also the lead author in a very, very interesting paper on the metaverse, which is why we invited him here. So, Yogesh, welcome. Thanks to science fiction epics like *Tron* and *Ready Player One*, a lot of us have an idea of what the metaverse should be, and the reality tends to not quite fit the image we have. So, I'm asking you, what is the reality of the metaverse today, and where do the builders hope to take it in the next year or two?

Dwivedi: Thank you very much, and greetings, everyone. Namaste. One thing you might be wondering [is] why we are here, actually. You know, why are we talking [about] the metaverse and social and crypto in this gathering? Well, I think it's very, very important and very relevant actually.The metaverse is kind of [a] jungle. That's how it is at the beginning. No governance, no legal restrictions, nothing. Anyone can go there and do anything. So how [do] we behave? How [do] we make sure it's safe and a place where everyone can go and have things to do, [to do] what they want to do without being intimidated or bullied or harassed, you know? Ethics, religion, philosophy. I think if we have elements of these, we would not be doing anything wrong. And this is [a] perfect place, actually, to talk about the dangers of these

technologies, and then actually let you decide how we should save these kinds of new technological innovations. Right? So that's why we are here.

We all probably have heard the term *metaverse*, right? And we all also have our own perception about the metaverse [and] what it is. One thing I'm sure of [is] that we all also don't know what metaverse is, including those who are building the metaverse. [*laughter*] Honestly, because there is no metaverse yet. It is still in its very early stage of development. We have [a] proto-metaverse, which I will talk about. I mean, they are precursors of [the] metaverse, but we don't have [an] actual metaverse that we are thinking would be the metaverse going forward.

So, what is the metaverse? Let me just put [it] simply. The metaverse is a three-dimensional, immersive, interoperable, virtual environment. That's what the metaverse is. Three-dimensional, like [how] we are sitting here. If we go in [the] metaverse we will feel exactly the same, right? And it's immersive. You know when you go on social media, you do things, you interact with others, but you don't feel part of it. But when you are in the metaverse, you will feel part of it, like you do here. I can connect with you, I can see you, and [in the] same way you will see in metaverse too. It's interoperable. I mean, you don't want that metaverse will be like today's internet, right? And when I say today's internet, I mean social media. So, you have Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, [and] many other channels and platforms. What happens when you want to be part of those? Every time you go and you create a profile, your digital identity. Without that you can't be part of it. The metaverse will be different. The metaverse will have one digital identity for you—at least that's what's been conceptualized. Your avatars will be your profile. It will embody your characteristics, your persona within it. That avatar is not going to be specific to each metaverse. [It] is going to be [the] same, at least ideally, for all metaverses. Basically, once you have created [your avatar], it will go everywhere. You will be present through that particular embodiment in all metaverses. This is why it's interoperable. Immersiveness is already there. If you go to Roblox or Fortnite or many others, you will find immersiveness. You will feel that you're part of that, you will interact with others as you interact in real life. But [are there] interoperable things there? No, it's not there, and that's why we say the metaverse is not there yet. It will

take [a] few years, and I am very skeptical about that aspect, if that will ever happen, because you know who is leading the development of the metaverse. You know, commercial organizations. They have their own interests, and they don't want to [be] in [the] same place and lose their competitive advantage. The metaverse is not there yet because the interoperable aspect of the system is not there. In a sense, [the] digital version of our world can offer people [the] opportunity to work, socialize, learn, play, and create as we do in real life. There are two things I want to highlight when you say *metaverse*: basically, you say you're going to have a sense of reality, you're going to feel like [it's] real, and this is a paradox, isn't it? I mean, that's a strange thing to do. Second thing, obviously, if you look at the novel *Snow Crash* that came out in 1992, they actually conceptualized it as the metaverse. Not metaverses, the metaverse. Obviously, at this moment there is no *the* metaverse, it's meta*verses*. People generally use "the metaverse" and "metaverses" interchangeably, which is not correct. How can you access the metaverse in today's world? At the moment you can use computer monitors, your mobile phone, and obviously VR headsets. These are the gateways to enter into the metaverse. But in [the] real sense, the metaverse is actually not *where* you are using the computer and monitor. It should be immersive. When you're using [a] computer, it cannot be immersive. Going forward, when we see proper metaverses, they will be mainly accessed through the VR devices. Some might be AR, Augmented Reality devices. You know, [like] goggles.

I want to talk a little more about the state of the metaverse. Many of us think that the metaverse is [a] new thing. No, it's not. I mean, the term itself was coined in 1992, but actually the first metaverse, as many of you probably know, was Second Life. Many of you may have heard [of] Second Life, which came out in 2003 and is still thriving. Lots of people are using it, and it provides you an opportunity to create avatars, and through them you can socialize, you can interact with others in [the] virtual world. Also, Second Life provides venues for virtual conferences. This kind of conference actually can happen in the metaverse, in Second Life. This was the first one, but others have followed. Decentraland, for example. I mean, many of you may have bought land in that, right? In 2022, $2 billion worth of land was bought in Decentraland, which is a metaverse based on blockchain. So it's

decentralized, and [the] users, whatever they buy and build, they can actually own those things in the metaverse. This already exists and [is] thriving. We also have VRChat. In VRChat—again it's a metaverse—you can create your avatars, you can create virtual worlds and monetize your skills for your own benefit. The Sandbox is a popular one already doing this, but obviously there will be more in [the] future. The metaverse is not here yet. Its precursor is here. Meta, Apple, Microsoft—they're all trying to take part in this world. They all hope to build something that is fully immersive, that is fully interoperable, and that is three-dimensional. Where we can be as we want to be.

Touhey: Sazan, you're up.

Sazan Hendrix: Oh, I've got to top that?

Touhey: Sazan Hendrix is a globally recognized influencer and entrepreneur with millions of followers across her public channels on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube. Her podcast, *The Good Life*, co-hosted with her husband Stevie Hendrix, has had more than 21 million downloads. Celebrated equally for her beauty sense and for her inspiring message on *The Good Life*, she stands among the elite as a true social pioneer. And, Sazan, I've followed especially your YouTube videos because they're really fascinating, and so it occurred to me as I was watching them, "This woman started with zero followers at one point and now she has millions of followers." Very impressive. Based on that, I want to ask you: What is it that an influencer actually does? [*laughter*]

Hendrix: Isn't that what we all ask? [*laughter*]

Touhey: Because it's obviously a lot of work, but what does all that involve, and also, do you like that term? Do you think it's an accurate description of what you're really doing?

Hendrix: If another influencer was up on this stage, we'd probably have two totally different responses as to what we do and who we are and the titles we go by. I think the term *influencer* is rather a new term, but the word *influence* is not, you know? Every single person in this audience has their own spheres of influence. In your community, in your household, whether or not an Instagram profile shows it, each and every single person in this room actually has that ability to influence. I see myself as a content creator. That's ultimately what I went to college for. I studied journalism with the heart and

the intent that I loved connecting with people, and I loved how the power of stories allows us to do that. I never would've guessed in a million years that I would be sharing my own personal stories and experiences through the lens of these different platforms, but that's where God has led my career, and it's been really cool and unexpected. But I was studying in college to ultimately tell stories, and I think there's so much power in the stories that we share and the stories that we create. You can reach people, you can connect with people. That's what always tugged at my heart, and that's why I thought I wanted to get into broadcast journalism and do that whole bit. And then I started a blog because I loved fashion and beauty—this was before I had kids, when I had a lot of time to dive into all these things—and I just remembered having, yes, zero followers. I think the only views that I had were my family; my grandma, my aunts in the Middle East, they were probably supporting and clicking things. But you start out with nothing. I treated it as if there were a million people watching when there was no one. I wanted to challenge myself to take this thing seriously, because I knew that the women I was meeting in Los Angeles—which is where I lived at the time when this journey started—I realized it looked like it could be a lucrative business. I'm seeing these girls share their stories, this is their full-time job, and for me it was figuring out, *Well, how do I do that?* It was years and years of digging and searching and praying and trying to go to events and network, and it's so awkward when you walk in and you don't know anyone. All those little things were stepping stones, because they opened doors.

Fashion and beauty is where it started, then I started to show more face and shared some of the things in life that I was going through, because, believe it or not, offline, you have a real life that you have to cultivate, that you have to nurture. It was at a time in my life when I was still figuring out who I was. I was still trying to get to know myself. I was 23, 24 years old. I was navigating social media, trying to be somebody that I thought this community I was growing needed me to be. I was, in a sense, really not trying to lose that part of myself, and just discovering who I am. It was amazing when I started sharing more of my life and being as authentic as I could be. That's when it wasn't just about growing the followers, it was about keeping them and supporting a community online. It can be consuming and

overwhelming, and I think when you can you know put in the work, but also more importantly, when you know your why. Like why am I showing up every day? It no longer becomes about the excitement of growing followers. It's like, I hit that million you know? And it feels like, oh what a milestone. Once you get there, you're like, okay, now what? You have to know where your heart, the direction is and so for me it became the encounters I was having with the women that I was talking to online, the people I was speaking out to, creating content for, and then ultimately discovering like, if I'm really gonna do this for real for real, I need to serve this community. I need to be here for those women by being completely authentic in the season of life that I'm in. So nowadays you're going to see a lot of videos and content of me with my daughters because I've got a five-year-old and a two-year-old and a third one on the way. It's a boy this time [*laughter*], two girls and a boy. [*applause*] My husband's like, Yeah! But I found that in sharing parts of my life now in my family, it's become my business, in a sense, and then you can raise the eyebrow and wonder, Well, how much do you share of your life? How much are you comfortable with? I have found a good balance, but for me personally as an "influencer" content creator, I feel like there is this generation right now, they need to see what marriage looks like. They need to see what family can look like, and if I can hopefully emulate that while also sharing that I'm a girl with dreams as big as my hair, you know—it's kind of flat today. [*laughter*] I would love to be able to lend my experiences in my life through these platforms to do that and to help—hopefully inspire—women and men. Also just help them cultivate a life that they can love every day despite not being where you want to be. Because that's the journey we're all on ultimately. That's really what has led me here to this chair. Ten years ago if you told me I was going to be sitting here with these guys, I mean, I don't know nothing about crypto, and the metaverse—I'm like, I don't want to lose the real-life human experiences but I'm also very intrigued. I just feel really honored and blessed that my path has led me here today to be able to talk about the influencer space as it's just continuing to grow and evolve. My life and the influencer life. I'm just really happy to be here.

Touhey: Well, thank you. Thank you very much. [*applause*] I see why you have over a million followers. [*laughter*]

Hendrix: It's 'cause of my husband, he can do any accent in the book. He's a comedian, I'll tell you that, so it's probably him that they're here for. [*laughter*]

Touhey: Hello, Luke. Thank you for your patience. Luke Burgis is a veteran entrepreneur, author, and educator. He is currently the Director of Programs at the Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he is also a clinical professor of business. He's the author of several books, including the award-winning *Wanting: The Power of Mimetic Desire in Everyday Life*, now translated into 16 languages. He lives in D.C. with his wife Claire. Luke, I've seen you on many podcasts, and you're a very interesting guy with very interesting thoughts. I want to ask you: Cryptocurrencies are all over the headlines these days, for both good and a lot of bad. However, it's very possible to watch and read about these things and still have no idea, at least if you're me, what a cryptocurrency really is. So I ask you to embrace the challenge of addressing my ignorance in 10 minutes and tell me: What are cryptocurrencies, and how do they function?

Luke Burgis: Thanks, John. If you were at the opening event last night, you know that John requested 200,000 cryptocurrencies in compensation for moderating this panel. [*laughter*] But he didn't specify what kind.

Touhey: That's right.

Burgis: So, John, I can give you the 200,000 after this talk, but it'll be worth about five dollars, and you won't be able to do much with it. [*laughter*] I think we should start by exploring what currency is before we delve into cryptocurrency. So, traditionally, money or currency has three characteristics:

The first one is that it's a medium of exchange. It means that we no longer have to barter one thing for another. For example, I have a valuable stuffed monkey named George, but I probably couldn't exchange George for your car. However, I can sell George to someone else who values it, and then use the money to buy your car. Mediums of exchange are important.

The second function of money is that it's a unit of account. It's a way for us to keep track of value. For instance, we earn airline miles for flights, and we know we can exchange them for future airfare. So, it serves as a unit of account.

The third function of currency is that it should be a store of value. This is the most controversial function, and cryptocurrencies haven't quite figured it out yet. Many cryptocurrencies are very volatile, making them an unstable store of value. When money is issued by a central authority, like a central bank, they control its supply, value, and other aspects.

Cryptocurrency emerged from a desire to address this issue and achieve decentralization. This movement aims to allow communities more control over value exchange through peer-to-peer transactions secured by cryptography. In simple terms, cryptocurrency is digital money where transactions are secured by cryptography, and its supply is often determined by a protocol, not a central authority.

But what's really happening beneath the surface? We should think about reality in layers, similar to Pope Benedict's ability to see layers of reality. Cryptocurrency has many layers, and the technical layer is just one part of it. Layer zero, in my opinion, is a social layer, tied to fundamental human desires for freedom, trust, and community. It's about forming communities based on trust where transactions can occur directly between peers, without the need for central clearinghouses. This fundamental human need often gets obscured by the hype surrounding cryptocurrencies.

We need to ask more profound questions about our desires and what we want from these phenomena. Are we outsourcing the hard work of building trust between individuals to algorithms and cryptography? Instead of looking to math to establish trust, we should focus on genuine human encounters and relationships, which involve building trust between people. This shift may require us to look beyond the surface of these phenomena and rediscover our unique personal vocations and desires.

Touhey: Thank you. That was helpful. I do understand a bit better now. You brought up trust. Let's discuss that further because trust is crucial, whether in cryptocurrencies, the metaverse, or any new technology. So, what criteria should people use to trust influencers, the metaverse, cryptocurrencies? And what responsibilities do creators and builders have to foster trust in these spaces?

Hendrix: I think the most important thing for me, both as a consumer and a creator, is transparency. Transparency builds trust. When influencers,

creators, or platforms are open and honest about what they're doing and how they use data, it fosters trust among users. We live in a time where people are becoming more discerning. They can see through inauthentic content, and they want genuine and transparent interactions.

In my experience, authenticity is key. Being real and authentic in your content helps build trust with your audience. Like my relationship with my kids, I realize that my followers are watching me closely. They are looking for authenticity and the realness of life, not just staged content. Sharing both your successes and struggles can help foster trust.

It's important to maintain a balance between creating content and living your life offline. Social media can become consuming and overwhelming, leading to burnout. When you know your "why" and focus on serving your community authentically, it becomes less about chasing numbers and more about nurturing meaningful relationships with your audience.

In the metaverse and other digital spaces, transparency is also crucial. Users need to know what data are being collected, for what purpose, and how it will be used. Accountability is equally important, and there should be mechanisms to hold creators and platforms accountable for their actions.

Dwivedi: Transparency is indeed a critical factor in trust-building, whether in cryptocurrencies, the metaverse, or any digital space. Users need to know what data are being collected from them, how it will be used, and who is accountable for it. Consistency in communication is also essential to maintain trust. Inconsistencies in messages can erode trust.

Additionally, in the metaverse, safety, security, and privacy are paramount. Users must feel secure within these digital environments, knowing that their data and personal information are protected. Cybersecurity concerns and the potential for hacking are significant issues to address.

Access to these technologies is also a concern. Affordability and the digital divide may create disparities between those who have access to the metaverse and those who do not. Ensuring that these technologies are accessible to a broader population is crucial for fairness.

Ultimately, the responsibility falls on builders and creators to prioritize transparency, security, and ethical practices to maintain trust in these digital spaces.

Burgis: I believe we're often asking too little of these phenomena and possibly don't even know what we truly want from them. In times of uncertainty and chaos, people tend to imitate others rather than focus on their unique and unrepeatable vocations. Outsourcing the hard work of building trust between individuals to algorithms and cryptography may be an issue.

We should consider the deeper desires of our hearts and whether these technologies serve our vocations or divert us from them. Technology should not just meet our surface needs but should also align with our authentic desires and purpose.

Touhey: Thank you all for your insights. We could discuss these topics for hours, but we've run out of time. [*applause*]

Someone With Me

A conversation on this year Encounter theme with ***Archbishop Christophe Pierre****, Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S., and* ***Fr. Erik Varden****,* ***O.C.S.O.****, Bishop of Trondheim, Norway.*

Introduction

The 2023 Encounter explores how—amidst growing uncertainty about how to face life, and especially the mystery of evil—many of us yearn to be seen and affirmed by someone in flesh and blood who defeats our loneliness. We long to be accompanied in life by a father or a friend who is certain of its meaning, and to discover our identity within this relationship. Bishop Erik Varden has reflected deeply on the most profound dimensions of our humanity in the course of his journey, as he describes in his book *The Shattering of Loneliness*. Here is an excerpt from the Introduction:

"I was close to 16 and I was developing an interest in Mahler. Having splashed my savings on a CD player, I bought a Bernstein recording of his Second Symphony, the Resurrection. The Christian significance of the theme was known to me but left me cold. Although I had been baptized, I had never affirmed belief. If anything, I was hostile. Christianity appeared to me a wishful flight away from the inner drama I was trying to negotiate, which was full of ambivalence, far distant from the studied certainties of preachers. Mahler, to me, was about harmonics and instrumentation. Nevertheless, as I listened to the symphony, I could not remain aloof. I had not expected to be so moved ... Before disbelief had time to configure, it was hushed by

voices singing of a hope that must, in secret, have gestated in my depths, for I recognized it as mine:

> Have faith, heart, have faith: nothing will be lost to you.
> What you have longed for is yours, yes, yours; yours is what
> you have loved and fought for. Have faith: you were not
> born in vain. You have not lived or suffered in vain.

At these words, something burst. The repeated insistence, 'not in vain, not in vain,' was irresistible. It was not just that I wanted to believe it. I knew it was true. It sounds trite, but at that moment, my consciousness changed. With a certainty born neither of overwrought emotion nor of cool analysis, I knew I carried something within me that reached beyond the limits of me. I was aware of not being alone. There was no special warmth, no ecstatic inner movement. There were no tears. But I could no more doubt the truth of what I had found than I could doubt that I existed. The sense of it has never left me. That this should be so amazes me still."

Bishop Varden will explore this year's Encounter theme in conversation with Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Papal Nuncio to the U.S. They will help the audience appreciate the meaning and relevance of being in a relationship with "someone who knows me and, inexplicably, cares for me."

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Riro Maniscalco, moderator: Welcome back! We're here for "Someone With Me," a conversation centered on this year's theme. The entire Encounter revolves around this theme, and today we have two exceptional guests. One is a longtime friend, Archbishop Christopher Pierre, and the other, a new friend and also a bishop, Eric Varden from Norway. Let me briefly introduce them. Archbishop Christopher Pierre, born in Rennes, France, embarked on his educational journey across Madagascar, France, and Morocco before attending the major seminary of the Archdiocese of Rennes and the Catholic Institute of Paris. He holds a Master's in Sacred Theology and a Doctorate

in Canon Law. His diplomatic service with the Holy See commenced in 1977, leading to numerous appointments spanning New Zealand, the Pacific Islands, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Brazil, and the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations in Switzerland. He was later elected titular Archbishop of Gunilla and has held various significant roles, including Apostolic Nuncio in Haiti, Papal Representative to Uganda, Apostolic Nuncio to Mexico, and currently, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States. That's quite the journey, and I must admit I'm not sure why I'm on this stage with such accomplished individuals! [*laughter*]

Eric Varden is our second guest and, being younger, he quips that he can compete with the Archbishop. [*laughter*] Born in Norway in 1974, Eric spent a decade at Cambridge earning a Doctorate in Historical Theology. In 2002, he joined Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, home to a community of Trappist monks. During a three-year stint in Rome, he taught Christian Anthropology, Gregorian Chant, and Syriac at the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant' Anselmo. Since 2013, he has been the superior of his community. In 2019, Pope Francis appointed him Bishop of Trondheim. Among his notable works are *The Shattering of Loneliness* and *The Entering of Twofold the Mystery*. I left out his talents in milking cows and brewing beer, but as a true Trappist, those are also part of his life. The floor is yours.

Bishop Erik Varden: Thank you.

Archbishop Christophe Pierre: I suddenly realized that I could have been the father of this young man, but he does not look like me. [*laughter*] I would be very proud to have a son like you, you know, so thank you for animating this time. You know, I've read, in my traveling last week, this book, mainly in the plains because that's where I spent my life, and this book is called *The Shattering of Loneliness*. For a person who is not familiar with the English language, I had to go and open my dictionary to see what "the shattering of loneliness" meant. But as a matter of fact, I think it's expressed very well in your book and in the theme of this Encounter. You know, this Bishop Eric Varden is a monk. It's interesting to have an encounter with a monk after the previous story of the metaverse. So may I say we go from the virtual to the real, unless the life of a monk is also a kind of virtual life, but you will tell us what it is all about. On the other side, what is very interesting

is, you know, the metaverse, the social communication, and the new way of communicating today—it's really the real world, it's a world where we live. So what is a monk? Maybe you can explain to the audience today what is also a Trappist monk; he's a special kind of monk. He was even the Abbot of a monastery in England; you will tell us. But then the Holy Father called you to become Bishop of Trondheim, which is one of the most ancient bishoprics in Norway, and now you have, I think, two or three priests in your diocese or maybe a bit more, and 18,000 Catholics, but you have a huge territory—it looks a little bit like Alaska. You know, for the moment there is no Bishop in Fairbanks, and my job is to try to find a bishop for that. Maybe you could go to Alaska, to Fairbanks. [*laughter*] No, no, don't worry. I'm lower than the Pope; I have no power. So, first and foremost, tell us who you are as a monk and as a bishop. What is a Trappist anyway? Tell us a little bit of your story first.

Varden: Well, to answer the questions, "What is a Trappist?" and "What is a monk?" There's a story told from the ancient tradition that a visitor to the desert asked one of the desert fathers, "What is a monk? What do you do all day?" And this man said, "Well, I fall, and I'm raised up, I fall, and I'm raised up, I fall, and I'm raised up." That's the monastic life in a nutshell. It is a life of conversion, which is oriented by a desire to know and see God as he is and as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, and to know Christ as my life, my joy, and my peace. But not on my own—in a fraternal communion with other brothers. Only once in the Holy Rule does Saint Benedict speak about the monastery in terms of a body. He speaks of the Corpus Monastery, the body of the monastery, but in some ways a monastery is the Church in miniature; it is the Body of Christ in miniature. So we try to live that ecclesial experience as deeply and as well as by the grace of God and by God's patience as credibly as we can.

Pierre: Well, you know, the monks don't always speak in a useful way. I remember when I was a child I used to go to one frequently, and actually one day I wanted also to become a Trappist monk but it did not happen. There was a monastery in Brittany, and I was fascinated by the fact that the monks at that time did not speak except by signs. So they spoke but in a different

way. In this book, *The Shattering of Loneliness*, your life is a life of conversion, a life of—

Varden: Well, it's a life of service and primarily a life of worship.

Pierre: And a life of encounter with Christ.

Varden: I mean, a monk doesn't pretend to be anything special, a monk or a nun is simply a Christian who tries to live a coherent Christian life, and experiences a tremendous inherited wisdom that can help them to realize that purpose.

Pierre: In the introduction to your book, and I recommend everyone to read the book—you are accompanied by a monk who helps you discover your own reality, your own life. In the introduction you actually give your life story. As a child you had a sudden encounter with suffering. Tell us about that, because it was the beginning of a new life. You were about 10 at that time.

Varden: Yeah. I think it was a kind of experience that most of us would have had when you're a child, living your fairly carefree life. I mean I had a very happy childhood. But then suddenly you realize the world isn't as it should be. My father was a country vet, and he'd been out doing the round of sick animals as normal, and we were gathered around the lunch table. I was about 10, as you said. And he told us about one of the encounters he'd had that day. He'd gone out to a farmer who had a cow that needed treatment, and the farmer had been out in the fields baling hay. Because it was a hot day, he'd taken his shirt off, and so he came shirtless to greet my father. He was no longer a young man, and my father could see the scars of lashes on his back. He told us that this man had been in captivity during the war and had been very savagely treated, and still bore the marks of that savage treatment on his body. That was the extent of the story, really; it was just factual information. But it sort of cut me to the quick because, I mean, one encounters warfare on the news. Even as a child you see terrible images on television. But it was the first time I'd realized that the presence of the mystery of evil and suffering was in my vicinity. I didn't personally know this farmer, but I *could* know him. I mean, I could accompany my father the next time he went there and that pierced something in me. Even as a child I felt a strong desire to try and understand what this was about. I mean, is there a way of making sense of

something that is senseless, which suffering is? Which pain is? In that respect I think it's true to say that my journey of searching began at that point.

Pierre: Making sense of what is senseless.

Varden: At least of what seems senseless.

Pierre: We do not understand. I think it's when I read that that I was amazed, because I said, Did this happen in my own life? And I think it did, but maybe I need to remember it and to measure what my life has been from these created events. At some point, something happened that marked a new beginning: the mystery of evil means the mystery of reality. The reality is not always beautiful, and it hits us. Then maybe it becomes the beginning of a search, and I think your whole life has been this kind of search.

Varden: Just to pick up that point from earlier about the monastic life: one of the things that happens when you join the monastery is that you go into a universe in which you are entirely but freely cut off from a lot of stimuli. You don't watch TV, you don't listen to the radio much—I mean, now the internet belongs in monastic life as everywhere, but one tries to use it with caution, and in the novitiate probably not at all. So you're used to being bombarded by images, stimuli, influence—and suddenly you find yourself with nothing. That can be extremely bewildering, and for some people that bewilderment is more than they can bear. But what you find if you stick with it is that as the stimuli from outside lessen, lots of things start surging from within, and you start realizing all the baggage you're carrying, both of good things and not-so-good things—you realize you remember much more than you thought, and you start realizing the importance of actually taking care about what you consume in terms of stimulus and imagery because it stays there.

You also begin to encounter your own poverty as a human being. We talked about the mystery of suffering, of pain or violence. It's not just that the world isn't as it should be—I am not as I should be. And this drama is being played out in me. There's another perhaps less well-known monk of Gethsemane but an extremely readable author, Father Matthew Kelty, who's published several collections of sermons. In one of those volumes he talks about his work with horses at Gethsemane. Working with animals is very revealing because animals aren't pushed around the way we try to push

people around. And he speaks of one occasion when he worked with this horse that just wouldn't do what he wanted it to do, and he realized that he was possessed of a great rage, and he realized that he carried in himself an aggression and a destructive potential that he hadn't known. The struggle to make sense of disorder and of evil isn't just out there but it's in here and that's when it starts becoming a bit terrifying but also very interesting.

Pierre: You said that there were days when this knowledge was crushing, the knowledge of evil. It's very interesting that you suddenly discovered that there was, in your search, a light somewhere, which was not necessarily coming from outside, that was very much inside yourself. This is the story of your life, but how did it start and how did it develop?

Varden:I think when you start being sensitized to all the suffering in the world—I mean, you hardly switch on the news because you wonder if you can actually face it today. But once you realize the extent of the suffering that is out there, and just how wicked people can be, you start also realizing how extraordinary it is that there is such a lot of gratuitous goodness, and that there is a depth of kindness that you can meet in people, and hospitality, and generosity, and non-judgmental openness and a desire to help. And you start realizing just how amazing that is.

For me personally, there was the discovery of a supernatural dimension to this whole conflict, which happened for me through an encounter with music. It was through listening to the second symphony of Mahler, *The Resurrection Symphony*, that something quite mysterious happened. It was as if a door had opened in me, and I realized that there was in me a level of sensibility and a vulnerability that I hadn't been aware of, and I had a sudden certainty that I carried in me something that was greater than me, that was somehow a presence. I had that experience listening to music. I thought, Well, it'll be interesting to reflect on this when it stops, probably tomorrow morning, but it didn't. The "wound" or the openness remained, and with it the certainty that there was something in me that exceeded me. This was for me an important turning point.

Pierre: You said you recognized it as a personal presence you wanted to pursue, to learn its name, discern its features. There was a kind of curiosity of your personal presence. What do you mean by that?

Varden: I suspected that what I'd encountered as a kind of presence was a personal presence. That it wasn't, as it were, just an extension of my own personality, and that if it was a personal presence, it would somehow be nameable. So, I started tentatively seeking for that name through reading, through attempting to pray, through beginning to read the scriptures, and eventually through encountering a praying community.

Pierre: When I was reading that, I was also thinking about the experience of Giussani at some stage when he said the "encounter with a presence," which you were actually confronted with, was a new start. It means that at some stage there was a desire in you that was confronted with an encounter.

Varden: Yes, I mean theologically speaking, one could make sense of this quite easily, and the conference began yesterday with that beautiful reading of a text from Pope Benedict referring to the iconic nature of human beings. The fact that we are created in the image of God, and if we take that a little bit seriously, it's quite natural that we should carry in our being, including in our physical being, in ourselves, at the most embodied level, a yearning for God and a dimension of ourselves that calls out for God implicitly, simply by way of being. There's a poet who refers, in a wonderful phrase, to the "rumors of God that rush through the fevered blood of human beings." And so, there is a way of making sense of that desire, the desire for comfort, the desire to be known, to be seen, to be loved, the desire for Infinity that we carry in ourselves, that all those stupendous aspirations are in fact true aspirations that correspond to a real object that by grace is within reach and that reaches out to us. That's the great mystery.

Pierre: The space within which my search unfolded was the Catholic Church. It happened here. I observed it first from a distance, attracted by its long uninterrupted history. When I stepped inside, I found it a warm and hospitable space in which I was at ease. It's interesting, I had discovered another environment that embraced my contradictions without compromising truth. I could purify both my grief and my desire. When I realized the scope of sacramental action—that's fantastic—by which all that is in heaven and on Earth is drawn into a single moment, the sense of things held in the hands of a broken human being—I knew I had come home. That's your story.

Varden: It is the story, and it's a story that's an ongoing story that's very beautiful.

Pierre: I will jump to the last chapter of the book. Desire, longing. What is your reflection about that? What do you mean by *longing*?

Varden: Well, it's an insight I've learned from Athanasius of Alexandria, from whom one can learn lots of useful things. It dawned on me, and I could sort of verify this from experience, that there is a very useful distinction to be made between desire and longing. And it's fortunate that in English there is a lexical difference, that we have those two terms that stand for different things. In the Romance and Latin languages, it's much more complicated because you have derivatives of desiderium standing for the two, but basically in Athanasius' terms, desire, which for him in Greek was the word *eîdon*, which we use as the word *hedonist*—you know, someone who lives for pleasure. For him, desire is something that originates in me and that seeks to satisfy me. There's nothing ecstatic about desire; it's an instinct or a craving that wants to be met and satisfied, whereas longing, for Athanasius, and his word for it is *potos*, originates from outside myself. What I long for is something that, as it were, calls to me from a distance, and my longing is the resonance awakened in me. My longing is a response, implicit or explicit, to a call that comes from outside myself. I think once we've made that categorical distinction in our minds, it helps to make sense of lots of things.

Pierre: It's constitutive of our humanity. The longing is not something that comes from above and takes over us, but it corresponds to the deep aspiration of the human. And the aspiration is not just the aspiration of a dream of something that cannot happen. It's not just a utopia; it's something that is part of us but needs to be recognized in order to exist in us.

Now explain to us what we should make memory of, in order to exist and to grow and to correspond to the longing of our own being.

Varden: Basically, if you accept the premise of what I said about longing just now, the memory sort of slots into that because, I mean, I try to develop the theme of memory in this book, not simply as the mental action of recalling something, of remembering where I put my keys, but we're talking about memory in a much deeper and existential sense, the way Augustine would talk about memory as being one of the fundamental faculties of human being.

I am the result of a loving intention and I'm made to realize that intention. We're back to the iconic nature of man and what it actually feels like, how we experience the fact that we're made in the image of God, because that's not just a theoretical notion for theologians; it speaks a great truth about ourselves. I think the fundamental challenge of practicing remembrance is to recognize that deep remembrance in myself; that my origin is purposeful and that I'm greater than myself. That's the great pedagogy of the Judeo-Christian tradition. We're about to enter Lent next week. We will reread the Exodus narrative and again and again and again we will hear those solemn Mosaic exhortations: remember our father was a wandering Aramean and remember you were a slave in Egypt; remember you were fed in the wilderness; remember underneath were the everlasting arms. It's remembering ourselves into that narrative of redemption, and then discovering the narrative redemption is actually carrying on to this day in our individual lives, in and through the Church.

Pierre: The prayer of the Jews was remembering. They repeated "remember" five or six times per day. Being Christian is to enter into this act of permanent remembrance.

Varden: The Church is a sacramental reality first and foremost. Remembrance is more than just notional and theoretical when each day at Mass we hear those words "Do this in memory of me." That isn't just writing something down on a little yellow Post-it note; it's about making that remembrance our own. And I think we can verify from our experience that it is possible to enter into that remembrance in such a way that we can say in the first person, "I remember that, I remember that Christ has risen from the dead."

Pierre: We are being called now to live our life in memory of this encounter, which by the way through the power of the Resurrection will be today, and I think this is a Christian life.

Varden: It's a covenantal remembrance, and as we know even from political life, covenants are always bilateral; the unilateral covenants don't tend to go very far. So when I say, *Yes*, I do remember, and I say *amen* to this remembrance, I also commit myself to realize this remembrance credibly in

the way I live, and to try and live it out coherently and in a way that is life-giving.

Pierre: Because the Catholic Church in the United States is entering into a process of Eucharistic renewal, I think it would be good to know what we are speaking about when we speak about *Catholic*. We have seen that a lot of people do not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, so we try our best to help people to believe, but how could people believe in the Real Presence if they have not been led to this personal encounter with Christ? In our secularized world, a lot of people, especially young people, have been separated from the mystery of God's presence. I think we need to make a strong effort of evangelization, this is what we are talking about, as a preparation to receiving the Eucharist.

Varden: It's about living committedly within the Covenant, isn't it? The Byzantine liturgy is striking: the first part is the Eucharistic celebration, which is the Liturgy of the Catechumens, with the readings and everything; and after the reading comes the catechetical part; but when the altar is prepared, the Deacon comes out and says, "Let all catechumens depart, let all catechumens depart." Because the next stage of the celebration only makes sense if you have made your own personal commitment to it. We have to make this, as it were, the hermeneutical key of our existence. There's the terrifying risk that even divine things, if they're instrumentalized for human purposes, can become the object of idolatry. There's a tremendously powerful parable in the first book of Samuel. The people have conquered the land, the exodus is a bit of a distant memory, and they're in this perpetual warfare with the Philistines. Someone has the bright idea, "Hey, we've got this big battle coming up, let's bring the Ark of the Lord into the battle and the Ark will protect us." And then, remarkably, God surrenders the Ark to the Philistines, and that leads Israel to a profound crisis of faith. Because isn't the Ark the assurance that God is always on our side? Whereas obviously, God's great prophetic message through that whole book is that, yes, I am on your side, but on the terms that we agreed on earlier, do you remember?

Pierre: Where are we today? Where are we with the Eucharist? Do you know what the Eucharist is in the present time, in the present context of our culture? Have we done what is necessary in order to realize the power of the

Eucharist between the encounter and the Resurrection? You speak of idolatry; is there a danger there?

Varden: The force that is present in it. I had the joy and the privilege in the last couple of days to preach a retreat to a group of priests. On Thursday we said a Mass to Christ's Eternal High Priest simply using the prayers from the missals. There's an oratory prayer that is staggering. It says every time commemoration of this victim is made, the mystery of our redemption is present. The question is, Do I live within that mystery? Do we *ecclesiastically* live within that mystery?

Pierre: Actually, when Christ gave the Eucharist to the disciples, he wanted them to live the mystery of his own redemption, his death, and resurrection. That's essentially what he invited them to do.

Varden: To revisit our earlier conversation, that's profoundly at the heart of the monastic mystery. If I may share a personal memory, just as I was preparing to make my solemn profession, I received a photograph from a very learned Anglican nun I'd been corresponding with. It was a photograph of a fresco from the Crypt of the Monastery of Shaitanya in Belgium, showing a monk on a cross with an inscription: "The crucified monk." This might not seem particularly encouraging before sa olemn profession. [*laughter*]

Pierre: Maybe that's why you were made a bishop. [*laughter*]

Varden: [*laughs*] But on the back of that photograph, she had written, in a slightly trembling hand—she was quite old then—words that became a paradigm shift for me. She said, "Here is an image of the Christian so fully conformed to Christ that he no longer contemplates the suffering Christ on the cross, but looks out on the world that Christ is saving through the eyes of Christ Crucified." It took me a long time to fully grasp that perspective, and I'm not sure I've fully internalized it yet. But it takes us to the core of deep Christian commitment, both in its earnestness and its grace.

Pierre: This resonates with our times and our church. We tend to view our commitment as a moral one, which is important. However, there's a risk of reducing it to ideology and fighting for that ideology, making those who disagree with us into enemies.

Varden: It's about more than transactional actions or moral codes. It's about the transformation of the human person. We should aim to be more

than just fighters for a cause; we should aim to be beacons of Christ's love and redemption in a world in need.

Pierre: Exactly. We often become fixated on doing, achieving, and fixing, especially in a society with so many problems. We fight for what we believe is right, but we must remember that the Gospel offers more than just a moral code.

Varden: True, and it all depends on our perspective. We must see the world as a place in need of redemption, illuminated by Christ's love, and greet every person with the joy of recognizing the image of God in them.

Pierre: As we wrap up, why did you choose the title *The Shattering of Loneliness* for your book?

Varden: Well, it needed a title. [*laughter*] But it's a meaningful one. I envisioned it like a glass shattering, breaking through the confines of our own loneliness to reveal a vast, infinite world beyond.

Pierre: It's a fitting title. Thank you very much**.**


SAT, FEB 18, 2023
2:00 PM ET
'YOU WILL NEVER SUCCEED
IN CONVINCING ME TO HATE YOU'
(JOSEF ZVERINA)
NEW YORK ENCOUNTER
Diane Foley
Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa
Anastasiia Zolotova
Amy Hickl
FOLEY
HICKL
ZOLOTOV
NEW YORK ENCOUNTER


FOLEY
HICKL


ZOLOTOVA

"You will never succeed in convincing me to hate you" (Josef Zverina)

Forgiveness and hope in the face of the mysterious existence of evil, with ***Diane Foley****, mother of journalist Jim Foley, publicly beheaded by ISIS;* ***Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa****, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem; and* ***Anastasia Zolotova****, Director of Emmaus, Kharkiv, and Ukrainian refugee. Moderated by* ***Amy Hickl****, teacher.*

Introduction

Violence and injustice, in all their variations, are evidence of a mysterious but undeniable reality in our lives: evil. We inevitably experience it as victims or as perpetrators, and in both cases, it does not leave us unchanged: it leaves us wounded. How can we deal with these wounds? Can they ever heal? Can evil be really forgiven? Do we truly desire to forgive or to be forgiven? Why? Speakers have been deeply touched by the reality of evil and will offer their witnesses in response to these dramatic and universal questions.

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Amy Hickl, moderator: Good afternoon. On behalf of the New York Encounter, I welcome everyone, both those present at the Metropolitan Pavilion and those following us online. I'm Amy Hickl, a high school teacher from Los Angeles, and I'll be moderating this event titled: "You Will Never Succeed in Convincing Me to Hate You." Before we begin, I would like to express our gratitude to Land of Peace for their assistance in organizing this event. Today, we are honored to have three distinguished and unique speakers who will share their profound experiences with us.

Diane Foley is a retired nurse and the mother of five children, including American freelance conflict journalist James Foley. In September 2014, less than a month after James' public execution, she founded the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation, where she currently serves as its president and executive director. Prior to this, Diane worked as a community health nurse and later as a family nurse practitioner for 18 years.

Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa is a Franciscan friar and has held the position of Latin patriarch of Jerusalem since 2020. He was ordained as a priest on September 15th, 1990, and began his service in the Custody of the Holy Land in 1999. In 2004, he was appointed Custos of the Holy Land, and in 2016, he was ordained as a bishop.

Anastasiia Zolotova is the director of Emmaus, an NGO based in Kharkiv. Since the start of the war last year, she has been a Ukrainian refugee in Italy, where she currently resides and works with her husband and son. Emmaus's mission is to create and support a community of friends who accompany orphaned and disabled young people in their pursuit of a fulfilling life.

We will begin with Diane Foley. Diane's oldest son, James Foley, was a journalist who traveled to Syria in 2012 to report on the conflict there. When he didn't contact his family on Thanksgiving Day, they knew something was wrong. They later discovered that Jim had been kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured. In 2014, Jim became the first American journalist to be publicly killed by ISIS. In the aftermath of this tragic event, Diane publicly spoke about God's call for forgiveness. To help us understand Jim's character and work better, Diane has shared a video with us, which we will now watch.

Video plays
Applause

Hickl: Diane, thank you for sharing Jim's story with us. We would like to hear about your own experiences, especially your journey towards forgiveness.

Diane Foley: Certainly. I'm honored to be here, and thank you, Amy. Losing our son Jim was a profound loss for us. He was our oldest child, and as some parents may relate, sometimes we don't fully understand who our children become as adults. That was the case for me. I was at home raising four

younger children while Jim pursued his own path, and I didn't fully grasp the person he had become. After Jim's murder, it became the most significant test of my life. Jim was in captivity for nearly two years, and I should note that he was taken on Thanksgiving Day in 2012. As Amy mentioned, his failure to call on that day was highly unusual, as Jim always made an effort to stay in touch with us, despite often being far away. His kidnapping was near the Turkish border, and we never heard his voice again until his tragic death. Our government advised us not to disclose this information, and so we followed their instructions, even though we were frantic because there was no trace of Jim. The FBI had no leads, and we were left in the dark.

I quit my job as a family nurse practitioner during this time, feeling the need to alert people in Washington or anywhere who could help locate Jim. I spent the following 18 months naively traveling to Washington and New York, meeting with various ambassadors, and begging for assistance. I had no idea how to find Jim or bring him home, but I felt compelled to remind people that he was missing. At that point, we had no knowledge that he was with other Americans or anyone else. We trusted our government's reassurance that Jim was their highest priority.

However, when European hostages began to be released, starting with the three Spanish hostages in February 2014, followed by the French and an Italian, I began to realize that we were on our own. This realization led to frantic efforts to figure out our next steps. We had previously been threatened with prosecution if we attempted to raise a ransom ourselves, but we ultimately decided to raise pledges for a ransom. Unfortunately, the captors never contacted us again until just before Jim's murder. I naively hoped that we could negotiate with them at that point, but it was too late.

A couple of weeks before Jim's death, I was exhausted and at a loss for what else to do. I remember going to our small adoration chapel near our church, where I fell to my knees and surrendered Jim. I said, "Lord, I just don't know what else I can do." I truly had no idea. Two weeks later, he was killed, and I remember the shock, feeling a surge of anger. I was furious with our government for leading me to believe they could help when they couldn't. I was so angry that I met with our local pastor, asking for help in avoiding bitterness.

Shortly after Jim's death, it felt as though angels descended upon us. Our community, along with people from all over the world, showered us with support. We received an abundance of mail for a year after Jim's murder, including letters addressed to "The Foleys in New Hampshire." We even received a large cross with Jim's name engraved, along with paintings and gifts from children, and generous donations. It became evident that we needed to use this goodwill to do something positive. Jim, a man full of life and a desire to contribute to the world, would have wanted that. So, a few weeks after Jim's passing, along with some of his attorney friends, we established the James Foley Legacy Foundation. Our mission was to assist other innocent U.S. nationals who were kidnapped or wrongfully detained abroad, providing them with a chance to return home. Additionally, we were passionate about promoting journalist safety, allowing journalists to carry out their work safely.

Hickl: Thank you, Diane. You also had the opportunity to meet with one of the men involved in your son's death. Could you share that experience with us?

Foley: Yes, certainly. That happened several years later. Jim was killed in August 2014, and in January 2018, two of the British jihadists responsible for capturing, kidnapping, and torturing Jim were identified and arrested in Northern Syria. After extensive collaboration with the UK, they were extradited to the United States in the fall of 2021. One of the jihadists, Alexander, pleaded guilty to all charges, while the other opted for a full trial. Alexander's guilty plea came with an offer to speak to the victims, and I believed that Jim would have wanted me to seize the opportunity to hear his story. I wanted to give Alexander a chance to tell his side of the story. Additionally, I wanted to share with him who Jim was. I mentioned to Alexander that, in a different context, he and Jim might have even been friends, which may sound strange. Nevertheless, I had three opportunities to speak with Alexander.

Hickl: Thank you for sharing your story with us, Diane. Now, I'd like to turn to Anastasiia and discuss a contemporary conflict. Anastasiia, does the title of our event, "You Will Never Succeed in Convincing Me to Hate You," resonate with your experiences? Anastasiia will be speaking in Ukrainian, and we will provide a translation.

Anastasiia Zolotova: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for

inviting me. My name is Anastasiia, I'm a Ukrainian from Kharkiv. I'm also the director of a Ukrainian NGO called Emmaus. Along with our boys and girls, we left for Italy and now are living in Italy. My hometown of Kharkiv is one of the cities in eastern Ukraine and borders Russia. I've lived there all my life, but on the morning of February 24th, the first bombs fell there, and my life has changed forever. It's been 356 days, and the war continues in my country. It was not an easy decision for me to come here. I haven't been home for an entire year and want to go back more and more every day. Getting back to the title of the meeting, I want to say that this is still an open question for me, because we were forced to hate. I've never felt such rage as I feel now. Rage at injustice, at violence, at the absurdity of what's being said. Generally, I have no right to talk about hatred because I didn't lose anyone in this war. But since I have to talk about this topic, I would like to describe the reality that I'm living in. I remember my grandmother calming me down at the start of the war, telling me that when Germans entered their village, they ordered all the women and children to be taken to the forest. The children and babies were sleeping under the carts to keep warm; others slept on the ground in the snow. So she said, Don't worry, women with children will be evacuated first. As I was listening to this, I heard the voice in my head saying that grandma is talking about World War II, a war that will not happen again. But Russia has attacked Ukraine exactly on this scale from the first day. They've been killing more brutally than the Germans did, and they're raping and shooting columns of women and children.

I've been afraid for a long time. All the connections are disturbed, my parents are being bombed in Kharkiv. I was afraid that my son would be an orphan, and I always think about other children that have already become orphans in this terrible war. Lots of our friends, friends of our relatives and parents, they are at the front lines. When Ukrainians experience this loss and pain every day, I hear from many of my loved ones saying things like, "They have ruined my life." But a voice inside of me saying, "They'll never make me think that they have ruined my life."

I had a different experience, so that's how I understand the title of our meeting today. You'll never make me think that you have ruined my life. I would lose if I just stopped at hating. A reality has begun to call on us more

intensively than before. My little son requires attention and love. Lots of people started contacting us at Emmaus, asking to be evacuated to Italy and for additional assistance. We have to be with our boys and girls that were made more vulnerable by this war, and we have to be together and support each other.

Hickl: Thank you Anastasiia, thank you. And thank you to Diane. We've been hearing about this desire to not let the bitterness overtake us. I think what we can see in this journey is the desire to forgive, the desire to live without the burden of the hate or the bitterness, and yet I think we all recognize that, humanly speaking, this is not easy. And so to help us, we're fortunate to be joined via Zoom by Archbishop Pizzaballa, who's going to help us look a little more deeply at this experience.

We're grateful that you could join us, because you live in a land too often dominated by conflict and violence. Can you help us to deepen our understanding of this? What is your own experience of this desire for forgiveness?

Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa: Good afternoon to all of you. For me it's almost night. I'm in Aman right now, on my way to Jerusalem, and I am at a very provisional station. I hope you can hear me well. Going back to your question, talk of forgiveness and reconciliation is not easy in this land. Forgiveness, justice, peace, reconciliation—they are perceived more as slogans than real life, and something not attached to our experience.

This is because of the frustration that is coming from many failures on the political level, the religious level, the social level. But if it is very difficult to talk to people about forgiveness, justice, and peace, it is nevertheless clear to all of us, especially for believers, that we cannot avoid this. Forgiveness, justice, and peace are not slogans. For believers, they are part of our life. Your decision for Jesus Christ, your decision for God, becomes also a decision for men, and you cannot separate these two aspects. To be concrete, I need to at least briefly outline the context in which I live. Otherwise, it's not clear.

I don't want to delve into the intricate political, religious, and social dynamics of the Holy Land, as they are widely known, at least in broad terms. There are numerous studies on the subject that anyone can find. What is common among all Israelis and Palestinians is the absence of trust. There is a

profound lack of trust on both the political and social levels. Both populations have grown weary of the so-called peace process after its many failures and betrayals. Politics on both sides of the wall that separates Israel and Palestine are in a state of weakness. Israelis have had five political elections in two years, while Palestinians haven't had any political elections since 2005. Both sides suffer from a dearth of political leadership, increasing polarization of political stances, a lack of vision, and significant economic and social disparities between Palestinians and Israelis.

In Israel's most recent general elections, a coalition of the extreme religious right was brought into government, which threatens to further destabilize Israel's already fragile social fabric, particularly the relationship between religious and secular Jews and between Jews and Arabs. In Gaza, the situation is even more precarious. Two million people are confined within a small strip of land, grappling with severe poverty and high unemployment. They endure daily water and electricity shortages under an increasingly oppressive regime. In the West Bank, settlements continue to expand, making the prospects for a possible peace agreement increasingly uncertain. With the latest Israeli elections, the possibility of meaningful dialogue has seemingly vanished. Some parties in the coalition even advocate for the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority, making any significant change appear remote.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority itself is fragile and weak, further eroding trust and increasing frustration among both Palestinians and Israelis. These are just a few of the challenging elements that define life in my community, where I have been called to serve.

In this context, what does it mean to be committed to forgiveness, peace, and justice? How does this commitment shape my life and my role as a pastor? I am called to speak a clear message, one of truth and simultaneously one that builds trust, which is so desperately needed. I aim to provide a perspective that opens up new horizons, rather than trapping my community in an attitude of resignation or rebellion, especially given the prevailing distrust and lack of political progress.

First and foremost, such a commitment must stem from a genuine personal conviction. What is said cannot be separated from the one saying it. The credibility of the witness is the essential prerequisite for any meaningful

commitment. My people must see that I truly believe in what I say. The work of a church advocating for peace and justice would be futile if its pastor didn't wholeheartedly believe in it. It's not something taken for granted. One must genuinely believe and be acutely aware that in these challenging circumstances, the commitment to peace and justice should be the immediate expression of one's faith. If my primary duty as a pastor is to safeguard God's presence in the true life of my community, it must also be clear that defending God's rights equates to defending human rights, and vice versa. These two aspects are inseparable. Each pastor inevitably brings their own personality, life experiences, sensitivities, and stories to this personal commitment.

My commitment and words must be consistent with who I am to be credible. At the same time, I recognize the importance of understanding that my presence in the Holy Land as a pastor is not coincidental but providential. Providence, in this context, requires a commitment to justice, peace, and forgiveness that is deeply intertwined with my personal experiences, something I am duty-bound to transmit to my community. I must be myself and convey my own perspective, rather than imposing someone else's. Additionally, I am mindful that communication should be a two-way process. My story, personality, and experiences should be enriched by my community's listening and participation. They should find in me an empathetic heart capable of understanding.

So, what is my approach? What is closest to my heart in this deeply troubling commitment? I firmly believe that one cannot earnestly discuss justice and peace from a Christian standpoint without including the concept of forgiveness, which is often regarded as almost taboo in the Holy Land. I am convinced that we will not overcome the obstacles hindering reconciliation, or build a peaceful future, without the courage to cleanse our understanding of history from the immense burden of pain and injustice that continues to heavily influence our present and many of our current choices. It's not about forgetting, but it's challenging to envision a peaceful future when victimhood forms the basis of personal, social, and national identity, rather than being founded on a shared hope. This is a common theme in the Middle East, and it applies here in the Holy Land as well. When one's starting point is

entrenched in personal pain and others are seen as the source of that pain, it becomes difficult to move forward.

Forgiveness is an essential element for overcoming this impasse. Purifying relationships cannot happen without addressing forgiveness, and not just within small groups or communities, but in a broader context, encompassing both political and religious spheres. In the Israeli-Palestinian political landscape, however, forgiveness is often perceived as surrendering one's rights. Furthermore, local cultures and religious backgrounds exert significant influence on the issue. Today, Islam and Christianity in the Holy Land have very different approaches to forgiveness, often equated with weakness. This discourse demands my personal commitment to living forgiveness, fostering reconciliation, and showing that forgiveness is not just a concept but a lived reality that is visible and tangible, one that generates peace. My people must see in me a person at peace, capable of bridging the gap between faith in God and daily life.

As for the impact on the lives of my people, one important question looms large and doesn't always yield a straightforward answer. How can I help my community reevaluate their history, purify their memories, and speak of forgiveness when their daily lives are marred by injustice and suffering? My people often say to me, "It's easy for you, an Italian, to talk about peace, justice, and forgiveness, but we experience these difficulties every day. How do you expect us to speak of forgiveness when we are living under oppression?" While it is challenging to respond to such questions, I remain convinced that discussing forgiveness is essential, even as we acknowledge the resistance to forgiveness. Achieving this synthesis of reconciliation is difficult and sometimes painful. It doesn't always succeed, but enduring this tension is also part of my service, without imposing solutions, but rather being in a state of hopeful anticipation, both trusting and painful, underpinned by faith in God's providence.

And now, another often overlooked but crucial aspect comes into play in this service: loneliness. Committing oneself to peace and justice, alongside forgiveness, isn't always met with immediate sympathy. Being in a situation that demands taking sides—Palestinians expect you to be with them against the Israelis, and vice versa—means deciding whom you want to stand with.

When you strive to talk about forgiveness, neither side may fully understand your perspective. However, if this is your conviction, you must also accept that you may find yourself alone. It's not merely about solitude, but also dealing with misunderstanding, resistance, opposition, and more.

I believe that it's impossible to be genuinely committed to justice and peace, especially when advocating for forgiveness, and simultaneously be applauded by all. For many years, I've been reminded of a gospel passage that highlights this dilemma. It's the story of the people's choice between Jesus and Barabbas, which I believe resonates with our situation today. Pilate presented the people with two figures of the Messiah: Jesus and Barabbas. Barabbas, in Aramaic, means "son of the father" and is a Messianic title. He represented an activist, a political figure who sought liberation for his people, advocating for justice, freedom, and dignity through concrete means. On the other side stood Jesus.

As a Latin padre in Jerusalem, I've constantly found myself in a position requiring a choice—to support the Palestinians or the Israelis—and yet, I've also emphasized the importance of forgiveness. I've pondered how to reconcile these demands—to be on the side of Jesus, advocating for love of enemies, without appearing to favor one narrative over the other. How do I address divisions firmly and justly, without exacerbating conflicts and always with mercy? How can I be a bishop who demands obedience but also turns the other cheek to those who defy him to resolve conflicts? Every day, I face the choice between Jesus and Barabbas. Every Christian in the Middle East confronts this dramatic choice: to die on the Cross or to engage in conflict.

How can you speak about deliverance from the bondage of sin, about forgiveness, when your people suffer under the yoke of foreign rule? Is it reasonable to quantify pain and loss of life, saying, for example, "One hundred Palestinians killed, 10 Israelis killed, so Palestinians suffer more"? Is that a valid criterion? How can you talk about a relationship with a Heavenly Father when your loved ones are killed or subjected to humiliation before your eyes? How can you speak of joy in the spirit when your basic rights are denied? The Barabbas mentality permeates this dilemma—the fundamentalism of those who want to wage a new crusade and the indifference of a disembodied Christianity.

Nevertheless, choosing Christ doesn't mean turning a blind eye to the evil in the world. From a purely human standpoint, forgiveness may seem like defeat. Jesus didn't resolve the social and political problems of his time. In the face of worldly evil, it may appear that our duty as Christians is simply to suffer, to die on the cross like Jesus, to accept defeat and be pierced. According to the Barabbas mindset, the pursuit of justice and peace is seen as futile, a strategy of wishful thinking with no future. Christianity in the Middle East may seem powerless, finished, crushed. Yet, countless individuals, particularly the poor and those with nothing to lose, demonstrate that despite everything, seeds of hope persist.

Take, for instance, the Christian community in Gaza, a small minority of 800 people amidst 2 million Muslims, facing daunting social, political, and religious challenges, including high unemployment and limited religious freedom. Despite their difficulties, they are one of the least complaining communities in my diocese. They actively engage in working for justice and peace, cooperating with both Christians and Muslims to alleviate social issues in Gaza. Their faith in action is admirable. Agada, a member of this community, is particularly inspiring. She is committed to justice and peace, yet she prays daily to be able to live forgiveness amid the adversity she faces in Gaza. This is just one example, and I could share many more, but it illustrates that even when institutions are paralyzed, many individuals, both Christian and non-Christian, embody forgiveness in their lives despite everything.

In conclusion, I often ask myself in this unique context, which may differ from others, what position to adopt in the face of these intricate situations. How can I genuinely commit to peace, justice, and forgiveness, moving beyond empty rhetoric and ideologies? I believe it's important to be cautious of those who offer simplistic and easy answers. In complex and fractured contexts like ours, easy answers are invariably misleading. I believe it often comes down to simply being there, within the wounds, and accepting that sometimes, we have no other solution but to be present, to be close, to be neighbors. We should not pretend to teach forgiveness but rather strive to share it. Forgiveness cannot be taught; it is a gift received from others. The only way to teach forgiveness, justice, and peace is by experiencing and witnessing them.

An academic exercise or a political decision may explain or endorse these concepts, but they should never precede the commitment to peace, justice, and forgiveness, which is born of a heartfelt choice. In the end, forgiveness is synonymous with love, and only a profound love for God and for one's community can provide the foundation and purpose for our commitment to peace, justice, and, indeed, forgiveness. This is my humble experience.

In conclusion, I may not have provided a clear answer to your question, but I can say that forgiveness is attainable for those with love and an open heart towards life and God. Despite everything, it is possible even in the Holy Land, and my role as a pastor is to be present and not to expect my people to understand or share, but to stand with them and support them. That is what I am called to do. Thank you. I hope someone is listening; I can't see anyone, so it feels like I'm speaking to myself. [*applause*]

Hickl: I'd like to conclude by expressing our gratitude to each of you for your concrete witness that has made forgiveness a reality in our lives. We thank each of you for being here today. [*applause*]


SAT, FEB 18, 2023
4:00 PM ET
WHO AM I?
NEW YORK ENCOUNTER
Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Fr. Michael Carvill
John Cavadini
John Zucchi
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John

Who Am I?

A presentation of The Religious Sense*, a seminal work by Fr. Luigi Giussani on the occasion of its new translation, with greetings by* ***Cardinal Timothy Dolan****, Archbishop of New York; a conversation with* ***Fr. Michael Carvill****, U.S. coordinator of Communion and Liberation, and* ***John Cavadini****, Director of McGrath Institute for Church Life at Notre Dame University. Moderated by* ***John Zucchi****, history professor at McGill University, translator of* The Religious Sense.

Introduction

The Religious Sense is one of Fr. Giussani's seminal works and is based on the Introduction to Theology course that he taught at the Catholic University of Milan from the late '60s until his retirement in the early '90s. As he presents the religious sense as a fundamental dimension of life, Fr. Giussani engages contemporary culture head-on, and tackles topics like reason, freedom, and morality, but also beauty, desire, love, justice, and happiness, without shying away from the challenges of modernity. Particularly interesting is the method he uses to address these universal and timeless aspects of our existence: not through conceptual reasoning, but by means of keen and impassioned observation of how they emerge in human experience, often using poetry and literary quotes to explain them.

Over 20 years after the first English edition, a revised translation of *The Religious Sense* will be available at the New York Encounter and will be presented by the speakers through their personal engagement with the text.

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Deniz Demirer: Schubert's Trio proposes ideally the journey of a man, as it were, the journey of every man, who appears on the scene of the world, a young man bouncing with positive drive. From the start, the music presents him bursting with energy and determination to get on in life. Then it is as if as time passes and circumstances change—problems, uncertainties, and suffering begins to surface. In the second movement that vital drive is challenged, tested, interrogated as to its energies and its hopes of fulfillment. Here emerges one of the most sadly beautiful melodies of our musical tradition. It expresses the desire to get to the heart of things and at the same time the awareness of the inadequacy of the means available. Hence, its agonizing sadness. When a man finds a beautiful melody he wants nothing else; this is the characteristic of Heaven. You will be unable to want anything else; this is happiness, being unable to desire anything else because you are fulfilled.

Music plays
Applause

Riro Maniscalco: Not bad. There's beauty in Schubert, there's thirst for beauty in Schubert. There's beauty in Giussani's words, there's thirst for beauty in Giussani's words. There's thirst for beauty and love and justice in our heart, the core of the religious sense, but there's also beauty in friendship, in this impossible unity, in motherhood and fatherhood, and that's why I'm really grateful to Cardinal Dolan for his presence, his fatherly presence, and I invite him to share a few words with us. [*applause*]

Cardinal Timothy Dolan: Thank you, thank you everybody. I always appreciate your invitation to the Encounter, and I'm unfailingly inspired by your company, so thank you very much. You're lucky, because about six months ago I was graciously invited to give a full-fledged talk at the Encounter, and I had to respond, "I can't come this year because I have to go to a meeting of one of the congregations that I'm on as a cardinal in Rome." I didn't think I'd be able to be with you. Then about a month ago I got word that, because of the reshuffling of the Curia by the Holy Father, the meeting

had been postponed. So I was able to come, but you don't have to listen to me for a full talk. [*laughter*]

Because all I've been asked to do is give you a word of warm welcome and boy, that I can do exuberantly. I'm grateful. I'm grateful for the company of brother bishops. I know Cardinal O'Malley is here but you can't blame him for getting out of Boston, huh? [*laughter*] Archbishop Gudziak is here, and we were just together in a very moving prayer service on this somber first anniversary of the aggression by Russia. I know that our nuncio, Archbishop Christophe Pierre is here, I see Bishop Massa, and I see Bishop Rika. So it's sure good to be with you brother bishops, thank you.

Now, of all the array of reasons for my long admiration for Communion and Liberation, one stands out at this annual gathering. You interested? Namely the charism, the charism of CL, the insights of Father Giusanni, the radiance of this annual Encounter—display to me an illuminating understanding by you of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, especially in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*. The teaching of the Council on the relationship, the delicate sensitive relationship between the Church and the world, between the Church and culture, between the Church and society.

Now, to be sure, the Bible warns us about the evils of the world; the evils of culture, the evil of society—you bet there are, and we know them well, right? But the Council also ringingly recalls the words of Jesus calling us to be lights to the world, reminding us that Jesus came not to condemn the world but to save it, that God loved the world so much that he sent us his only begotten son. You all are prophetic in your posture of *yes*, a challenge to the evils of culture, society, in the world, but also spotlighting the good.

It might be an art: poetry, literature, dance, song, or music like that stunning piece we just heard, or even such things as economics and politics, history. Thus, this annual Encounter is evidence of a productive approach of accompaniment, dialogue, invitation, outreach, cooperation, friendship, welcome, and encouragement. All vocabulary, by the way, that's often repeated by Pope Francis. Now New York City needs you, we need this example, you guys, and that's why you're so welcome. New York City needs your example. New York City needs this Encounter, and so does the world, so does the

Church, so do I, as a matter of fact. So not only are you welcome, not only am I grateful, but please keep it up. Nice to be with you. [*applause*]

Maniscalco: Alright, and now straight to *The Religious Sense*. Thanks for being here, John Cavadini, Director of McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, Father Michael Carvill, U.S coordinator of Communion Liberation, same as above, and John Zucchi, Professor of History at McGill University, and translator of *The Religious Sense*, which means if you don't like the translation, he is the one to blame. [*laughter, applause*]

John Zucchi: Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone, and on the Encounter's behalf I'd like to welcome everybody—those here in the Metropolitan Pavilion, and also those following us online. I'd also like to begin by thanking Somos for its generous help in organizing this event. I'd like to mention one other item here: The Trunk Is Rooted Where The Truth Lies, an exhibit on the self and the other in the life and thought of the Servant of God, Father Luigi Giussani.

This event is going to be a conversation, what we might call an introduction, an invitation, an encouragement to engage with *The Religious Sense*, Father Giussani's seminal work, which has just been released by McGill Queen's University press in a new and revised version. I'd like to begin with a short, very short story. When the translation had been completed, I approached McGill Queens University Press about this and they agreed to publish it. I thought this was, well, wonderful, but it's a standard thing for major university presses to pick up two or three foreign books and publish them in English translation. When I met Father Giusanni a few months later, he was bowled over by this, and he kept asking me, I mean three or four times, "Tell me the story of how this all took place!" And at the end of it he said, "So you were at the origin of this?" I said, "No, not really," and he goes, "Well, was *I* at the origin of this?" And then he said he was at the origin of this, and that struck me so much, because by saying this, he really put into action what is so key to *The Religious Sense*: the fact that appearances tell us of another reality, a deeper reality, and it's in this spirit that we're going to have this conversation today. We want to avoid, obviously, a dry and didactic account of *The Religious Sense*, and we're very lucky to have with us today

Father Michael and John Cavadini with us, because they've engaged so deeply with this book and been touched by it. We're going to have a conversation not with two teachers, which they are, but with two human beings who've been touched by the book, moved by it, by two witnesses.

I'm going to start with the question of the religious sense itself. I'd like to ask Father Michael: From your reading of the book, what *is* the religious sense?

Fr. Michael Carvill: Yeah, I would say that the religious sense is, to put it in just two words and then maybe explore those two words just a little bit, I would say that it is a *structural expectation*. And by structural I simply mean there's something that we all have, just like we have a nose and eyes. A part of who we are as human beings is this expectation. It is part of who we are; it's not a choice, it's not a an acquired ability or gift, it's something that's simply there; it's a structural expectation, which is that we as human beings when we live, when we live the experience of being human, we find that continually within our engagement in the reality that we encounter, when we open our eyes and we begin to live, we discover that we're after something, that we're not just passive spectators, that there's a powerful dynamic force within our engagement in reality that is an exploration, a search, a thirst, a hunger, a wanting to discover something. If somebody asked us what we're looking for, we'd find it hard to put it into words. But yet we do find, we do know deeply the experience of inadequacy, and that inadequacy, that experience of the inadequacy of things, comes precisely from this expectation. And it's a fact that this expectation doesn't get met, it doesn't get met in the day-to-day interaction with things, and therefore it continues forward, looking, always scanning the horizon, looking for something that might in some way be satisfying.

I always think of going down to collect the mail. When you go down to collect the mail in this little pile of envelopes on the floor under your mailbox—I don't know if they even do it that way anymore but that's the way I think of it. At least for me, there's a little expectation of "Might there be a letter there that changes everything? [*laughter*]

It's just one little experience that reveals the fact that, in me, as a human being, there's a waiting, there's a wanting, there is a desire, there's a point of

comparison of things, there's a point of evaluation of things by which I rate the things that I encounter.

Zucchi: So, this expectation is not just some characteristic, it's something structural?

Carvill: Yeah, by that I mean it's part of who I am as a human being; I can't get rid of it. It comes before any consideration of the epoch in which you were born. We can find this in the most ancient literature, we can find this in the most distant and diverse cultures, we find it as truly something that's human. It' doesn't belong to any category of human, it belongs to the human person *per se*. That's what I mean by structure. That's us. It is ourself.

Zucchi: Thank you. John you read *The Religious Sense* many years ago and you read it recently. How have you understood the religious sense, particularly from the second reading?

John Cavadini: I did read it about twelve years ago and I liked it. [*laughter*]

Zucchi: That's good! [*laughter*]

Cavadini: I reread it recently on a plane coming home from Italy, appropriately enough, and it just struck me totally differently this time, it really moved me. Actually, it made me cry. I hate to admit it. I was embarrassed because there were a lot of movies, you know, on the airplane that you can kind of see, sort of romantic ones, and I was thinking, I'm not crying at that, please don't think I'm crying at the movie. [*laughter*]

This time, being a theologian, what really struck me about the book, what I like about Giussani, is that he talks about it in terms of reason, and he kind of expands our understanding of reason so that reason seeks, reason inquires—but reason seeks and inquires on the basis of awareness of human desire, awareness of the desire, he says, to explain the meaning of everything. Reason becomes aware of something, and it becomes aware of the answer, as something which transcends reason, and to deny that is irrational.

In the last chapter he builds up to the possibility of revelation, which was very moving to me. He says that nothing can erase that possibility, and he brings up Mary. Isn't it interesting, right at the point the Blessed Mother appears in this book, right at that point she says, "How, how can this be?" and the angel says, “Because nothing is impossible through God.” And so

the Blessed Mother remains right there, open to a possibility she can't fully foresee, and in her whole life there is always an openness and it never goes away. Think about the Seven Sorrows of Mary, for instance. You know the prophecy of Simeon. She was like, wow, virginally conceived, this is going to be fantastic, this great thing is happening—then all of a sudden "a sword shall pierce your heart" and there was the flight to Egypt and all the hardships, and then meeting Jesus on the Way of the Cross. It's like, *This isn't going the way I thought it would*. In fact, it looks like it's going the wrong way altogether. Imagine taking Jesus down from the cross, dead. It's like, now what? But she didn't close off the possibility that God might accomplish something, for nothing is impossible with God, even if we can't see beyond it, and who can see beyond death? Into that openness the Resurrection quietly sneaks in, in the middle of the night, as something that unexpectedly greets that openness to Mystery, the possibility of something we hadn't been able to form at all, which seemed impossible, and yet it happened, it snuck in.

Zucchi: I hope you don't think the question too intimate, but what particularly moved you to tears in this?

Cavadini: Can I read the line?

Zucchi: Yes, please! [*laughter*]

Cavadini: It's actually the last paragraph, but I'm not going to read it all. It's this: "The hypothesis of revelation cannot be destroyed by any preconception or option. This is the frontier of human dignity, even if salvation does not come. Still, I want to be worthy of it in every instant." That's the last sentence in the book. That's what moved me. This whole book is saying that the the religious sense, when it comes to its fruition and when we don't block it, it leads to a readiness like that: “Even if salvation does not come, still, I want to be worthy of it in every instant.” That's kind of Marian, isn't it?

Zucchi: In our unworthiness we still desire that worthiness.

Cavadini: Right! Even if it doesn't come, I want to be worthy of it in every moment of my life.

Zucchi: Thank you. Father Michael, what in particular struck you in *The Religious Sense*?

Carvill: There are an awful lot of things that struck me in *The Religious*

Sense, and this point of the possible remaining open for me is absolutely the most vital thing. It seems to me that the greatest objection against Christianity is to say it's impossible, that that man over there could not be God. It's impossible to shut it down before a consideration of it, and the thing that I find most beautiful and extraordinary in this book is the way in which it so profoundly establishes the unreason, the profound unreasonableness, even the violence to our own nature that we have to do to eliminate the possibility, to say that something is not possible. When I find a cloud over my perception of Christ present in the world, it always sends me back to this, it sends me back to saying, first of all, first of all: I can't. I can't. There are moments when you kind of get lost in the small stuff and it just seems—I see this with people at funerals, for example—the hope of resurrection seems so difficult to hold onto when you look at things around you.

But then you see there's a work here that to me is extremely valuable and is deeply helpful to me in my personal journey, which is: first of all, to know that everything is possible. That's what you said about the words of the angel to Mary. Everything is possible for God. So the openness of that possibility removes from me a shadow over the whole human experience and allows me to open my eyes and look, to look at what's happened to me in my life. To look at my family, look at this Movement, look at the Church. To see what's real and to be able to engage in what's real. For me, I'd say the thing I hold onto most from this book is that reason demands, and reason in some mysterious way is simply us. Reason isn't something I do, reason is my relationship with the real, it's my relationship with what is. You shouldn't think of reason as some kind of box. You know, here's your conscience, here's your reason, here's your stomach. Your reason is *you* in some way, it's you, your engagement, it's your ability to relate to and know and grasp what's there. And that demands openness. And because it demands openness, the claim of Christ has to be faced. Now I find that totally convincing.

Zucchi: It's interesting you're saying this, because we think of reason as often telling us that the impossible is impossible. But here you're saying that reason tells us the impossible is possible.

Carvill: Right, yeah, I do think that's right.

Zucchi: I'm going to ask you, Father Michael, about two other key words

that Father Giussani brings into *The Religious Sense*. You know one of these is *experience* and closely tied with it the question of *correspondence*. They're words that in the Movement are often bandied about without understanding their depth, their deep significance. I was wondering if you could help tease out these words for us?

Carvill: I think one of the great things that Father Giussani has done for us and for the world of thought in some way, because ultimately I think that this book is a real contribution to the world of thought, to the history of the thought of humanity—is he in some way restores the word *experience* to a real dignity, to a real dignity and he does that by observing and helping us to perceive that experience is the emergence of the real to our human knowing, and therefore experience is not just things that happen. Experience is things that happen with the conclusions that we can draw from those things that happen, the judgment that we make of those things that happen, and in this way we find ourselves with something that's profoundly unobjectionable if you think about it. I always come back to Peter outside the synagogue in Capernaum: "Will you also leave?" Peter wasn't given some person in authority he could call, he wasn't given some certificate that Jesus had, he wasn't given any method to respond to that question other than what he had lived and seen and come to know by living those years with Christ. When Father Giussani speaks of experience, he's speaking about the completed work of encounter with reality; not just the surface of the sense encounter, but the completed work; then the work of an encounter with something real reaches its fullness in knowledge, in awareness, in a grasp, in a relationship with that reality that you're looking at, that in some way owns it, in some way holds it, in some way makes it its own.

I think experience has to be seen as a dynamic of the human person. Correspondence is the recognition, and it goes back to what I said at the beginning about the reality in front of us. Correspondence means that I discovered that the expectation in me responds to the things that I meet, and it has an ability to evaluate the things that I meet, it has the ability to say this is important, this is important, this is not important, this is secondary, this is primary, this is something I must pay attention to, this is something I can put off until tomorrow. Correspondence reveals. Correspondence is ultimately

the encounter with that expectation, the encounter between experience and that expectation, but is the "A-ha!" It's the recognition. You know, the famous graffiti that Father Giusanni sometimes quoted: "*Quid animo satis*? What can satisfy the soul?"

I go about the world, you know, almost like I have a detector, like some sort of a Geiger counter, so when I get close to certain things it says, "You're close now." It's like, *beep*, *beep*, *beep*, *beep*. Within my humanity there's this potential, this ability, this capacity to respond to the reality I encounter and to be moved by it. Being moved by it, to be able to perceive and recognize what is, begins to be the answer to that expectation and it scans all of reality, looking always, expecting always, going to the next thing.

Zucchi: Thank you. So, we have this complex, then, of needs and evidences that we call the human heart, we have reality, we have this correspondence. I have a question for you, John. You're a university professor, you have a large introductory class in Catholicism, but you teach at all different levels. You meet many students, some Catholics, some not, some practicing, some not. Can this concept, this correspondence with the heart, can this be useful for them in their quest for truth?

Cavadini: Absolutely, but I find that if you use that language, it doesn't get you very far because they already think they know what all those words mean. If you use that language they sort of tune you out, "Yeah, I've heard that all before." And so even if you talk about the religious sense—all these students have the religious sense, though they've been taught really to ignore it. The Catechism starts with a natural desire for God, which in a way is the religious sense pointing to that. Sometimes you know someone who's like, "Well, I don't have the desire for God, so I proved that wrong." But the issue is, well, what do you think God is? If you think God is, I don't know, a divine harpist sitting on a cloud calmly observing the affairs of people, then I don't have a desire for that either, I agree with you. You have to sneak behind all the ways they think they understand the language.

I have a kind of stupid way of doing it. I'm almost embarrassed to tell you. I say "Alright, let's figure out what this word God means. I know you all watch B movies"—and they all do. "How about Godzilla? Godzilla was kind of big, and in the movies he's kind of got a heart, you know, he's frustrated, so

you feel a little bit for him. What would be something big enough for you to call it God? Would it be Godzilla times two? No? Godzilla times four? How about that? How about Godzilla squared?" And they're all pre-professional students and whatever, so "What about Avogadro's Number of God, which is a really big number?" They get the point, right? You don't do it by adding. It's not something within this world but something that transcends it. So you begin to get them to be aware of something. To get them somehow to see that implicit in all their desires, running in every one of them, there's a desire for something that transcends those. Like, even if you've had Thanksgiving dinner, the word hunger doesn't entirely lose its meaning. You're still hungry for something, but what is that something? It's—could we say it's the desire for meaning—this is what Giussani says—and that does click, because it's lodged within all of our desires. Even when they're satisfied, what does it all mean? You have to help them name it, otherwise they think you're just talking about trying to force themselves, like Groucho Marx in a *Night at the Opera*, trying to force himself to like the opera. Trying to force yourself to like an old man sitting on a cloud.

Zucchi: We just heard that beautiful second movement of the Schubert trio, and there's that line from Father Giussani that was read at the introduction where he said, "Discovering a beautiful melody, we want nothing else. We have an intuition of the hereafter." In other words, there's an intuition of the hereafter in a beautiful melody.

Cavadini: Yeah, that's a really excellent example, the example of music. Because it's the example of beauty, right? You're hearing something beautiful, and in that moment, it seems like that's all you want. But there's a lot of ways—Giussani calls them preconceptions—there's a lot of preconceptions you can use outside of that moment to dodge it. Like, well, beauty is just—I don't know, it's just something subjective; it isn't anything out there. They've all been taught these things, so in order to counteract that sometimes I wear a flower to class, a carnation. They're like, "Whoa, what's that for?" I say, "What's what for?" "Like, well, that in your lapel." I say, "Well, what is that? It's just a piece of matter, right? That's all it is. It's just, it's just whatever." And they say, No, it's a flower. Why did you wear a flower today?" They all think I'm crazy, so I say, "Just the other day you were all saying this could be

just a piece of matter, energy, interacting." I take the flower out of my lapel, I slam it on the floor, I step on it, and they're absolutely horrified. One time I did this and the floor was a little slippery and I slipped on the flower that I just stepped on. I didn't entirely fall, so I halfway kept my dignity, but I said, "Why were you horrified? I just stepped on a piece of matter, you said that's all it was." Something was violated right in that moment, and they concede they can't simply explain it reductively.

Zucchi: Great, thank you. Great example. The theme of this year is "Who Am I That You Care For Me?" Is it possible—I won't say to *respond* to this question, but even to understand the terms of this question without reference to the religious sense? Either one of you can begin.

Carvill: I mean, I think that just to ask this question is already to begin to engage with the religious sense, and I think you have to come back to that beautiful word "beauty." Excuse me for the tautology, but that beautiful word "beauty," because that word already expresses something absolutely extraordinary that's going on in the experience of being a human. The fact that the word beauty even exists is already a very, very powerful evidence that there is in the human being—I mean it's the fact that there is reality perceived as attractiveness. And to me that's a fundamental source of this question: Who are you that you care for me? Why is the world so beautiful? Why does the world touch my heart so much? Why does it beckon me so much? Why is reality so enticing? Why do I want to live forever? Maybe sometimes when I look at the beautiful ocean I turn away, there's a hint of sadnes. There's a hint of sadness because I have to turn away, I have to go. I have to turn away from that and go back to other things. Why is reality so attractive? Why is there a "given," something so profoundly attractive? And who are you who give it to me? I mean, I always ask my classes, "If you come into the house back from work, and there's a big bunch of flowers on the table, what's the first thing you do? What's the very first thing you do? You say, Oh they're beautiful. Even before that, though, you do something else, you rummage among the leaves. Where's that little card? You pull out the little card, "Ah, yeah, okay," and you put it down. Then you display the flowers. You put them in a vase.Who are you? I think that the emergence of that "You" in the human experience reveals the religious sense. I always remember a story from

when I was in the working world. I had a colleague and we used to sometimes go down to a computer center together to do some work. Sometimes he'd drive, sometimes I'd drive. He was radically atheist and he always had new arguments for his atheism. I remember coasting up towards a green light and him just gripping the steering wheel and saying, "Stay green, stay green, stay green," and I said to him, "Hey, Kevin, who are you talking to?" [*laughter*] We talk to the real because we can't help but perceive the real as responsive to us as an other.

Zucchi: The other day I was reading this book again, it was chapter 10. I was in tears again reading the section precisely on this, where Giussani says that we become aware of the real, and then aware of faces and things, and then of our 'I,' of ourselves. That we begin to say 'I' in that sense there. John, how about you? Do you think it's possible to answer the question, Who am I ultimately? Who am I that you care for me? Without this reference to the religious sense. In other words, is it simply a philosophical question or is this religious sense absolutely necessary for understanding the terms of the question?

Cavadini: I would have to say yes. I would first of all underscore everything that Father Michael said, and maybe I can also help you understand why this last chapter moved me so much and still does now, because it has to do with the "You." Like you said it has to do with the "You." The "You" is that irreducible word if you really mean it. It can't be reduced to anything but itself, but the way that he does it in that last chapter, he's built up the whole book so that reason, if it's true to itself, asks all these questions about meaning. And if it's true to itself and becomes aware in that asking of an answer that is larger than itself, that transcends itself. And it's in that last chapter, after he's built all this up, that then he says we interpret it most successfully if we're honest with the word "mystery." So, if you're truly rational, true to your rationality, you'll be aware of some of reality as ultimately a mystery. Step one. But then step two is, you could say, natural revelation. There's a cosmos that reveals itself to reason as mystery. But then, what if that were to talk to you? What if it all of a sudden were to say, "I love you," like whisper it to you or something? Then you've got revelation. All of a sudden, this mystery has a voice, and it has a name: Father. He uses the name Father and then "You." Who am I that you

care for me? That's a "You," that thing you've been ordered to, and that thing cares about you and it's a person, Father.

That's the moment when you really fully understand who you are and the meaning of your life. Yet as Giussani says, the fact that it can be named and understood in that sense only deepens the mystery. It doesn't collapse the mystery of who am I, but it opens me to an identity that I could never have imagined for myself or given myself. And in the moment that it's given, all you can do is say thank you, thank you for caring about me. And may I live every moment, whether salvation comes or not, as though I were worthy of it.

Zucchi: Father Michael, why for Father Giussani is this awareness that we belong such a fundamental aspect of life?

Carvill: I'd say a couple of things. First, it's a testimony. It's a testimony of his, and he wants to propose this. But if we don't belong, then what are we? What is this creature that is me? What is this reality? Without recognizing its nature, reality becomes completely impenetrable. Father Giussani in his book presents a thought experiment. Imagine a person with all our current awareness and critical capabilities, but experiencing reality for the first time, like a baby just born. The first perception is reality itself, something that is given, a gift. We can get caught up in complex thoughts, but even the simplest mind facing reality sees it as a gift. What was the question again, if you don't mind? [*laughter*]

Zucchi: Do I need to look it up?

Carvill: Just the last part.

Zucchi: Why is recognizing dependency fundamental for Father Giussani?

Carvill: Father Giussani believes that humans, by their nature, need to understand the reality we find ourselves in. If there's an unknown object on this table, even if I try to ignore it, I'll wonder what it is and why it's there. The unknown beckons our reason. We have this strong desire to know. Without recognizing that we belong, our quest for knowledge is stymied.

Zucchi: I'm interested in the relationship between our dependence and what you called the impenetrability of reality without that dependence. Can you expand on that?

Carvill: When I think of "being" or "existence," I see it as an action, like

sitting, which describes an ongoing state. But what is this "being"? How can we grasp the reality of existence? Humans tend to reverse engineer reality, deconstructing it layer by layer, always probing deeper to understand its origins. There's a historical and philosophical journey in this process, but someone experiencing reality for the first time is immediately confronted with that question. And I find that fascinating.

Zucchi: Thank you, and John I'd like to go right back at that question before about, or that issue I brought up before, this control that we always want to have over our lives. Somehow, we see ourselves as a source of our own happiness. Everyone seems to share in this. Is it still possible today, and I'm thinking now in particular about your students, is it still possible for them to discover a vulnerability that opens them up to this recognition that they ultimately depend, to have it to discover a new serenity and an understanding that ultimately they depend on another?

Cavadini: Students, I mean, they're basically taught they have to rely on themselves, and they're taught that what matters is their achievements, and therefore they're very anxious. Most of them live anxiety-ridden lives: Am I going to do enough? Am I going to get this job? If you scratch beneath the surface of that anxiety, you find an incredible vulnerability. I remember Giussani talks about the community, the humanitarian dimension. He says it's very difficult to get to that level of vulnerability because it means taking a risk.

What you need in order to help them get farther is that community dimension. Like, there's going to be someone to help you. There's going to be someone to catch you. You're not actually by yourself. There is a network of help. It doesn't do any good to point it out philosophically, because it's when somebody offers to help you that you all of a sudden think, wow, maybe I could take that seriously, and this vulnerability that I'm hiding can go somewhere. And of course that ultimately requires a sense that somebody else larger is taking care of you, but that's the second step.

Zucchi: Thank you. I'd like to move on to another question, which is that of chapter nine—well, we could say chapters six to nine, on ideology and preconception. We seem to draw ideas of what the good life is, what success means, ideas about our bodies, ideas regarding gender equality,

diversity, etc.—from images that are sent to us by the world, what Father Giussani would call the common mentality. And Father Giussani says that preconception "confines itself to the familiar and expected." Why is it these images that come from others end up becoming the familiar and expected? Why is it not—how can I put it—what we desire most, await the most, even if we're not particularly expecting it? Why is that not the familiar? Why is it always a preconception that is the familiar? John, did you want to start that?

Cavadini: I would say that it's because to become aware of something that exceeds the answer to your questions but also exceeds reason itself and exceeds you—that's frightening. We block it, we've been taught to block it. Really, my students have been sold a bill of goods and a mess of pottage for their birthright. They've been taught to block it. So we think of Mary: the most unimaginable thing was announced to her and she didn't block it, she was open to it, and that meant open to all the sorrows and yet to something that transcended all of them.

Carvill: I think that to hold the original position of the human being is profoundly dramatic the more you live, the more you look, and the more you experience the real. The more you realize there's a profound drama in living the real. The answer to my heart is not in the mall, it's not something I can make in the workshop, it's not something that's been invented now or next year in the corporations of the world, it's not here, it's not here. It's very, very comfortable to say, This is it, this is the answer: my career, my power, my influence, my girlfriend, my money. But the heart ultimately cries and we become people that live a quiet desperation, because even though we've come up with this conspiracy in the world, that this is what we're after, somewhere inside we know it's not, and that no matter how much we pursue this it's not going to get us there.

Zucchi: Thank you. We've had this this discussion today not to explain the book, but to encourage people to read the book, from two witnesses who grappled with the book. I really want to thank both of you for this wonderful conversation, thank you.

For Me?!?

*A presentation on the James Webb Telescope, its undertaking, and its discovery, with **Stefanie Milam**, James Webb Space Telescope Deputy Project Scientist for Planetary Science, and **Massimo Robberto**, Branch Lead of the Near-Infrared Camera of the James Webb Space Telescope. Moderated by **Maria Elena Monzani**, Lead Scientist, Stanford University.*

Introduction

Speakers will present some of the latest discoveries and some stunning images obtained by the Webb Telescope. They will also speak about the Webb Telescope's relevance for the future of astronomy, and how this amazing project began and was implemented. This event will be an occasion to marvel both at the immensity of the universe and at the human ability to explore its origins.

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Maria Elena Monzani, moderator: Good evening, everyone. Thank you for joining us tonight. On behalf of the Encounter, I extend a warm welcome to those present in New York and those tuning in online. I'm Maria Elena Monzani, Lead Scientist at Stanford University and an adjunct scholar at the Vatican Observatory. I have the honor of moderating tonight's event. I'd like to express our gratitude to Benedictine College for their tremendous support in organizing this conversation. Tonight, we're privileged to have two outstanding speakers. I'll briefly introduce them before handing over the stage.

Stefanie Milam serves as the James Webb Space Telescope's deputy

project scientist for planetary science. She specializes in compositional studies of primitive bodies, primarily comets. Using both ground and space-based facilities, she strives to comprehend their link to the formation and evolution of planetary systems.

Massimo Robberto is a distinguished scientist at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore. Presently, he is the instrument scientist for NIRCam, the Near-InfraRed Camera designed for the James Webb Space Telescope. In the past, he's led several programs with the Hubble Telescope, notably the treasury program focused on the Orion Nebula cluster, which produced some of Hubble's most mesmerizing images.

Stefanie, why don't you get us started?

Stephanie Milam: All right, thank you so much for that lovely introduction, and thanks again to everybody for being here. I'm gonna get us started and let you know what we've been doing with the James Webb Space Telescope. [*starts slideshow*] But first I want to give you a little bit of background. This telescope is actually a long time coming for us. It's known as the successor to the Hubble Space Telescope, but I'll tell you, and Massimo will tell you, a little bit about why it isn't exactly a successor to the Hubble Space Telescope. Once Hubble was launched, we had challenges presented to us. This was a whole new view of the universe, and we were seeing things that we hadn't ever seen before with fantastic resolution and sensitivity. You all know the Hubble Space Telescope images just as intimately as I do. But we already knew even within the first few years that we wanted to do better, and we wanted to know *how* to do better.

So, a group of scientists were actually pulled together and determined that we needed to go to longer wavelengths, we needed an infrared telescope that was just as capable as the Hubble Space Telescope. So, we had to build one that was a telescope that's over a hundred times more powerful. We needed a telescope that was over fifty times the resolution of our former infrared space telescope, known as the Spitzer Space Telescope. It needed to be comparable in size to the largest ground-based telescopes at the time, but because it had to be big meant that we had some engineering challenges. We wanted to send it a million miles away from Earth to the second LaGrange Point, because it's an infrared telescope and we're looking for heat signals. The heat from the

Sun, the Earth, and the Moon needed to be avoided as best as possible. We had to have a cryogenic operating telescope and basically the best instruments that you could possibly build. [*changes slide*]

Let's talk a little bit about Hubble versus the James Webb Space Telescope. It is huge; it actually stands about three stories high. The sun shield, which is the large silver structure on the bottom here, is about the size of a tennis court, whereas Hubble, the whole space telescope is about the size of a public bus. We have a mirror for Hubble that's 2.4 meters in diameter and the James Webb Space Telescope is about 6.5 meters in diameter. Hubble was launched in the '90s, and we launched the James Webb Space Telescope on Christmas Day 2021. Hubble has been operating successfully for over 31 years now. JWST was launched with a mission expectation of 10 years, but after our beautiful launch we now know that we have 20 years. Even though we have an extremely large telescope, you can see that the mass was light-weighted so that it's actually half the mass of the Hubble Space Telescope. This is quite significant and definitely an engineering challenge that was met. And because we're a million miles away from Earth, we're very cold. [*changes slide*] Basically, this is a really big telescope. This is a picture of a scale model at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center where I work, showing you part of the team. [*changes slide*]

So we have this huge telescope, and we have to figure out how to put that into the fairing of a rocket, so we had to present ourselves with the engineering challenge of how to fold a telescope. Sometimes you'll hear that JWST is now called an origami-like telescope, and that's because we have to fold it up. [*changes slide*] To do so, we fold the mirrors; the sets of three mirrors on the side fold back, the secondary mirror folds up, and then our sun shield pushes in and then folds up on either end so that we fit nice and tight into the fairing of an Ariane 5 rocket. [*changes slide*] And this is what it looks like when it's folded up. That's actually me standing in front of the telescope about a month before we sent it down to French Guiana for launch. It was huge, I cried. [*video plays*]

We launched on Christmas Day 2021. This was the most terrifying moment of my career. Spending over 20 years to build a telescope and then putting it on a rocket is very terrifying. A $10 billion telescope. This

is an operation center in Baltimore Maryland, watching intently—I believe Massimo was there. I was sitting at home in my living room with my dog, my boyfriend, and my niece. [*laughter*] Our launch was exceptionally nominal, though I think nominal just doesn't even describe it. It was absolutely perfect, and in fact it was so perfect that we got to see our first deployment and that was a complete surprise to us. After launch, we were fortunate enough to have a camera on the rocket itself showing the spacecraft, as you see here, separating. If the launch wasn't as perfect as it was, we would have had to do a couple of tiny maneuver corrections, burn some thrusters to make sure the telescope was going in the right direction, but we didn't have to do that at all. We saw our first deployment, which was the sun shield, the solar panel, which meant we we were off of battery power almost immediately, which was fantastic and demonstrated how successful this mission was already going to be.

So with that I'm going to turn it over to Massimo. [*changes slide*] Um, nope! I'm going to talk to you about deployments. Okay, so once we launched, we had about a month of terror. We had to go a million miles away from Earth and we had to deploy the entire origami telescope. So we have a series of 40 deployable structures, with over 178 mechanisms to make them move. Not all of them had backups, so there were lots of sleepless nights for an entire month. I will tell you this was one of the most successful remote, deployable sequences NASA's ever had, and now we know how to build large space telescopes. Because of the success of the James Webb Space Telescope, many future generations of even larger space telescopes will likely come. So you can see it was a very complex sequence, everything worked perfectly, and we were on our way to a million miles away from Earth, to the second LaGrange point. [*changes slide*]

We have five LaGrange points. These are gravitationally stable points between the Earth's sun system, and we are the one that is the opposite side of the Sun. We go around the sun with the Earth in an orbit. And this is a fun little picture in which you can actually see the telescope on its journey out a million miles away from Earth, taken from telescopes in Baltimore, Maryland. [*changes slide*] So what it looks like as we go around the Earth is, we are in this orbit and we're basically with the Earth going around the

Sun. But it means the bottom side of our telescope always has access to both the Earth and the Sun, so we have a small solar array for power and we can communicate with the Earth continuously with our communication system. [*changes slide*] Okay, *now* I'm going to turn it over to Massimo.

Massimo Robberto: Thank you. I'm going to tell you something about how the telescope is actually built, the main elements, and how to achieve what we need. Just to clarify, all of us are at the wavelength that we observe with the Hubble. We are all shiny bright, but each one of us or each piece of matter, this microphone, everything at this temperature—emits gazillions of photons. So if you want to look [at] a few photons that have traveled across the universe from a remote galaxy, it's a problem to do it from here. We need to cool down things to crazy low temperatures like 230 degrees Centigrade below zero, 40 Kelvin.

And this is what we do with the Webb. It's an ultra-cold telescope. Now the problem is that the Sun, with the Earth and the Moon, are shiny bright, they warm up things, so we need to keep this cold side isolated from the warm side, which is the one facing the Earth, the Sun, and the Moon. So here in this graphic, the Earth, the Moon, and the Sun are on the bottom and the telescope is on the top. The top is isolated, shielded by these five layers. It's like an umbrella that keeps the two things completely separated and the top part is basically just exposed to the cold universe. The universe is even colder than our temperatures, 270 degrees below zero [Celsius], 3 Kelvin. So in this situation we reach our extremely low operating temperature. Apart from that, the telescope is rather conventional, you might say. The telescope is a machine that receives light from sources that are at an infinite distance. In other words, parallel rays coming from each point of the sky with tiny different angles, and they are all concentrated on small points and what we call the focal plane, which is where we take the images. This is basically the principle: collect these parallel beams and focus them on the image of these objects. [*changes slide*]

Once we collect the points we can split the light, send the light to different instruments to be analyzed in different ways. There are 17 observing modes, 17 ways to analyze infrared light on the Web. The instrument that I mostly followed is called NIRCam. In this picture, [it] is the central one, the gold

one, but there are three others around that have served different purposes. NIRCam, this structure that is shown here, is like two sides: one on the top, the other on the bottom. They are basically the mirror image of the other. Why two? Why are we building it this way? Because NIRCam has a double task. On the one hand [it] is the instrument that takes wide field images of the sky, so it's the prime imager. But on the other hand, [it] is the instrument that keeps the telescope together, aligned, because as we have seen the mirror is—and I will return to this—the telescope is built that the giant mirror is not a single piece, but rather it's built with 18 segments.

These 18 segments need to be kept together to form a single surface, the surface of an ideal mirror. And this is done with instrumentation that is built on NIRCam, so NIRCam has to serve the telescope, keep it in good order, and this is important not only for us but for all the other instruments. It's like a servant that keeps the machine aligned. There are two of them, because if one stops working, the other one is still alive. This is the type of redundancy we like to have in space missions. [*changes slide*] NIRCam is not only capable of looking at the sky, as we will see, but it is capable of looking at the telescope, and it's making sure that the mirrors are in place. This is one of the first images we have taken where NIRCam, the instrument, is actually looking at the mirrors themselves, the 18 mirrors. What is happening here is that one of the mirrors is exactly pointing to a bright star and therefore is illuminated. All the others are still in alignment, so they are looking at the dark sky, where there is nothing bright, so they look less bright.

Analyzing these types of images and others even a little bit more exotic, so to speak, we were able to align the telescope. [*changes slide*] That's the selfie of the mirrors. [It] is something that you can easily imagine, because it's really the reproduction of the mirrors that we were seeing from the ground, so this is a selfie that Stefanie made in [*laughter*] the clean room. [*changes slide*] I have no time to tell you about the fascinating choreography, but [it] took a couple of months to put all the mirrors together. It was a little bit like herding cats at the beginning because initially the mirrors were pretty well aligned, but the launch is a chaotic environment. The vibrations are such that things start to move around, therefore we had to move each mirror as six actuators. There are degrees of freedom and we need to understand each one of them

for each mirrors. It's been quite time-consuming. The choreography has been rehearsed and tested for years, so when the time comes we know exactly what to do, step by step. It took only two months to do this. [*changes slide*]

And this is one of the first images, this is how a bright star appears immediately after launch. We knew at this point that the telescope was alive, the detectors were alive, but really you see 18 stars, each one a little bit bad and elongated, misaligned, out of focus, because we need to put together 18 telescopes to make sure they work like a single one. [*changes slide*] So this is how we started. Then moving the mirrors and taking images day after day and going back and forth, we started getting the 18 segments to understand where each mirror is actually pointing. Then finally putting all of them together so we get a single image from the 18 mirrors.

That is not actually the end point, because it's not only the mirrors; the telescope has to collect the light and put in a point, but we want really all the surfaces to be exactly on the ideal, perfect, mathematical curve that produces a single mirror, because then a more structural phenomenon, which is called *interference*, occurs, and you get the ideal theoretical image of a perfect 6.5 meter telescope. [*changes slide*] And this is what happened when we saw that. Suddenly the star became incredibly bright, incredibly sharp, and due to the sensitivity of a 6.5 telescope, what happens is that together with our bright star that we were looking at, suddenly we see all these galaxies popping up from the background because the telescope reaches immediately a sensitivity that was—even if you do the math and you do the calculations, I tell you there is no way to beat the surprise when you realize what you have in your hands, the level of sensitivity of this telescope.

The galaxy's seen were infrared galaxies that, with the Hubble, we would have had a terrible time reaching. But here they were just showing up everywhere. [*changes slide*] This is another of the first images just to give you an idea of the change. This is not a single star, this is still with the mirrors poorly aligned pointing at the Magellanic Cloud, a region full of stars, and here, everything gets messed up because all these stars are seeing 18 times out of focus. This was the real beginning. This was a great image for us because we understood that the mirrors, the instruments, everything was working, it just needed alignment. And this is what happens at the end. [*changes slide*]

[*audience gasps*] This is the same field after everything is in focus, after this month of work that lasted about, what was it, one year ago in these days we started producing these images. Now you can imagine day after day for us. At some point you are in the control room and you see clapping because every few hours there was one of these steps, and we were just going step after step in this choreography rehearsed for years. Things were going well and well and well and well and then better and better and better. It was really a fascinating time, the highest point of our career. [*changes slide*] And this is what happens when the instrument has aligned the telescope, everything is in order, then all the other instruments start to see. And this is a beautiful picture because it shows the incredible quality of all the other instruments. Now I remember that I showed you the four ones at the beginning. There is a fifth one that is like a servant to all of us to make sure they all behave in the right way. [*changes slide*] This is an image that shows you the change.

This on the left is the image that we had from Spitzer, from a camera at eight microns, and you see now the dramatic change in sensitivity. All these images taken with the Webb that I'm showing you, really are like snapshots.

I've given you an overview of how the telescope has been built and now maybe some recent results. Stefanie may show you something.

Milam: Thanks, Massimo. Last summer we finished commissioning the telescope and it was six months of endless nights making sure everything was beautifully aligned, as Massimo just showed us. And so last summer we had an event where we wanted to show the world how well the telescope actually performed. We released a series of images. The president actually released our very first image and it was called JWST's First Deep Field. So what you're seeing here is what that image actually looks like in Hubble's eyes. So with the Hubble Space Telescope we actually observed the same region as the James Webb Space Telescope did. This particular image with Hubble took, I think, two weeks worth of Hubble time. It took a considerable amount of time to do.

With less than eight hours JWST surpassed the sensitivity of the Hubble Space Telescope. You can see hundreds of thousands more galaxies and I want you to think about one thing. This image, the size of this image, if you had a grain of sand and you held your arm out at arm's length and you put it

against the sky, that's the size of the sky that we're actually imaging, and we see thousands of galaxies within a grain of sand. So just the mere vastness of what we are already seeing, the first image released with JWST already blew us away with the capability and eight hours. This is a blink of time. We have a 20-year mission and this is what we are able to do in eight hours. So this was absolutely mind-blowing. [*applause*]

Also what's fantastic about this image is we are getting to see real physics and real science in action. So the brightest galaxies, the five that are sort of right along the line under that bright, sharp, pointy star, are galaxies that are so massive that they're actually bending light around them. So some of these galaxies that you see that are almost streaked and smeared, they're actually galaxies that are much, much farther away, and the light is being pulled by the massive mass of those other five galaxies and being stretched around them. [*changes slide*] This is called gravitational lensing, this is something Einstein told us we would be able to observe. We have observed it with the Hubble Space Telescope, but in almost every field we look at now with the James Webb Space Telescope we're seeing lensing in some form of another.

It's absolutely fantastic. So this is just giving you sort of a pictorial representation of what I'm trying to explain about light coming and being bent around. [*changes slide*] I'm going to let Massimo talk about this next image because he has a little bit of passion for it. [*laughter*]

Robberto: One of the first steps we took immediately after commissioning, before diving into scientific observations, was to assure the community, our colleagues, and NASA that everything was functioning correctly. So, we selected a few confidential targets. Due to an embargo, we cannot disclose what they are. Only a small group of us met daily for approximately 45 days. By the end of the first six months, scientific observation data began to emerge, and we were observing several chosen fields. One of these was a star-forming region in Carina. Viewed from the ground, this nebula is a massive star-forming region roughly 6,000 light years away, placing it relatively nearby. It's situated centrally in our galaxy and is, naturally, immense. [*changes slide*]

If you consider our telescope's scope, it's akin to a microscope in terms of the area it can cover. Even with our largest camera, we can't achieve the expansive view that a small ground-based telescope provides. We directed

our telescope to a specific area in this vast star-forming region. [*changes slide*] With our instrument, we captured an image of the area highlighted in the red rectangle. This spot is where we aimed and subsequently took a sequence of images.[*changes slide*] The final image offers one of the most breathtaking views we've ever had of the star-forming region. Bright, newly-formed giant stars exist just outside this field of view. These stars emit ultraviolet light, which erodes the molecular cloud—the place where new stars form. It's a race against time, balancing the destructive power of the ultraviolet light and the emerging stars within the cloud. [*changes slide*] Capturing such images isn't straightforward. Our instruments primarily produce black-and-white images. To achieve maximum sensitivity, we avoid color imaging, focusing on capturing every photon. To discern color, we utilize colored filters, cycling through different hues and combining the results. [*changes slide*] Using this technique, we can instruct a technician or artist to use one image as, for instance, the blue layer in a composite image. [*changes slide*] By switching wavelengths and capturing separate images, we produce visuals in colors our eyes can perceive, even though they originate from distinct wavelengths. Only when combined do these images yield such stunning results. [*changes slide*] This method is standard for obtaining our images. Every filter choice is driven by a well-considered scientific question. As astronomers, our challenge is selecting from the 29-30 filters on instruments like NIRCam, determining which will best answer specific scientific queries. But once observations are complete, artists can transform the data into these magnificent images. [*changes slide*] I wish I had more time to delve into the intricacies of star formation. It's a rapid process. In comparison to the Sun's age of 4.7 billion years, this phase lasts a mere million years. During this time, stars absorb and eject matter, all beautifully displayed in our images.

These observations will provide study material for years to come. While this particular image was captured primarily to validate the instrument's functionality and is now publicly accessible, we've amassed many more. This was among our earliest captures and was truly awe-inspiring for us. [*changes slide*] When we look even closer, we can observe similar phenomena with increased clarity, as seen in this Class 0 protostar.

Milam: After commissioning, we released our first images, marking

the start of our science operations. We now operate the telescope much like Hubble, collecting new science 24 hours a day. I'd like to showcase some of our new images. All of them are available online, free for your personal use—whether for a computer screensaver or perhaps as a phone background featuring the Carina Nebula. [*laughter*] I'll briefly highlight a few images; for detailed scientific inquiries, please approach Massimo or me later.

As Massimo mentioned, we have an image of a protostar—a stage when a celestial body is on the brink of becoming a star. In vast clouds like the Carina Nebula, gas and dust aggregate, becoming increasingly dense. Unlike the clouds in our atmosphere, they don't precipitate; instead, they accumulate mass. When the gravitational force becomes intense, atomic fusion starts, marking the birth of a star. This process can be seen in the image, where the nascent star pulls in materials from the surrounding gas and dust. If you closely examine the image—maybe after downloading JWST images later—you'll notice a distinct black line, indicating the protostar and its accompanying disc. The thick dust and gas conceal it, but the radiating energy from the forming star illuminates the surrounding materials. What's captivating about this image is that it can't be observed through the Hubble Space Telescope or even with the naked eye. It's discernible only in the infrared, making it a favorite of mine. [*changes slide*]

Next, we have the iconic Eagle Nebula, also known as The Pillars of Creation. While I was familiar with the Hubble Space Telescope's image, JWST's rendition truly outdoes it. The intricacy within these vast gas and dust clouds surpasses our expectations. Especially notable are the red tips of the pillars in the JWST image, signifying the formation of protostars. This exemplifies the discoveries we can make. [*changes slide*]

JWST is also pioneering the study of exoplanets. When the mission began, the existence of planets around other stars was theoretical. We initially designed the telescope without capabilities to study these celestial bodies. However, today, exoplanetary research is one of the most exciting fields in astrophysics. Over 5,000 planets have been identified around stars in our galaxy, but none resemble our solar system. These findings underscore the challenges in studying exoplanets. [*changes slide*]

To understand exoplanets with the James Webb Space Telescope, we observe a star and await its "twinkle." A twinkle might indicate a planet obstructing some of the star's light. The magnitude of this twinkle can reveal details about the planet, such as its size or the presence of an atmosphere. [*changes slide*]

While this kind of study is challenging, especially for faraway planets, our advanced instruments can detect and analyze specific molecules in the atmosphere of these exoplanets. For instance, if we're seeking an Earth-like planet, we look for molecules like water, carbon dioxide, and methane. Depending on the twinkle we observe, we can ascertain the presence of these molecules. One of our findings even demonstrated the detection of carbon dioxide in an exoplanet's atmosphere. [*changes slide*]

Understanding planets around other stars requires a grasp of our own solar system. Yet, many mysteries remain about our neighboring planets. I'd like to highlight some intriguing solar system discoveries. For instance, our image of Jupiter showcases JWST's remarkable sensitivity. The ability to simultaneously observe Jupiter's brilliant surface and its faint rings, which are 10,000 times dimmer, underscores the telescope's capabilities. Observations of phenomena like the auroras and the Great Red Spot further emphasize JWST's contributions to our understanding of the cosmos.

We recently released this image of the Neptune system. The most impressive part about this image is it's photobombed by galaxies. Everywhere we look there's galaxies. I should have been a galactic astronomer not a planetary astronomer, but here we are. This is fantastic. Neptune has not been seen in this type of resolution or light in over 30 years, the Voyager flyby mission was the last time we saw the rings of Neptune. [*changes slide*] And I can tell you; it was amazing. This is like three minutes of JWST time, and we already saw better than we were able to see with a flyby mission 30 years ago. We see satellites, we see rings, we see clouds in the atmosphere, there's all kinds of science already being done from this one image. Three minutes of JWST time and we've already blown the record for solar system capabilities. This is great, sign the check, let me retire, let's go. [*laughter*] [*changes slide*]

Last week we released Pandora's Cluster. This is a fantastic cluster environment that's nearby. I'm just panning through the image so you can

just see the extent and beauty of this particular clustered image. You see some of the galaxies are even streaked still and arced, again, all the lensing that's happening, fantastic resolution, lots of tiny little red dots. Those little red dots are all galaxies too, and it either means that they're really far away or they're really dusty, and the only way to determine that is to actually take the spectrum of it. We have to break the light apart and see if it's dust or if it's actually distance. [*changes slide*] And so this is what astronomers are doing day in and day out because we want to see if we can detect the first galaxies of the universe with this telescope. By doing so we're studying not only the evolution of our cosmic history, we want to know how galaxies formed, how they evolve, why do we see beautiful structure in galaxies that are nearby and then it kind of turns into a fuzzy mess the further back in towards the Big Bang that we actually look?

JWST is enabling us to do new science that we haven't had access to or the capability of doing before. [*changes slide*] So this is some of our most distant candidates now that we have, so we're looking at redshifts of 10.5 to 12.5 redshift, which is only 350 million years after the Big Bang. And this is not even a full year of JWST science and we're already pushing and breaking the record for the most distant objects. [*changes slide*]

There's more to come. I'm extremely excited about the science that's being enabled, and I can't wait for the next generation of scientists to use this telescope and tell us all the discoveries that are yet to be made. Thanks for your time. [*applause*]

Monzani: So we have a few minutes left. We would like to hear more from them, if you will indulge us. I would like to ask Massimo a slightly personal question. I know you were assigned to this project in 1999, so that's been a while, it's most of anybody's career, 24 years. This was one of the most ambitious projects that humanity ever attempted. There were slowdowns, technical challenges, budget challenges, political challenges—what was that like and how did you persevere all the way to here? What helped you?

Robberto: I joined the project in 1999, almost too early because I was hired by the European Space Agency to come here, and then they realized that the European Space Agency had not yet signed a contract with NASA to collaborate on the project. So for seven years I had to work on the Hubble,

and I was the instrument scientist for the Hubble, the infrared instrument. So I've been around for a while and I've been through all this stuff. It has been a great adventure. To remain on the project and to be passionate about it requires the desire of doing something great with your life. Something you do because it has to be done. I was telling my wife yesterday, we were reflecting about this, when I moved I was in my early 40s, so I had already some expertise. You don't come here if you are just, you know, a fresh cookie. [*laughter*]

I had already done something pretty noticeable at the time. I moved here to work on Webb and the Hubble, but I was not in the senior position, right? There were people in their mid-50s, mid-60s that were the "fathers" of this idea, who had the authority to draft the drawing that you're seeing in the early slide. I was noticing that they were all retired. They were all fully retired and some of them, let me say, fighting with Alzheimer's, at the time of launch. You work on this project like you work on a cathedral. You work on this project, and it is really at some point is not for you, no. It's because it's a great thing to do, because we are here together and you start something that you may not finish, you may not see to the end. But you stay. You do it because it's something great that you want to do with your life.

Monzani: Thank you. [*applause*] Speaking of the cathedrals, Stefanie, you said something very moving last week about the beauty of looking at those images and what they mean to you. Maybe you can tell us a little bit what this has felt like since launch and commissioning, and what else we've been looking for the last years or so.

Milam: Oh goodness, okay. So, being on the project has been very emotional. It is absolutely a privilege to get to work in the position that I do, I get to see all of the images before everybody else does [*laughter*], which is really cool, but it's also really, really hard to be around any friends, especially with a glass of wine, because you want to tell them all the great things.

It's a lot of fun but I will say that the beauty of these images speaks for themselves. Every time I give a talk about JWST, everyone's like oh, it was such a good talk, and I was like, I didn't have to say anything. Look, just look. It speaks to you, it's beauty that can't be comprehended in any way, the vastness of the universe, the intricate details that we're now seeing. It's

emotional and it is something that we are now sharing with the world, and it is so fantastic to be part of this project. We've done some really cool stuff already, we've detected some of the most distant galaxies now in the universe, we're watching star formation happen in real time, we're seeing clouds on Neptune and other planets in our solar system. It's been amazing.

But one of the coolest things that we've done is we actually got to watch the DART Impact Mission. I think I have some graphics showing what this mission was about. NASA has this mission that they were able to do last year that had a satellite—a spacecraft that was actually crashing into an asteroid system. [*shows video*] And what they're doing is for planetary defense, they were trying to move the moonlet, the smaller of the two asteroids. By moving it, it's demonstrating that if there's an asteroid coming towards Earth, and it's going to implode and hit us and, you know, bring us a dinosaur kind of event—we can go and nudge the asteroid while it's far enough away so that it doesn't actually hit us. This was really cool, but not only was this amazing to do for a planetary defense sort of demonstration, but it was also very cool scientifically. This was the first time JWST got to support a planetary mission, which meant we had to track an asteroid that was going really, really fast.

This was where my job got to be the best, because I get to tell all the engineers that built this fantastic, extremely sensitive telescope that's pointing across the universe, I tell them I want to go really, really, really fast so that we can watch this asteroid blow up, and they're like, "You're crazy, Stefanie." [*laughter*] And I was like no, no, no, we could do this, we could do this. A lot of people actually helped work behind the scenes to prove that we could actually do this. [*shows clip*] So we actually did observe the DART Impact Mission and what you're seeing on the left here is, it's a really quick image that's looping, I apologize, but you'll notice that it starts very, very faint and that's right before the impact, and then it gets extremely bright and you see this huge burst of energy.

We're disentangling the information now. It's very, very hard to do, because the asteroid was extremely bright and there was so much dust released that we're trying to dig through all of that dust to find out where the actual ejecta of the material from the spacecraft came from. This was also the first time that JWST observed the exact same thing as the Hubble Space

Telescope. So we have simultaneous imaging that happened with the Hubble Space Telescope. This was one of my proudest moments I get to say that I was involved in. We're working on the science now, it's been amazing and more to come for sure.

Monzani:] Massimo I'll go back to you for a second. I said in the introduction you were the owner, although that's not the right word. You led the Orion Nebula project. And you know the Orion Nebula was one of the very first images that came out with the James Webb, it was part of the original five pictures. What is special about that region in the universe and why are we so fond of it besides, you know, it looks awesome? [*laughter*]

Robberto: The Orion Nebula, visible to the naked eye on clear nights outside of light-polluted areas like New York, is one of the most significant regions in the sky. It's the nearest region to us where giant stars are forming. These giant stars play a pivotal role in the universe's evolution. Though they're rare and have brief lifespans, they're highly energetic and dynamic—akin to the "James Dean" of stars. The Orion Nebula holds importance as the birthplace of these giant stars. As these massive stars form, they're accompanied by thousands of smaller stars, many similar to our sun. We hypothesize that our Earth originated approximately 4.7 billion years ago in an environment akin to the Orion Nebula. Hence, studying this nebula helps us understand the formation of sun-like stars, Earth-like planets, and the overall star formation process.

My research takes a slightly unconventional path. Instead of focusing on the massive stars, I've chosen to study the opposite end of the spectrum: the exceptionally small. Within the Orion Nebula, there are celestial objects that aren't quite stars—more like orbs of gas that will never illuminate as stars do. These are rare and remain unchanged over time, bearing a resemblance to planets. Their exact number remains elusive due to their faintness; even in close proximity, it's challenging to account for all of them. However, their visibility improves during their younger phases. My interest lies in understanding these enigmatic, ultra-small "stars" known as brown dwarfs. I specifically investigate the tiniest brown dwarfs within the Orion Nebula, aiming to decipher their formation and quantify their population. That's the crux of my work.

Monzani: We've touched on star formation, exoplanets, infrared light, and early galaxies. Stefanie, what exactly is the James Webb Space Telescope trying to uncover?

Milam: Essentially, everything. The observatory was designed to tackle four primary objectives. Firstly, we aim to identify the initial stars and galaxies that formed in the universe. With the telescope's capabilities, we're pushing boundaries—already surpassing our expectations. We hope to locate the very first galaxies that emerged. This will provide insight into the universe's formation, the fusion rates within the stars of those galaxies, their evolution, and their influence on surrounding environments. Secondly, as mentioned, we're keen to understand star and planet formation. Thirdly, we want to examine exoplanets, particularly any that resemble Earth. Lastly, a personal favorite of mine, we're studying our solar system.

However, what truly excites me is uncovering the unknown. Each image and spectrum offers a fresh revelation. The potential for discovery is immense. As a cometary scientist, I'm particularly eager to study comets using the James Webb. Currently, there's buzz around a green comet, which I'm slated to observe in about a week. So, keep an eye out for some captivating findings.

Monzani: That naturally raises questions about our origins and...you know, are we alone in the universe? [*laughter*]

Milam: These are age-old questions, central to humanity. Although the James Webb Space Telescope is an exceptional tool, it's not on the lookout for extraterrestrial beings. Our main goal might be to find an Earth-like planet, but more significantly, we're searching for planets with dynamic atmospheres, hinting at some form of active process, be it geological or meteorological. When you reflect upon Earth's history, from its volatile beginnings to pre-life conditions, or even Mars' past, it's evident that celestial bodies evolve rapidly on a cosmic timeline. We're eager to discern similar processes on other planets—be it volcanic activity, atmospheric phenomena, or potentially even...[*whispers*] alien life. [*laughter*]

Monzani: Massimo, what's your stance? Are we singular in the universe, and why should it matter?

Robberto: I humorously suggest we might be those "little green men." [*laughter*] But on a serious note, we represent a fleeting presence in

the vast timeline of the universe. We emerged 13.78 billion years into its history, and our existence is but a brief spark. Yet, here we are, a point in the universe where conscious beings construct telescopes—a juncture where basic elements like protons, electrons, and neutrons become sentient. We're the universe's self-aware entity, filled with curiosity, ceaseless questions, and a thirst for understanding. Our capacity for reason allows us to decipher the universe's intricacies. After 13.8 billion years, our existence, where the universe contemplates itself, fills me with awe. It's a testament to the profound significance of every individual, and we should remain conscious of this wonder.

Monzani: Beautifully put. Thank you both. [*applause*]


NG?
NEW YORK ENCOUNTER
Greg Wolfe

Why Do I Have This Yearning?

*A literary conversation between **Chris Beha**, writer and editor of* Harper's Magazine*, and **Ron Hansen**, novelist. Moderated by Greg Wolfe, writer and Slant Books Managing Director.*

Introduction

Throughout history, we have looked to literature to help us understand who we are, to delve deeply into the mysteries of the heart. The classic idea behind all great literary storytelling is the author's exploration of a protagonist's motivation—what does he or she yearn for? In this session two of America's leading novelists will discuss how their stories address the nature of desire. After all, if so many literary works depict the way desire gets us into trouble, perhaps desire itself is the problem. But there is another possibility: that when it comes to desire, fiction may be uniquely suited to tell us about what is irreducible—original, true, enduring—in the restless pilgrim we call the human heart.

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Greg Wolfe, moderator: Good morning. On behalf of the Encounter, I want to welcome everybody, those here at the Metropolitan Pavilion and those following us online. My name is Greg Wolfe, I'm the publisher and editor of Slant Books and I will be moderating this event. It's an honor and a privilege to be joined today by two of America's leading writers, and I'll give you their short bios.

Christopher Beha is the author of the memoir, *The Whole Five Feet* and the novels *Arts and Entertainments* and *What Happened to Sophie Wilder*. His

most recent novel, *The Index of Self-Destructive Acts*, was nominated for the 2020 National Book Award. He serves as editor of *Harper's Magazine*.

Ron Hansen is the author of 10 novels, including: *Mariette in Ecstasy*, *Atticus*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, *Exiles*, and *Hitler's Niece*. He's also the author of two collections of stories and two books of essays. He is Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ, Professor Emeritus in the Arts and Humanities at Santa Clara University in Northern California. He is an ordained Deacon and is married to the novelist Bo Caldwell.

I should say that we have a fairly amazing fact to share with you and that is that both speakers are identical twins. [*laughter*] I mean not to each other. [*laughter*] To their siblings. And respectively I want to say I'm really happy to be talking about fiction today, because in the history of this event, we've talked a lot about poetry and it's easy to wax poetic about poetry, but fiction is a sister art form and I would argue of equal dignity. It does get a little bit down and dirty at times, that's true, and of course this is where the obligatory Flannery O'Connor quote comes in, right? [*laughter*] She says, "Fiction is about everything human and we are made of dust, and if you scorn getting yourself dusty, then you shouldn't try to write fiction. It's not grand enough for you."

So let's talk about getting down and dusty today, what writing fiction means and what value it has for ourselves, for our own personal journeys, as well as the larger culture. As our title for this session indicates, our topic this morning is going to center around the question of yearning or desire. But before we get there I'd like to start with a couple of very basic, fundamental questions. I've been reading a wonderful group biography of four women philosophers [called] *Metaphysical Animals*. It's a wonderful book about four 20th century philosophers, and in that book there's an allusion to a BBC series that aired after World War II. Basically, the series asked questions about the point and value of philosophy.

I'd like to start here with a very similar approach. What is the point of fiction? Why make stuff up? [*laughter*] You know, we may be in the 21st century but there are still people today who say, you know, life is hard enough, shouldn't we stick to the facts, shouldn't we stick to what's going on in front

of us, why make these things up? So I'm going to just lob this in the direction of whoever wants to start. Why do this thing, why make up stories?

Ron Hansen: Well, research has shown that reading can increase empathy. By stepping into someone else's shoes within the pages of a book, you gain insight into how others think and feel. I believe part of my drive to write stems from wanting to better understand someone I've read about or tales I've come across.

Chris Beha: I'd like to begin with a reflection on the nature of "What's the point?" questions. [*laughter*] Many renowned thinkers have observed that only when a cultural practice or set of norms is questioned or confronted by another culture, do its practitioners begin to theorize and philosophize about it. It's often at these moments of doubt that we start crafting narratives about the origins of our values. In daily life, I don't often ask myself, "Why do I write?" A writer who constantly questions their motive might be in trouble. [*laughter*] It's akin to questioning daily why you're with your spouse. Continuously posing such questions, even with positive answers, might not be healthy. While I appreciate discussions like these, it's worth noting that most writers don't routinely question their purpose. At some point, you just know intuitively that writing is your mode of existence.

However, the genre that Ron and I focus on, which is realist literary fiction, is certainly under scrutiny today. There's autofiction, where novelists question the very act of creation. I believe we narrate stories to make sense of our values, especially when those values are under attack.

Wolfe: Shifting gears slightly, can you speak about your journey to becoming a fiction writer from a personal standpoint? Was it a natural evolution, or was there a moment of realization about this unique talent you possess?

Hansen: In grade school, we were given an essay assignment. I recall raising my hand and asking if I could write a short story instead. Interestingly, no one else had this urge. For me, some questions were best explored through fiction, which helped me understand both myself and others.

Beha: Adding to that, being an identical twin has shaped my perspective. While I don't always ponder it, having a twin means understanding from a young age that someone else's well-being might matter more than your own.

It's an enlightening experience. You also witness another person, strikingly similar to you, making different life choices. This naturally led me to consider alternative life paths and understand what truly defines me. One strength of novels is their ability to portray both the external world and a character's inner thoughts. As a twin, you're always compared to someone who shares many of your traits but remains distinct in their experiences and emotions. We'd often get asked if we could read each other's minds. [*laughter*]

Hansen: I've been asked that too. [*laughter*]

Beha: I got asked this question many times, usually by peers, so it's like you're in fifth grade and some other 12-year-old is asking that question. But to a surprisingly late age, you're still getting asked that question not as a joke, and it suggests to me something actually quite profound, which has to do with people's inability to separate out the external facts from the internal facts. To see that there's these two people who are not distinguishable by me on the basis of appearance, which means that they must be indistinguishable in reality. Those kinds of questions were always very urgent to me. The question that comes out of that is, well, presumably my brother was faced with similar things, and he became a securities litigator. But that fact itself, that I responded to our twinness in a different way than he responded to our twinness, is part of the larger set of facts that I was kind of dealing with.

Hansen: Another thing about being a twin, and I'm asked this question all the time, is did you have a private language that we shared with each other. And I think the fact that we did have a private language and it meant we invented these words and shared them with each other and understood them, that feeds into being a fiction writer, I believe. The love of language itself, but also the sense that there's a privacy to it and a way of sharing it.

Wolfe: Chris, I like the way you talk about fiction as both trying to present us with sort of an exterior and an interior. There have been a lot of quotes and statements over the decades about fiction helps—there's this fine line between trying to recreate the experience of everyday life, realism, and yet a certain amount of selection and organizing. In a sense, fiction, I would posit, tries to recreate experience, what it is to live, what it is to experience. But then there's this other dimension and it's also very delicate, like both an experience but also a judgment. As you read, the author is hopefully not

preaching to you but giving you at least a framework in which to evaluate or judge the kind of quality of what's going on. Is that a tricky process to pull that off?

Hansen: You answer. [*laughter*]

Beha: I have a lot of complicated feelings on this subject. One of my favorite writers is George Eliot, and Eliot is an extremely didactic writer. She really does not mind both giving you a set of facts and telling you why she's showing them to you in this way and what it's supposed to mean. I think it was Harold Bloom who said that Elliot is the only novelist whose authorial intrusions improve the work. Almost everyone else, including someone like Tolstoy, when they step in and start to interpret their own work and philosophize, you wish they'd just go back to telling you the story. But Elliot is such an astute human psychologist and such an astute moral thinker that you love being in her presence. If it can be done well, I think that sort of evaluation can be a wonderful thing. But one of my other real touchstones is Henry James. The famous line about James from Eliot, not from George Eliot, from T.S. Eliot, was that he had a mind so fine that no idea could penetrate it. He wanted to give you just the palpable reality and he did not think it was his job to give you the interpretation, but he was just going to show you it exactly as it is. And I think there's something very powerful about that too. I think our culture right now is very uncomfortable with art that does not tell you what you are supposed to think about it, that shows you humanity and does not also stand safely in judgment of that humanity. In my own work, I'm much drawn to situations or characters where there's some ambivalence, where I myself don't know entirely what I think about it, where I can set as a project for myself just rendering the thing itself as clearly as possible and I can leave to the reader making the judgments.

Wolfe: Yeah, I think we've lost the sense of ambiguity as a positive thing, as an openness to mystery and as an act that, on the part of the author, gives space to the reader to participate in the process, that great art in any form, whether literary or other, is really about the way that the viewer or the receiver completes the work. I mean, we live in the age of TV and YouTube, and we're used to things getting dumped on our lap, but ideally there should be a kind of interactivity in which we are participating and which not everything is

given to us. I think of *Mariette in Ecstasy*, a classic work of ambiguity because you have this nun who experiences the stigmata, so the fundamental question is, Is this real or is she taking a nail to her hands and feet and so on.

But even more so in the book, you play very well with this tradition, the sort of Song of Songs, the *eros*, the love of God that has a kind of erotic dimension, and so there's the deeply spiritual but also the fleshly. So, you want to talk a little bit about ambiguity and why that's important?

Hansen: I was thinking about my own fiction, which I always do of course, and I thought that if there's some consistency in all my subjects, it is about outlaws, or people *in extremis*. They're usually people with reckless ambition or pride or something that exaggerates qualities of myself, either good or bad, and sometimes it's the life unlived that I'm writing about. You do the same thing.

Beha: Yeah.

Hansen: There's always a quality of exploration and putting yourself in a weird or unusual situation and seeing how you would react to that. I remember reading about a study they did of cats, and the cats had been indoors all their lives and yet they discovered that when they dreamed, they were dreaming about chasing mice and getting their food. So it's almost like it was a computer program that was rehearsing things that might be necessary later, and in some ways that's what fiction is for me, is anticipating something that could happen and seeing the right or wrong way of acting.

Wolfe: You both, I think, have somewhat distinct approaches to your subject matter. Ron, you really do seem to go pretty far afield. You know, westerns, a kind of 1920s screwball comedy. Chris, you stay fairly close to a kind of a cultural milieu that is probably fairly similar to what you've experienced.

Beha: Yeah, I mean I don't know if that will remain true throughout the course of my career but it has been true so far. The first, well, the second—I wrote two sort of desk drawer novels that never got published. One I wrote as an undergraduate and then the first one I wrote throughout my 20s. There was a serious kind of adult effort at fiction, what I think now people would call a literary fantasy novel, but I wasn't reading fantasy. Well, I was reading John Crowley, but also I was reading Nabokov and people like that. What I

was really resistant to [was] the autobiographical fiction that a lot of my peers were writing. Everybody I knew who was in the literary world in their 20s was writing about people in the literary world in their 20s in New York trying to write their first novels—and I didn't want to do that.

So I wrote this novel where everything was made up. The days of the week were made up, the measurements were made up, when they spoke about how long something was in distance, they used made up units. And I spent six years on this novel and it was a mess and it went in a desk drawer. Then I wrote a novel about a young man working in the literary world in New York [*laughter*], and writing his second novel, not writing his first, because I'd already written my first and that became my first published novel. One of the things that I had to, I think, come to recognize was that the themes that I was interested in could be worked through in this form.

Wolfe: Let's move on to the core theme of our session today, this question of yearning or desire. The classic writing workshop question that's always asked is, What does this character want? Do you feel like that's a legitimate question? Do you think about it or is this subconscious? Clearly that is a driving factor because these characters are going through a journey of some kind. Want to jump in on that?

Hansen: I do agree that what a character wants is really crucial and what a character is afraid of is also crucial. Within that is their passions, and I'd never write about myself, but I write about glimpses of myself within the characters and it's a way of identifying what's really important to me at the time and trying to find some kind of resolution to those difficulties.

Beha: To return to the question of ambiguity or ambivalence, we don't always have very clear wants, or we have wants within ourselves that conflict with other wants within ourselves. I think asking what a character wants is a fruitful thing to do, but I think that it can be a mistake to answer it with just one thing. I think that's sort of the way in a lot of formulaic fiction, particularly television and movie fiction, there's this idea that the character has to want this one thing, it's got to be very clear, and we have to watch that character attempt to get that one thing, and in the end either get it or fail to get it.

Wolfe: The marriage plot.

Beha: Maybe it's just a different manifestation of our cultural discomfort with ambiguity, a sense that every problem or question that can be properly posed should have a single clear answer. This is a sort of Wittgensteinian idea that you ought to be able to clearly articulate what all of the questions are, and part of what makes something a real question is it has a real answer, and that even if we don't know it, that answer is knowable, and it is knowable in sort of a clear way. So there's that, there's everything that can be broken into questions or problems with clear potential solutions, and then there is where we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent, and that latter part is what fiction deals in. It poses questions that don't have clear answers, or it deals in ways of living that can't be rationally managed. One of the things I'm very interested in is when a character behaves in ways that seem inconsistent with what that character is supposed to want or when a character believes him- or herself to want one thing but keeps...I'm really interested in characters who get in their own way.

The last novel I wrote, as you know, is called *The Index of Self-Destructive Acts*, and I have said more than once that when I found out about this—which is a real baseball statistic made up by Bill James—and when I found the statistic called the index of self-destructive acts, I knew right away that I wanted to make that the title of a novel because it seemed to me that almost every great novel could be called the index of self-destructive acts. [*laughter*]

That this is one of the perennial topics of great fiction is the way that we sabotage ourselves, and part of that is by having crooked natures. That the crooked timber of humanity is, we don't want the things that we feel we're supposed to want, or we know what we want but then we have some sort of sub-yearning that causes us to behave in ways that's inconsistent with that, etc. So I think characters having wants is absolutely important, and I think that asking yourself as a writer the question "What does my character want?" is also important, but I don't think that question should or need have a clear or simple answer.

Hansen: It occurs to me that most fiction functions because one or two characters are guilty of the sin of pride and saying, That applies to everybody else but not to me and I'm going to test it out. And so you find their downfall

comes from an excess of that virtue or vice and that's how they get themselves in so much trouble and often bring down a lot of other people with them.

Wolfe: Yeah. Without the struggle to understand what desire means, even if it's counterintuitive, even if it's a discovery of something that they didn't know that they were wanting, without that there's no story, right? That's the drama of any story, this sort of negotiation of how my desires bump up against the world, and of course the question really is how do they arrive at a truer judgment about themselves? I think *The Index of Self-Destructive Acts* has a whole series of pretty decent characters, they're not villains or criminals, they're mostly upstanding citizens. And yet, each in their own way makes a choice to get something that they think is legitimate, that they want to help either themselves or somebody dear to them and it often involves a kind of shortcut or a slightly gray area that they step in. And often the result of that is almost tragic, in the sense that it sort of snowballs into something greater than you might say the original sin was and that's fascinating to me.

Beha: I think one of the things we all want is—and this gets to Ron's point about pride—we all want to be able to tell stories about our lives in which we're the good guys. And I think what happens when you make a shortcut like that and you are not willing to pay the consequences for that and, in particular, pay the emotional consequences. You're not willing to say I did the wrong thing and maybe I did the wrong thing because I'm not the person I should be. And so what you do is you tell a whole story that is the story you need to tell in order to justify the decision you made, and now you're in a particular narrative where you get to make a whole host of further decisions coming out of that.

The Index of Self-Destructive Acts is a pretty long novel, and one of the reasons for that is it has a number of different characters and they're all given basically equal time of being the point of view character. And that was a very conscious decision, because we all experience ourselves as the main character, right? Nobody experiences themselves as the side character in someone else's novel. So I wanted that for all of these characters. But, experiencing yourself as the main character to some extent means experiencing everyone else as the side characters, and there's something coercive about that.

We all know people—I think if you don't know someone like this you

may be that person—[*laughter*] who are incredibly compelling because they wrap you up in their story and you want to be, for a little while, the side character in their story. They have that kind of charisma and kind of energy but at a certain point you realize that they only want you to be around to the extent that you will play that part of the story, and when you try and individuate yourself, when you try and make your own choices for your own reasons, then all of a sudden they're like, this is not for me.

There's something very dangerous about our tendency to want to be the main character. What I wanted in the book is to have each character get seen at certain stretches as the secondary character in someone else's plot, then get seen as the main character, and each time that happens you see how it radically reorients the story and the story becomes about something else. And the same facts have an entirely different meaning. It takes a lot of space to do that but that's what I tried to do.

Wolfe: I certainly agree, Chris, with the earlier statement you made that it would be a mistake to write a book, a work of fiction, in which the character seems destined to attain a single end. And yet, I guess what I'm curious about is, there is a kind of universal experience I think in fiction, the best fiction, in which as the character struggles with desire there is at least I think some commonality to the human story of coming to a place where you understand that you need more than you thought you needed. That in a sense, that there's literally this sort of realm of mystery, this kind of hunger for the infinite, that what I thought I wanted isn't enough. Do you feel that?

Hansen: Yeah, I think that, at least with a lot of the characters I've written about, I pushed them to the very edge and then they go a little bit farther. A lot of people do this in their own lives, a lot of good qualities go into something they're doing, and they'll just push it a little farther. It's the Peter Principle basically in fiction.

Wolfe: I think—particularly of your fiction, Ron—that one of the ways that fiction can be realistic without being *literally* realistic is it pushes something to an extreme that makes us uncomfortable or seems out there, some wild west scene or some wild surge of guilty passion, to quote one of your novels—and yet by the very fact that it distances us from our immediate quotidian life, it actually—I think, for example, of *The Sopranos*. The great

thing about *The Sopranos* is that it's not about the mafia, it's about being kind of a middle class, white, suburban American in the end. Because those are the issues that leak out around the various hits and things that are going on.

Hansen: I think one of the wonderful parts of *Goodfellas* is how Scorsese makes you want to be a mafia member for about the first hour, and then you see the tragedy that results from that, so that's another way that fiction works.

Beha: *The Sopranos*—part of what it's about is what it means to inherit a tradition that is suffering its last gasps. So you have these '90s-era suburban New Jersey gangsters who have the *Godfather* poster on the wall, and they are romanticizing the life of this because they don't come in the heyday of this, they come in its faded glory, and so they have to spend a lot of time theorizing about this "thing of ours" as opposed to just living it.

And there's various scenes where they meet with the Italians. The Italians come over and none of the second or third generation New Jersey Italians speak any Italian, and then they feel a little bit inauthentic about that.

Wolfe: Wouldn't you say that one of the hopes that you might have for a reader of one of your stories is a sense that even if the story ends badly, that the heart, the human heart, there's a kind of infallibility to it because in the end even if it makes the wrong choices it kind of recognizes that, and recognizing this need for something else, this sort of edge of mystery that they hunger for. I think that can be true in both; I mean, it's clearly true in tragedy, where you feel the sense of loss of what could have been, but it's even there I think in the best comedy, because you know a comic story, while it ends happily, still reminds you of how the crisis that occurred in the middle of the comedy could have gotten tragic. I think Shakespeare does this so beautifully, that even though there's the wedding and the dance at the end, there's always one character at the edge of that stage. Do you feel like this question of the heart's infallibility, that really is our tether in reading fiction, is connecting to that in some way?

Hansen: Edgar Allan Poe said that if you could write a book that had the heart fully exposed, it would be a bestseller because everybody wants to understand other people's hearts and their own feelings.

Wolfe: So what about autofiction, what about this sort of contemporary trend that says everything is constructed, our social world is constructed,

we're all so conscious of construction that the best we can do, essentially, is blur the line between my life and my artistry as a fiction writer. You may not practice it but it's out there. I mean, we can condemn it but it certainly raises questions about where we're at and what the possibilities of fiction are, and where maybe we look for hope and avenues of openness beyond that. But I'm just curious about your thoughts on that.

Beha: You know when you were first introducing these questions, you said there's a contemporary strain that says the world is hard enough, why do we have to make this stuff up? But I don't think that's what the critique is; I think it runs in exactly the opposite direction. It's not why would we make up these tragedies and put ourselves through this thing when there's enough real suffering, but it's instead, how can we afford this escapism when we've got so many challenges that we face? I think that's part of what the impulse comes from, is this sense of responsibility towards the reality that we're in and a sense that there's something frivolous about making stories up. There has always been a sense that there's something frivolous about making stories up and there may well be. I think for me it's an unnecessary frivolity. In my writing lifetime there are two occasions when novelists *en masse* started asking this *Why are we writing?* question, and one was after September 11th and the other was in 2016 after the election. And in both cases people said we've got an emergency going on right now, the emergency stems in part from our failure to have understood certain things about the situation we're in. Post-9/11 there was this sense of, oh, a billion people in this world hate us and our way of life, and we didn't even know they were there and now we've got to learn about them.

And for people in my milieu, which is, you know, a fairly progressive sector of New York, there was also after 2016 a sense of, there's this whole segment of the country that we kind of didn't realize was there and disagreed with us about these things, and so there was a sense of almost anthropological need to go out and find out about these people. And in both cases people started to think, We can't afford to make stuff up right now. How some people try and answer that is that the understanding you're looking for of the other, that's going to come precisely through fiction. Our best way to find out about all these people in the world other than ourselves is to try and engage in

the sympathy of fiction. There is some truth to that, but I think about a talk that C.S Lewis gave about life and wartime towards the end of World War II that was about whether they should close the humanities departments at Cambridge and Oxford during the war, because they were sending all of the able-bodied men of university age to go fight. He did not make the case for, "We need the humanities in order to understand the Nazi threat." He simply said if we cannot afford to have these things during this emergency, then we can never afford to have them because we are always in an emergency. Life is an emergency. I feel that very strongly, I feel like we have these moments and one of them was in 2001; for many people one of them was in 2016; for a great many of us the last couple of years under Covid have been another. We understand ourselves as being in an emergency, so then we say we've got to throw all the rules out the window or we've got to give up on certain things that in normal times are the things that make life worth living. I just think we're always in an emergency, life is the emergency, and we need precisely in the moments where the emergency feels most acute and is most obvious to us to hold on to the things that make life worth living, and for me our creativity and in particular the novel are really among those central things. [*applause*]

Hansen: Why do I have the yearning to read fiction when most people don't? Philip Roth claimed only 200,000 people in the United States are interested in literary fiction. There are 360 million of us and the people who are interested in reading books is a very small percentage. Most of the people outside on these streets are not looking for the next bookstore, so it's not only the yearning to write fiction but the yearning to read fiction that is kind of at the heart of the question here, and I don't know where it comes from. I don't know why at one point in my life I decided I wanted to be a writer and that was my secret ambition. I didn't even want to talk to anybody about it but it was something that was grounding for everything I did. Most people don't have that feeling and I don't understand it. Where does it come from? There's nothing in my background, my nature, really, that would explain why I wanted to become a fiction writer. It just seemed to come from out of the blue and I'm sure it was that way for you.

Beha: I don't know that the country would be in better shape if that 200,000 were two million or 200 million—perhaps, perhaps not. I have to

say it's not that important to me. I would love to have a huge audience, but it's not because I believe that what I have to tell people is going to fix the world. I know that I love fiction, I know that I love doing it, and I know that I love reading great books. And the fact that I love reading great books is enough for me to want to bring more of them into the world. I know that there are at least some other people out there who share that love and that does feel like enough for me. Roth was huge—*Portnoy's Complaint* sold millions and millions of copies, so he went through periods of his life being on the bestseller list. Then towards the end of his life he was very pessimistic about the size of literary fiction because he wasn't selling a million copies anymore. And people of his generation who grew up in the shadow of Dos Passos and Hemingway and people like that were nostalgic for a time when writers could be the cultural figures that Hemingway was. And then the next generation were nostalgic for the time when writers could be the cultural figures that Mailer and Roth were.

I grew up with reading being a private thing. I did not feel like it connected me to larger strains in the culture. I was well aware that very few of my peers spent a lot of time reading literary fiction. There weren't models who were huge cultural figures, and so that was never what it was about for me. I'd like to be able to make a living doing it so I can keep doing it, but it's not particularly important to me to have fiction restored to some central place in the culture. I'd say this: I don't know how many people in front of us right now are serious readers of literary fiction, but if most of you are, a room this big, full of this many people? That feels like a lot to me. That's a good feeling to have all of us together sharing this thing. What's going on outside of this room, what's going on outside in the larger culture, is not a problem for me if we have this.

Wolfe: For all the talk about e-books and smartphones and the nature of the way we absorb media, it does seem that classic book-reading persists. The notion of the end of the book was a little premature. Do you find that you still get stories of people wanting to sit down and open the first page of a book?

Hansen: One of the things that I noticed is that there are still people who

don't want to know the ending of a book. And it never bothered me to know the ending the book before I began it but—

Wolfe: You didn't skip to the end, though?

Hansen: I didn't skip to the end. But some people are still riveted and captivated by books, and I think I'm just too distant from that because I'm looking at the mechanism, how things were done and what can I steal here. [*laughter*] But most people are not that way, they want to sink into the dream and not be abruptly waking from it.

Wolfe: Alright, so second obligatory Flannery O'Connor quote. She says, "Writing a novel is a terrible experience during which the hair often falls out and the teeth decay." [*laughter*] Is this one of these things where you hate it while you're doing it and then you're glad you did it? Or is the process of writing a joyful one for you?

Hansen: I'm a joyful writer.

Beha: You'll notice Ron has a lovely head of hair, which I do not. [*laughter*]

Hansen:] I looked for the occasion that there's always a sentence in a day of writing that I think is the perfect sentence. It may not be, but I think it is, and so I run around like Snoopy saying how do I do it, how do I do it, and I don't have misery about writing at all. One thing I have identified is that if I'm sad or miserable about writing it's because I didn't need to write that scene. I need to look for something I'm really challenged by and enjoy.

Beha: I often get a great deal of pleasure out of writing. This is again the ambivalence. Sometimes it's hard and I am the kind of writer where if I only did it when it was fun, I would not do it enough, and as with a lot of things in life, like, you know, exercise and things like that, you've got to get through the resistance and the hard part to get to the part where it's fun. On the other hand, if it were just the hard part I wouldn't do it. O'Connor—I will never write work of the kind of power that she wrote, but I will say I am always a little suspicious of people who really go on and on about how hard writing is.

One of the things that is so moving about O'Connor as an example is that in the last years of her life she knew she was dying at a very young age, and she spent those years writing and produced in that time much of her most extraordinary work. She was doing it under very trying circumstances

and perhaps the writing was what made things trying. But perhaps the writing was what made such trying circumstances livable for her. Otherwise I think if she truly felt the way that she expressed in that quote she wouldn't have done it. This was a woman who was quite literally on her deathbed. I am now in kind of early middle age, mid-career. At a point when I was younger, I saw peers who were kind of giving it up before they'd quite made it as writers. What I've now seen—which I'm sure Ron has seen plenty of—is peers of mine who did make it by the standards of what making it as a literary novelist looks like, who are giving it up. The thing is, if you are a wildly successful fiction writer, what happens is somebody approaches you and offers you a lot of money to write a TV show.

There's nothing about the culture that is going to push you to keep writing novels even if you're successful at it. They want to take your abilities and monetize it in a different way. So the drive to write has to come from inside, and for me it has to come from, on some level, enjoying the doing of it.

Wolfe: Well, to wrap up, I guess my question for you, since you guys—God willing—are not giving up, is: Where do you go personally to find inspiration, to find stimulus to write, to find hope in the value of what you do?

Hansen: A lot of it's research, just reading biographies and at one point a person's life may grab you. You say, I never knew that about him or her and I want to explore that.

Beha: You mentioned that my fiction is roughly set in the milieu in which I live, and I think that's in part because I'm drawing inspiration from just looking around me. It is part of how I engage with the world, how I go about being a person in the world. Life presents questions to us, including questions as I was saying before that don't have clear answers. When I feel urgently a kind of question and I don't feel an obvious answer to it, I start trying to write about it.

Wolfe: Wonderful. Well, Ron, Chris, thank you so much for a really wonderful, stimulating session.

Everything Costs More! And Now?

*A conversation on inflation in the current global context between **Jon Hilsenrath**, senior writer for* The Wall Street Journal*, and **Stephen Smith**, senior managing director of Brandywine Global. Moderated by **Anujeet Sareen**, portfolio manager, Brandywine Global.*

Introduction

The U.S. economy is experiencing the highest inflation in nearly half a century. What is inflation? What causes it and keeps it going? How did the pandemic, supply chain troubles, and the war on Ukraine contribute? How can it be addressed at the institutional level? What can we do to reduce its impact on our own finances? What does the short-term future look like? These are some of the questions the speakers will address.

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Anujeet Sareen, moderator: Welcome, everyone, to the New York Encounter at the Metropolitan Pavilion and to those joining us online. We've gathered to discuss a topic that impacts nearly everyone here: inflation. It affects our everyday purchases throughout the year. The past few years have seen significant inflation. The government measures overall prices through the Consumer Price Index, representing goods and services a typical American buys annually. This past year, this index rose almost 10%. This is notable for two main reasons. Firstly, unless you received a 10% pay raise, your purchasing power declined last year. While national wages increased roughly 6%, it still lagged behind the rising cost of living. Collectively, our nation

felt the strain of this inflation. Secondly, we haven't witnessed 10% inflation in 40 years. Before Covid, annual inflation rates hovered around 2-3%. The last time we faced such inflation, during the '70s and early '80s, was economically challenging for our nation. Despite numerous analyses of that era, it's surprising to find ourselves here again. Today, we aim to understand the reasons behind this inflation, its origins, and its potential future.

To guide us through this conversation, we have two distinguished speakers. To my far right is Jon Hilsenrath, a senior writer at *The Wall Street Journal*, and he has been delving into economics and finance since 1997. He's written from Hong Kong, New York, and Washington, DC, often focusing on financial crises. He was a Pulitzer Prize finalist twice for his coverage of financial events and contributed to the Pulitzer-winning coverage of 9/11. Jon authored a book on Janet Yellen titled *Yellen: The Trailblazing Economist who Navigated an Era of Upheaval*. This book, available at the back, offers insight into our current Treasury Secretary and former Federal Reserve chairman.

Beside me is Steve Smith, a senior advisor for Brandywine Global's fixed income team. Since joining in 1991, Steve diversified the firm's investment strategies and introduced the global fixed income product. An alumnus of Xavier University, Steve chairs multiple committees and serves on the Board of Trustees. Personally, I owe Steve a nod of gratitude for hiring me at Brandywine Global six years ago. [*laughter*] Beyond personal connections, Steve's investment prowess speaks volumes. As a bond investor, one of his strategies, focusing on high-quality U.S. government and corporate bonds, yielded a near-eight-percent return over two decades. This impressive performance, surpassing many bond and stock funds, reflects his deep understanding of macroeconomics and inflation. It's an honor to have both of you here. [*applause*] So, Steve, the floor is yours. Why are we facing such high inflation?

Stephen Smith: This is an intriguing question. I hate to drag you through the past, but to understand this, I need to take you back in time. The longest vacation I ever had was in Peru. I returned on March 2nd, 2020. When I got to the office, my colleagues told me, “Steve, it's just the flu.” Yet, by the end of the week, anyone over 65 was banned from using the train. This made me wonder if it wasn't just the flu. Given that I typically read six to seven

hours a day, I was practically reading nonstop. Just like in the movie with Eddie Murphy, the market was shouting, "Sell! Sell! Sell!" Everything was plummeting. A fund I managed at Brandywine was down 17%, my worst performance in roughly 50 years in Wall Street. I felt pretty down on my luck. But all that reading led me to some insights about Covid. On March 23rd, I sat in my sun porch reflecting. The following day, I began a buying spree that lasted two months. The situation was intense, with extreme market volatility and widespread fear. Covid was a known unknown, but how do you navigate something so deadly? It was challenging.

However, I realized the Fed would introduce MMT, Modern Monetary Theory. This approach, where the government issues bonds and the Fed buys them, was reminiscent of policies in Venezuela and Turkey, which led to massive inflation. Considering the government-induced economic shutdown and the millions left unemployed, a fiscal response was necessary. The Fed's actions made me believe that getting the market direction right was essential. A few months later, amidst the second Covid wave, I proposed a concept called the Roaring Twenties. I anticipated an economic boom because the stimulus measures were unlike anything I'd seen before.

Jon Hilsenrath: Just a side note, we don't profit much in my line of work. [*laughter*]

Smith: I've always been more of a storyteller, trying to predict market trends. It's like when a meteorologist suddenly starts building an ark; that's a real forecast. [*laughter*] Back in 2020, amidst the pandemic and significant monetary responses, shorting the market seemed the obvious move. With the amount of stimulus introduced, it was evident the economy would feel the effects. To me, the fiscal and monetary reactions overshadowed the impacts of Covid.

When the lockdowns began, and benefits ran out right before the election, it was clear that politics played a major role. The introduction of a $900 billion package, followed by Biden's $1.9 trillion, signaled unprecedented economic measures. Inflation started to creep in by 2021. When the government pumped trillions into a massive economy, a demand shortage naturally ensued. People had more money to spend, driving prices up. This was beneficial for consumers, who, after the 2008 crisis, had saved up to 18%

of their income. Both the corporate sector and the public had significant cash reserves. However, inflation kept rising throughout 2021 and 2022.

The complexities arise when understanding the lag in the Fed's actions and their economic impact. They held interest rates at zero until inflation became a problem. Janet Yellen's advice to the Biden Administration, considering the inflation rates, makes me recall what Peggy Noonan once said about such decisions being made by "high IQ stupid people." [*laughter*] The inflation spike that took two decades in the past happened in just 15 months recently, largely due to a demand shock.

The complexity here arises from an incident I recall. I once told our chief of police, who sells Christmas trees, that it was going to be a difficult year for his business. Despite increasing his prices by 15%, he ended the year with 337 trees unsold out of the 4,300 he ordered. When I saw him in January, he acknowledged that I was right. His earnings increased due to the price hike, but he had an overstock.

This is indicative of the current economic climate. For instance, Coca-Cola had impressive quarterly results, but their sales volume dropped by three percent. It's all about the pricing. Many may not realize the distinction between real and nominal values. Without naming the prior president, it's noteworthy that during his tenure, incomes for those earning between $60,000 and $275,000 rose by $6,400. However, despite such increments, rising costs mean that the average person's purchasing power has diminished. Simple factors, like gasoline prices rising from $3 to $5, significantly impact budgets.

This year, the Federal Reserve began hiking interest rates, sometimes by as much as 75 basis points, taking them to 5%. This abrupt action reminds me of a movie analogy, like the reversal of roles in *Trading Places*. After enjoying four decades of inflation at 1.75%, the sudden spike has caused panic. A significant cause of concern is the government's unprecedented spending.

Inflation can be likened to the narrative of a country song played in reverse. After a 15-month surge due to what I believe was a grave policy miscalculation, we're now witnessing measures like the Inflation Reduction Act. It's amusing, as these efforts, such as tax hikes and a near-trillion-dollar program, could potentially lead to further inflation. The current trajectory

of government spending is truly astonishing, and it's adversely affecting everyone's income.

So, where do we stand? With intense spending reminiscent of a python digesting its meal, I anticipate a decrease in inflation, driven by a reduction in prices. While reports may seem positive at first glance, the reality is less rosy. Prices for essentials like eggs, oil, and natural gas have been declining. The Federal Reserve's halt in money printing, the most significant contraction since 1938, will likely lead to reduced inflation. However, the situation is intricate, given the opposing forces of labor shortages and massive government expenditure.

I personally think that Yellen should have been fired. You just can't spend three trillion dollars and think that there's not going to be an effect. And from a simplistic way, that's what they did and that's what we got and I think it's a travesty that they did it.

Sareen: All right. Jon, what would you add to that?

Hilsenrath: Picking up on your question, "How did we get here?" I believe Steve touched on an essential point: the government poured significant stimulus into the economy during and after Covid. I liken the current economic situation to a tank filled with water. If the water rises, the economy is expanding: more jobs, increased profits, and growing incomes. When the water falls, we're in a recession with declining incomes and jobs. Now, picture dropping a rock into this tank. Water splashes everywhere, making it challenging to gauge the water level and determine if we're expanding or contracting. Over the past three years, the U.S. has experienced four significant disruptions akin to dropping rocks into this tank.

First, there was Covid. The economy came to a near standstill: no dining out, hotel stays, or flights. Next was the government's reaction, including the stimulus. The Federal Reserve, our Central Bank, played a crucial role. Looking at any bill reveals "Federal Reserve Note" printed on it. The Fed regulates our money supply, impacting interest rates that affect mortgages, car loans, business loans, and even stock market valuations. To address the Covid crisis, they slashed interest rates to zero, aiding households and businesses.

Subsequently, there were stimulus checks. First by the Trump Administration, then compounded by the Biden Administration, including

rental relief. This influx of funds began as support during Covid but later seemed politically motivated.

I'd like to touch upon some historical context. Specifically, the 1970s, 1950s, and 2008. To comprehend the rationale behind the recent stimulus, one must look back at the 2008 financial crisis. In my book, I discuss Janet Yellen's role during this time. After the near-collapse of the banking system in 2008, unemployment soared, reaching 10% at its peak. This was followed by a prolonged period of sluggish economic growth and very low inflation. The Fed aims for a consistent two percent inflation rate, and while one might question the desirability of any inflation, this target allows them wiggle room during recessions. However, post-2008, the rate consistently fell below this target. When Covid hit, policymakers in Washington feared a repeat of 2008. To prevent high unemployment, they infused the economy with funds. But they overlooked an essential difference: the 2008 crisis reduced household spending—a demand shock—while Covid caused a supply shock. This miscalculation resulted in inflation.

Now, what lies ahead? I don't foresee a return to the 1970s. Back then, monetary policy was rudderless. However, today's Federal Reserve is committed to its two percent target and is prepared to risk a recession to achieve it. A more apt comparison might be the 1950s. Most associate inflation with the '70s, but the '50s saw similar patterns post-World War II. Excessive wartime spending led to inflation spikes, which were curbed by pulling back on funds, occasionally leading to recessions.

Similarly, our recent stimulus wasn't due to military expenditure but relief efforts. The '50s were tumultuous for the U.S. economy. While we can draw from history and economic models, it's vital to remain attuned to evolving realities. I concur that inflation will likely decrease. The pressing question is whether this will lead to a recession. Predictions vary, but recent data show a robust economy, making the future intriguing.

Sareen: Let's delve deeper with both of you. It seems we went a bit overboard with our policy a few years ago, sending checks to everyone with the Fed's full backing. We aren't taking the same approach now, especially not the Fed. In fact, the Fed seems to be doing the opposite. Have they done

enough? Do you believe current policymakers have done what's needed to bring inflation down from 10% back to 2%?

Hilsenrath: The reality is, we don't know. Neither do they. They'll have to adapt as situations change. The relationship between the Fed and the markets is intriguing. The markets always look to the Fed for cues on interest rate changes, but even the Fed doesn't have all the answers. They're just like us, analyzing the CPI report every second Tuesday of the month, trying to gauge if the inflation trend is slowing. Recent data show improvement. The peak of the inflation increase happened in June. While some prices like gasoline have stabilized, we still face food inflation and rental costs. But the economy is multifaceted with various factors influencing it. The key question for the Federal Reserve is whether the observed slowdown will persist. If inflation continues to decelerate, they might have done enough, and they'll halt interest rate hikes. If not, and this is where we differ from the 1970s, they'll continue increasing interest rates, affecting mortgages, stock valuations, and more.

Sareen: Steve, while I value the Fed's data-driven approach, the impact of their actions usually manifests a year or two later. Considering how reactive they've been recently, aren't you concerned about a potential recession? It feels like they've swung from one extreme to another.

Smith: I initially believed that people's incomes would rise as inflation decreased. Let's clarify: The Fed increased the money supply by 44% in two years, leading to the current inflation. They had a significant realization in March of the previous year. Instead of a modest interest rate hike, they've aggressively raised rates by five percent within a year. This is quite a drastic move. My firm belief is that inflation will decline because money supply growth is contracting, a phenomenon not observed since 1938. This affects prices of everyday goods, which have either stabilized or decreased. The real inflation pinch is in the service sector. Considering factors like retail sales, which remain consistent, and surpluses in stores like Walmart and Target, I predict inflation will decrease. Indicators such as layoffs in the IT sector suggest an impending economic slowdown. High mortgage rates make housing unaffordable for many. Government stimulus and spending also play roles in this complex equation. Notably, the vast funding to state and local governments and the unemployment benefits during the reopening phase

have both influenced our economic landscape. Many of these moves seem like unforced errors to me. The economy is likely more robust due to the excess stimulus, and this is my stance.

Hilsenrath: I want to highlight two points. Firstly, many state governments are reducing income taxes, with 43 states making cuts over the past three years, benefiting households. Secondly, any discussion on inflation must consider the global context. The major shifts in global economic dynamics, deeply rooted in history, are contributing to the current inflation narrative. Over the past 30 years, globalization has been a dominant theme. A key part of this was the American corporate push into China. While many claimed they targeted China for its vast consumer base, the real allure was its vast workforce.

But those efficiencies are now being reconfigured because our relationship with China has changed. We don't trust them, and they don't trust us, leading many American companies to explore other markets. This shift poses a challenge for the Fed in its effort to combat inflation, since we can no longer rely on a highly efficient global system to maintain low costs for imported goods. Additionally, the retiring baby boomer population is exerting significant downward pressure on the labor force. A thriving production system requires workers to be both available and productive. However, our labor force isn't expanding rapidly as a significant portion of the population, adding complexity to our projections about future outcomes.

Sareen: Expanding on that, both of you seem to anticipate a decline in inflation, suggesting it's already beginning to decrease. This reduction can be attributed partly to the Fed's credibility and its commitment to managing inflation. However, the trend of deglobalization makes their task more daunting. I'd also like to revisit the political dimension. Both the Trump and, arguably, the Biden administrations have witnessed a surge in populism across the political spectrum. A prevalent response to any economic shock is to inject substantial funds or stimulus. Is this a persistent issue? Steve, as you alluded earlier, this approach exerts inflationary pressure. Ironically, these attempts to aid people by introducing vast stimulus measures have, in reality, diminished their living standards as inflation has outpaced wage growth. A

pressing concern is whether this brand of populism, with its inflationary tendencies, is here to stay.

Smith: One aspect I've considered is China's conservative fiscal approach during this period. They haven't spent as extravagantly as we have, resulting in a modest inflation rate of 1.8%. The competitive pricing of Chinese goods could help regulate global prices. Though there's a discernible shift from China to countries like India and Mexico in terms of production, data indicates that the transition isn't as profound as perceived. However, this trend is gaining momentum, presenting investment opportunities in regions outside China. What astonishes me is the massive loss of jobs and factories in the U.S. after China joined the WTO, and how affected individuals largely went unsupported. China advocates for free trade, yet their practice lacks fairness. They've avoided confronting this, adopting a more authoritarian stance. While this is an expansive topic, I currently view China as the world's primary manufacturer with minimal inflation, which bolsters my optimism about decreasing inflation rates.

Hilsenrath: The issue of populism is intertwined with American sentiments stemming from past trade deals with countries like China. Many Americans feel left behind in an era dominated by global trade and capital flows. I once reported on the economic roots of political discontent from Hickory, North Carolina, a town severely impacted by Chinese furniture imports. Donald Trump's messages resonated deeply with such communities. Numerous factors, not just trade and globalization, contribute to the widespread feeling of exclusion. The concentration of power in large corporations, especially tech giants, plays a part. Many Americans feel that the current system isn't benefitting them, and they desire change. Media outlets further amplify these divisions for commercial gain. This divisive environment is not only detrimental to our nation but also undermines the institutions meant to hold us together. [*applause*]

Smith: I think we could do a seminar on that. I don't know what people might think, but I had dinner with Steve Bannon. It was absolutely fascinating. It was about all these people that were laid off and we didn't do anything for them. All these factories closed and nobody ever did anything.

Hilsenrath: A striking observation from my visit to Hickory was its

proximity to Charlotte, one of the South's largest financial hubs. While banks in Charlotte were bailed out in 2008, communities like Hickory bore the brunt of factory shutdowns. From an economic and financial perspective, bailing out banks is crucial for maintaining economic stability. However, to communities witnessing nearby banks receiving aid while their factories shutter, it's perceived as an inequitable trade-off. This disparity is a testament to the broader challenges our nation needs to address.

Sareen: Thank you, gentlemen. I think we could carry on this conversation quite a bit longer but I'm going to get in trouble if I don't wrap this up soon.


AN UNCONDITIONAL EMBRACE
Ashley & Nate Kaufman
Maria Chiara & Rick Kushner
Tom Tobin
Hashmat Wali

An Unconditional Embrace

Witnesses in light of The Miracle of Hospitality*, the newly published book by Fr. Luigi Giussani, with* ***Ashley*** *and* ***Nate Kaufman****, foster parents;* ***Maria Chiara*** *and* ***Rick Kushner****, mother and father;* ***Tom Tobin****, high school teacher; and* ***Hashmat Wali****, manager financial reporting & analysis at USCCB and Afghani refugee.*

Introduction

The Miracle of Hospitality is a newly published book by Fr. Luigi Giussani. It is a collection of conversations over several years with families fostering children. In it Fr. Giussani offers reflections that shed light not only on the experience of fostering, but more generally on the attitude of welcoming (and being welcomed by) the presence of an "other," even when such presence is unexpected or does not match our plans. In a passage at the very beginning of the book Fr. Giussani states: "If we do not feel welcomed or loved in the first place, we cannot share anything. In other words, we cannot make our presence part of another's presence; we cannot open our presence to welcome the presence of another." This attitude of openness, which Fr. Giussani calls a miracle, will be the focus of the witnesses of a father and mother who welcomed a very special son, an Afghani refugee, and a couple fostering three children.

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Tom Tobin, moderator: Good afternoon. On the Encounter's behalf, I welcome those who are here at the Metropolitan Pavilion and all those that

are online. My name is Tom Tobin, I'm a high school teacher, and that's why I have to stand up when I speak, while everyone else is sitting. [*laughter*]

I'm from Wheaton, Maryland, close to Washington, DC, and I'm the moderator of this event. I'll start just by saying that we're going to present a remarkable new book which is now newly available in English, *The Miracle of Hospitality*, which is available out at the book table. I was given an advanced copy to prepare for this event. The book is a collection of letters from Don Giussani to a group of Italian parents who were known as the Welcoming Families. This was an event that happened in Italy in the1980s. There were a group of families that began to take in adopted kids, foster kids, handicapped kids, and then later it expanded in many directions: young adults who needed a hand, for example, and people who needed to live near hospitals so they could visit their loved ones who were hospitalized. This movement grew, then they felt the need for a kind of companionship and support within this, and it became an association and that association spread. It spread throughout Italy, it spread to four different European countries, then to Brazil and to Argentina. This is something that happened somewhat spontaneously out of the life of the Movement of Communion and Liberation, so it kind of came from the life that Don Giussani brought in the world, but he also guided it and deepened it and he pointed to it.

I's clear that Don Giussani had a particular affection for this group, this movement that was happening. I'm going to read a quote from the book. This is from a meeting with the 1988 Welcoming Families. Giussani says, "You have a great responsibility, because the Welcoming Families is a work that should inspire the whole Movement. All the families in the Movement, as I said this morning, in front of certain facts we cannot stand by indifferently. Either with an admiration from a distance, or with a brief emotion that makes us go on as if nothing happened. Approaching certain experiences which other people have should be determining for us."

And this is a point he keeps coming back to in the book, that what these people are living is a truth, it's just a truth deeper than some good thing that they're doing. It educates all of us to the truth of our being. That we must live an experience in our lives of being welcomed, beginning from gratitude, and from that to live this whole spirit of welcoming.

For just a minute before we hear from our different panelists, I'm going to briefly lay out some of the themes that run through the book, because there are different addresses and yet there are certain points that he constantly returns to. The first is this, and I kind of touched on that already: "People need to be welcomed in order to welcome." The beginning of a real generosity is a receptivity. He keeps returning to this, that if what we do in gestures like this doesn't have at its root a kind of gratitude, it can't be sustained over time. I mean, I know it from our own experience. It's hard, it's hard and you can hit your limit if it is simply a matter of your energy and your good will, your intentions. Again, I quote Don Giussani: "If we do not feel welcomed or loved in the first place we cannot share anything." In other words, we cannot make our presence part of another's presence, we cannot open our presence to welcome the presence of an Other. So this is a work that can't be just sustained by our desire to do a good thing. We welcome others to a place where our own brokenness, our own need has been embraced, and therefore, there's a possibility to do this.

The second point is this: belonging to a companionship is crucial. Again, to quote Don Giussani, "There is no authentic gratuity if we do not live with gratitude for the charity with which Christ has touched our lives through the lives of others. The encounter with a companionship without faithfulness to the companionship that we met means our charity would be false, it would not make history, that is, it would not truly contribute as it should to the Kingdom of God and to the building up of the Kingdom of God."

I just offer a little anecdote here. Gronya and I took, in fact, these young adults at different times, and with the very first, I reached a moment where his conduct infuriated me. I was so frustrated that I said to him, "You're only in this house because my wife loves you." [*laughter*] Which was not a charitable thing to say, but for me at that moment it was absolutely true. I mean, I had really reached my limit of patience with Thera, but it also touched on a truth, that because Gronya really had a deeper commitment, she really looked upon him as a mother, she had really kind of made that choice, you know just a deeper choice than I had—that my limit was not *the* limit. That this isn't a program to do a certain kind of gesture; rather, this gesture done in a certain way is an education to life.

And it is a work that needs to be gratuitous. This is a word that he keeps returning to, this word gratuity. From Don Giussani: "Hospitality does not mean giving *something* but giving *everything*. It is the implication of a whole life to welcome another, it means to put our house, our time, and our energy at the disposal of another, that I become totally involved. It doesn't have calculation." I've always admired a couple in our community that were foster parents who took in first a boy and then later his half-sister. And in time the girl they took in has done very well, she's in a stable marriage, she has a little company that she and her husband run, and the boy has continued to have problems with substance abuse, jobs, legal issues. But I was always so struck that, for them, it wasn't like a success and a failure, or that they ever calculated, I'm proud of this. To me, it was always a witness of gratuity.

A final point is that welcoming is a profound human gesture that goes deeper than taking people into your home. Again, to quote Father Giussani: "Welcoming is the embrace of what is different, and for this reason it has to do with all our relationships. The embrace of diversity is called forgiveness, because to embrace someone different demands first that we forgive him. To forgive means to affirm under all the ugliness what is true and right, good and beautiful, to affirm the being that is the other, the being of the other, your being is greater and deeper, more important than thousands, thousands, thousands of your sins."

What he does in the book is he continually calls people to go to the depth of what they're doing and to see that to understand this gesture in its depth is something that educates you to all of your life. Accepting difference is what's true of marriage. You enter into a marriage and at a certain point it becomes clear that you have to love and embrace the freedom of one who is simply different from you. However much it might have seemed easy and glamorous in an early period, there's a moment when you have to make that choice to embrace the other in their own freedom and in their own way. And it's this way with children, too. I remember with our first son, you think, okay, now I know what it is to be a father. Then the next one comes along and you realize, no, I don't know this one; this one, it's not the same thing. And then you're educated to the point of this difference and to accepting difference.

I'm going to introduce our panelists now. I'm very, very grateful for our

first panelists because they've had quite a drama before being able to speak to us. Nate and Ashley Kaufman are not here right now, because not long before they traveled from Nebraska, their home, to here, Nate had a health crisis and they had put him in the hospital. But being the hardy westerner that he is, they're gonna Zoom from his hospital in Nebraska. Nate and Ashley Kaufman live in Omaha, they've been married eight years, and they're foster parents to three young girls. As they'll explain, they took two and then by a little surprise they got another. Nate graduated from the University of Nebraska, Omaha, and works as a software engineer. Ashley obtained her Doctorate of Audiology degree from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and currently works with children and adults who are deaf and hard of hearing as an audiologist for Boys Town National Research Hospital, a very famous place. Thank you so much for your courageous gesture in hanging in there and sharing your story with us. So if you could, please tell us your experience of hospitality.

Nate Kaufman: Yes, thank you, Tom, for the introduction, and we're so happy to be speaking today, we wish we could be with you. This is just how it goes. We'll share a little bit of our journey through adoption and foster care. We thought it'd be helpful to share a little background information about our journey and what has brought us to this point. Ashley and I, as you mentioned, were married a little over eight years ago, and right off the bat we knew biological children were not in our future. I have a genetic disease called cystic fibrosis, which makes having biological children difficult to say the least, and we discussed it prior to getting married, and both agreed we felt a call to pursue an adoption. Around two years into marriage we began our adoption journey with an open adoption program, and this just simply means that the biological mother picks the adoptive family, and they maintain open communication and contact throughout the child's life.

It was during our adoption experience that were invited to a weekend retreat with other families in the Movement who had either fostered children, have adopted children of their own, or who are raising children with special needs. During this weekend we had the pleasure of meeting some incredible families such as Rick and Maria Chiara, with whom we shared similar experiences, we were also introduced to this book by Father Giussani called

The Miracle of Hospitality. It was in this work that we were introduced to the idea of what hospitality is. Giussani described it as "nothing short of man's greatest imitation of the love with which God loves man and therefore the love of the love that constitutes the life of God." Through the words of Giussani, this book, and the witness of these families who are living out this hospitality, we became more aware of what we were being called to. Adoption was not simply a method of obtaining a child for our family, but a calling to a life that would require depending on Christ in a way we hadn't experienced before. A life where he could continually ask us for our openness to situations where we may not know the outcome.

Ashley Kaufman: We were in our infant adoption program for almost five years and, to be honest, they were a really difficult five years and so often very emotionally draining. We would go months without hearing anything about new potential adoptions and then all of the sudden we would get a phone call about a biological mother that was looking at our profile, and there was always this hope that would enter in and we would think maybe this is the one, and so everything would stop while we waited. Many of these cases were last minute phone calls, so we wouldn't make plans with anyone, just in case, and I would scramble to get everything in order at work so that if I all of a sudden needed to be home for two months with a baby, my patients were still taken care of. During that time, we experienced six potential adoptions and three changes of heart, and that means that a birth mother picks you to be the adoptive parents and then often times after the baby is born changes her mind and decides to parent her baby.

The first change of heart was due to some unforeseen circumstances in her legal case, but it was during this time that we received one of our first great lessons in practicing hospitality. I remember telling a dear priest friend of ours that we were excited about the potential of bringing this little girl home, but we didn't want to become too hopeful or too attached in case it didn't work out. And he reminded us that if we loved this baby we needed to love her right now, fully, without reserve, whether we ever got to bring her home or whether she was in our care for a minute or a lifetime. And what he challenged us with that day reminded us of a section in *The Miracle of Hospitality*, where Giussani says that the duration with which one lives

hospitality does not matter when a child is entrusted to you, whether it be for a minute or a month, you can truly live hospitality because your heart has an openness that is not fixed or measured by the amount of time; it has more to do with the totality of your 'I' if you do not block your embrace according to your own preoccupations. And I think this is kind of what made our second change of heart all the more devastating, because we approached it with this openness.

So about a year after this first change of heart we were asked if we were open to our second adoption possibility. We were asked on a Wednesday if we would like to adopt Sophia, and her mother was scheduled for a C-section two days later. We frantically called friends to gather supplies, we picked up a car seat, we began getting ready for the addition of a new baby. And when we met with the birth mother, she explained to us why she picked us, and her reasons seemed so true to who Nate and I were. She really seemed to see us for our personalities and loved us for that, that we really thought this baby was the one. She wanted us to pick Sophia's name and she asked that I'd be her support person in the hospital. So I was in the operating room, I was the first person to hold Sophia, and I got to spend three days caring for her. Nate and I felt an instant, overwhelming love for this little girl with chubby, chubby cheeks, and a day after Sophia and her mother were discharged from the hospital, her mom began to change her heart, and the next day you [*looks at Nate*] received the news that Sophia would be staying with her mother.

The moments after this decision were extremely difficult for us. I cried for days at the loss of this little girl, and yet they were moments for us where we once again were offered the space and opportunity to deepen our understanding of what hospitality is. To live in such a way comes with a risk, because you're opening yourself up without holding anything back, and it was the faces of our friends and our family that helped us see the beauty of that risk, because in all honesty in that moment we couldn't see it. So it was the friend who showed up at our house unexpectedly even when weren't really feeling up to company. People that sat with us, cried with us, who began to take weekly walks with us, and who asked us, 'If you could go back in time and do this all over again, would you?" At that time, without fully understanding why, we both knew that we would.

Nate: It was several more years without being matched in the program, so we prayerfully decided to move on. Yet the experience of Sophia showed us we still had the capacity and the desire to welcome a face or faces we had yet to meet. It was at that time we didn't feel comfortable choosing a new adoption program. I truly felt we were done, so we began to look into foster care. I think we sometimes still ask ourselves how we moved on from adoption to foster care, knowing that with the goal of reunifying children in foster care with their biological parents we would be experiencing that same feeling of loss that we had with Sophia, but over and over and over again. Looking back, I think we can now say there was a growth in maturity from our experience, becoming less about possessing this idea of what we thought a family should look like and more about opening our home to someone in need and without expectation.

We had the freedom to now say, Okay, God, you have carried us this far, we can take a few steps more, and there's so much evidence of the fact of your presence that we are going to step out in faith with you again. That's the only explanation I think we have for it. We applied for the Boys Town Foster Program, filled out a mountain of paperwork, completed background checks, attended a two-week training class, and were approved for the program. Once the state approval came through, things moved very fast. Within a week of our approval we were asked if we would take in two sisters: a 15-month-old and a two-and-a-half-year-old, and they had already been in the foster system for several months. Once we said yes, their current foster family literally dropped them off on our porch with all their belongings without saying so much as a goodbye. I remember thinking, Is this how this typically goes? This is nuts. But right away we felt so much empathy for them because of the fear and uncertainty they must have felt. The older one of the two walked into our house and proceeded to throw every toy we had procured across the room, hit and kicked and screamed whenever she didn't get her way, and the younger sibling cried for all but two hours of the first three nights in her home. They were just simply trying to find their foothold in a world that had been turned upside down and honestly so were we.

It was a tremendous undertaking at first to adjust to a life with children who weren't born to us, who had had drug exposure and trauma in their

history, and all the while navigating the system of agencies and people we had no prior experience with. Boys Town had prepared us as best they could, and we now know that foster care is really something you can never fully prepare for; all we could do once again was take one step at a time and trust. It was two months after welcoming the girls into our home, still in the midst of trying to develop consistency, find time to sleep and maintain sanity, that we were actually approached by a local women's shelter that Sophia's mom had lived in, and they informed us that there was a pregnant mother there who wanted to make an adoption plan and asked if were open to another adoption. It was almost laughable; we had just moved on from the adoption world and invested ourselves in the lives of these two little girls and now were once again asked for our openness. So we said yes, and Ashley was the support person again for the birth mother and was in the room at the time of his birth—but again, less than 24 hours later we experienced our third change of heart. The funny thing is, two weeks after that moment, we were informed that our foster toddler's mother was pregnant again, and the baby would almost certainly be entering the foster system when she was born, with the goal of keeping siblings together. DHHS let us know that we would be the first family they would ask to take this newborn baby. Having just said yes to the girls, and still trying to get our feet on solid ground and having them just experience her third change of heart—we were not prepared to say yes again.

Ashley: Our initial response was just that there was no possible way that we could keep doing this; we wanted off this emotional roller coaster and knowing this baby could also have drug exposures, we wondered if we could even handle, you know, potential health complications this baby might have--two toddlers, Nate was in graduate school at the time, his health complications, and all the while both of us working full-time. While everything seemed next to impossible, we knew something was being asked of us and we wanted to take that question seriously. So, in an effort to gain clarity in our answer, we began to reread *The Miracle of Hospitality*. As we reread the book, we began to find our footing again, so practically, not only did we just gain more experience as parents, but our bond and attachment with the older girls grew, and their physical, mental, and social development improved significantly. Father Giussani's words again strengthened our hearts

and desire to live hospitality in the way that he described. He was mirroring our own experiences in much of what he said. At one point in the book he says, “Loving God is affirming that existence is goodness, that you live this generosity with awareness the more your generosity will not be at the mercy of your desires, of your tiredness, of your feelings. Otherwise feeling, instinct, how things seem to be going; it will be the measure of what you do, and when you reach your limit you say no. It is not possible to do anything else, I cannot do this. This awareness of the relationship with Christ multiplies the strength of imagination, multiplies the energy of dedication, and makes us persevere.”

We realized in this moment that we're not living out of our dependence and gratuity, but we were trying to make a decision based on the measure of our own capacity. Shortly after I was reading the book again and I came across a passage where Father Giussani says, "Just think: the first word the Mystery spoke to man was, ‘Do not be afraid; do not be afraid.’ To do what you do, you need to be not afraid. If one is afraid, it is impossible for him to stand, but it is also impossible that the idea of standing even crosses his mind.” This is one for me, one of the reasons that Mary's "Yes" has always been so incredible to me. Her simplicity to say "Yes" without fear and with total trust in the Lord. I remember reading that section and then laughing out loud, looking at Nate and saying, "I think I know why we haven't made a decision about this baby; we already know what God is asking of us, we're simply too afraid to say yes."

Nate: I had thought about this. This little baby had to go somewhere when she was born. Whether it was with us or another foster family. We simply began to ask God for this freedom, and slowly all the perceived impediments to our yeses began to fall like dominoes and we ended up saying yes to our third foster daughter. After she was born, we were actually afforded the opportunity to visit her in the NICU. She was there for two weeks, and it wasn't until I held her for the first time and gazed down at her face and feeble body that all my previous doubts and fears seemed insignificant; that essentially there was no way I could have ever said no to this face. Our older girls have now been with us sixteen months, and our youngest is four-and-a

half-months. We love these girls with all our heart, and life has been really good—but to be honest, very hard at times, too.

Two toddlers and a baby is just hard, plain and simple. We've had days where we thought, Why are we doing this again? But the girl's trauma cannot be erased; and while we have mentioned the progress that we've also made, what is actually striking is that, as our capacity for love and patience has grown, we have found a dimension of joy that we may never have found if we had not been able to say yes to what God was asking of us. I speak for Ashley as well, but some of our favorite parts of the day are walking over to the baby's bassinet, which is next to our bed, and peeking my head over the side and seeing her giant grin just looking up at me with this face of recognition. Or picking up the girls from daycare and watching them run across the room with huge smiles on their faces. If we had been closed off to that we may never have experienced that depth of love.

We've encountered this quite a few times, but often when somebody finds out that we're foster parents they respond with, "Oh, I could never do that; I would get too attached." We've learned that this is the whole point: attachment is one of the greatest gifts a foster parent can give their foster child. Children don't just need homes and food and caretakers, they need families who are willing to give them their hearts, who are with them in their need and who love them as their own and get too attached. I love how Giussani puts it when he references the story of the tax collector Zacchaeus in the gospel, as he does so often. When Jesus approached Zacchaeus in the tree, he didn't say, Listen up, give back what you have taken, be good, don't rob anyone anymore—but instead told him simply, "I must stay at your house today." That is, I am with you. And hospitality is this "being with." [*applause*]

Tobin: Just a question or two before we move on to our other panelists. One of the many things to me that's very striking in what you've said is the sense of calling that you had at the very beginning. You said this wasn't just a question of adopting a child because you weren't able to have one, that it was a calling that you had. You know the experience that Gronya and I had: I would say she had that sense of calling and I didn't. I kind of got it from her over time. But for you two, why was it there in the first place? And how did that sense of calling change as you went through all of these challenges?

Nate: That's a good question. I think we always had a sense of a desire for children in our lives, despite the apparent difficulties of us having biological children. We always had this desire, but didn't know what that would look like in the future. It really was simply us acting on this desire and moving forward with it in a practical way. It was only until we were in it, when we were in the adoption process, in the foster care process, that we began to understand more the depth of that. That it wasn't simply us forming a family for the sake of it, or the attempts to form a family, I should say, when it came to the adoption process. But the calling there, there was a depth to it that we began to understand more. I think through the light of the book, for sure, I think that helped us really understand what was at stake there. Hospitality wasn't simply just inviting somebody in for the sake of it, but rather it had to be in this framework. Otherwise our welcoming comes up against the measure of our own capacity and it will always fall short. And I know this to be true now because when I approach the girls with this awareness of the depth of love that Jesus has for them, a miracle happens. It's the only way I can describe it; I think there's this wonder in the interactions between myself and them, their response to me takes on a dynamic of delight, and I don't see that elsewhere. My interactions with them become effortless.

I think it's because it's no longer just my own capacity, the capacity of my own patience, of my own desire to spend time with them, to play one more game, to read one more story, but rather mine and Christ's, which is boundless in nature. I often think about the capacity that Christ must have for my own shortcomings and failings; he continually and without restriction accepts me time and time again.

Just a small little anecdote. Ashley and I recently spent some time traveling to Hawaii. Unfortunately, we couldn't bring the girls with us. It's often quite difficult to travel with foster children across state lines, so while we were on vacation the girls stayed in respite here. Boys Town has a group of trusted respite families they utilize when their foster families need to be away for a time, and while we were away, we received a number of reports both from daycare and the respite family that the girls behavior was, for lack of a better word, problematic. Just a lot of acting out. So we were fully expecting there to be a number of issues we needed to address when we got back in

order to get the girls back on track to a state of normalcy—but instead a miracle happened. Prior to picking them up we had decided that, come what may, we would approach them with this light-heartedness and awareness of Christ's love for them, and us, and whatever new behaviors we saw we would just roll with. There was this newness to the reunification between us and the girls, we were just so excited to be together again, and it was so apparent in their joy and our energy. It was quite simply one of our most enjoyable weeks together. Giussani refers to this as a creative capacity, and for myself, I verified it to be true. It has become more of a calling, or my awareness of such a fact has become more true, as I tap into this kind of creative capacity that he speaks of.

Ashley: I don't think, in the beginning, we viewed it as a calling. Initially, it was a way to grow our family in a manner we felt comfortable with and wanted to pursue. However, our first shift from seeing it merely as a method to recognizing it as a calling happened during what we affectionately term the "hospitality weekend" in Minnesota. Each family there had their own unique journey. Hearing their stories made it clear that just approaching your children based on your ability or desires wasn't enough. These parents exuded something that seemed to transcend their individual selves. There was a palpable joy between them and their children. Observing how they parented was unlike anything I'd seen before. These were parents who faced genuine challenges, and I found myself deeply yearning for what they had. I realized my own desires weren't enough. If we were to truly embrace what Christ expected of us, it would have to be a calling, not just an attempt to fit my desires into what I perceived He wanted or what I thought I could manage.

Tobin: Thank you, thank you so much, thank you now for all your words and your heroic effort just to join us today. [*applause*]

Nate: You're very welcome. Thank you so much for having us.

Tobin: I'm going to introduce you to our second panelists, but full disclosure, these are old dear friends. Gronya and I were married 26 years ago, and this was my best man. He still is my best man. Rick and Chiara are the parents of four children between 15 and 23. One out of college and Davide, who will be starting high school next fall. I've been married for almost 25 years. Rick is my fellow Washingtonian, we're a rare breed. He's

been working in software for all of his life. Maria Chiara is from southern Italy and is a biomedical researcher.

Maria Chiara Kushner: Thank you, Tom, and good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience with you all, although I feel very inadequate. I learned that when something is asked of me, it is not only something I'm giving to others, but it's really truly for me, and I had a similar experience when I found out that I was pregnant. I was over 40 years old and Rick and I were not thinking to have more kids. But in that moment I really felt preferred, I really felt wanted and chosen, and I was thinking, wow, me again? Another kid? This beautiful gift: someone that loves me and trusts me with all my limits and my shortcomings. Rick can add more to the list. [*laughter*]

In the first few months of the pregnancy, my doctor suggests I go to a specialist clinic. I had a very fancy sonogram, and after that they told us that the baby had severe genetic problems, so they were pushing to have more genetic tests so they could understand better what was the problem. When we understood that those tests—like celiocentesis, amniocentesis—they carry risk of infection and miscarriage, so we declined. For us, there was no question, we wanted to keep the baby no matter what, and even though at that moment I didn't know what would be my future, as I didn't know what was going to be my future for the other kids. I had to go back to my experience of trusting the one that loved me, that loved us, and I had to entrust myself and my baby to him. At the moment I said yes to that baby and to that relationship, I was not afraid anymore. We were still in the doctor's office when Rick told me that he felt like Simon the Cyrene when the Roman asked Simon to carry Jesus' cross. He didn't want to carry Jesus' cross; we didn't want to carry that cross, the cross of a sick child, the cross of the pain if we lose him or her. But I understood Rick was underlining the importance of carrying that cross to participate in Christ, in Christ's passion, in that pain.

I didn't fully understand. As you know, Rick is very intense. [*laughter*] But for me it was clear that I was not going to be alone, and in that moment, I also understood that we could not carry that alone. So, we called on our cell phones our friends. We needed to share in that moment what we were going through. The yes that we said to that baby was carried by so many friends

and family; we were not alone in welcoming this baby. In that moment I also understood what so many women go through, because in that office the only thing that was really clearly said to me was that the baby will suffer all his life, he will be in and out of hospitals, and I was very selfish to bring into the world a baby like that, a suffering baby. And I understood the pressure you feel as a woman, you are told that the only good thing that you can do for that baby is to end the pregnancy. So, one of my desires is to be…sorry… [*cries*] Sorry, still after 15 years this is so heartbreaking for me... [*voice breaks*] [*applause*]

In the months between this news and Davide's birth, we were never left alone. Like the experience of Ashley and Nate, there was no day that we didn't receive a phone call, an email, a message from France, all over the world; people that we didn't even know were telling us that they were praying for this baby, for his heart and his life. At that point we found out he was a boy and we decided to call him Davide, so we could respect also Rick's tradition. Davide was loved even before he was born. Davide was born in the middle of the summer with Down Syndrome. He was alive, and that for me was the only thing I cared about. He reminded me of Carlo—that was the only boy with Down Syndrome that I knew at that time, and Carlo's dad is one of our dear friends. They were in Italy when Davide was born, so they wrote us an email to welcome Davide, and among the many things that they told us, sharing their experiences of Carlo, there was a phrase that I keep going back to that said, "The only thing you can do is to love Davide as he is, and he will be who he is." I have to say that was not always easy.

Davide spent the first of 18 days in the NICU. He had to have a transfusion, to have a surgery, but his heart was not acting well, and yes, he had vision problems, eating problems, he had to wear special shoes to support his ankle, and at one point he also had this very cute, very tight suit to support his low muscle tone. So it's true, I had to go to many more specialists, but it also gave me the opportunity to meet so many other families that were going through this experience of having kids with disabilities. I remember once I was invited by my neighbor to a meeting, it was a support group, and I really felt I didn't need a support group. I already have all my friends. But not to be

rude, I went. My thinking was, this will be my first and last. There were like 50-60 moms of different ages with kids of different disabilities.

Actually, I felt I was the lucky one. I heard so many dramatic stories, but none of them, when they were talking about their kids, were describing the limitations of their kids. They were only pointing out the fact that they could not live without those kids, that they could not have a life different than what they had. I left that meeting thinking, I want to be friends with these people. I want to learn the way they love those kids.

I can say that after 15 years of life with Davide I am the one who is most changed by him. He has a way of learning by affection. He doesn't put anything between reality and himself. He doesn't have all the *ifs* and *buts* that I do, so I want for myself to have this experience of simplicity and humility in front of reality. Because only when I'm simple can I embrace reality as it is. I am more human because my freedom is in action I have to embrace reality as it comes.

I say also humility, because I got disappointed many times. But I'm going back to the experience of preference, the fact that I am wanted. I felt preferred, and so this is a work that I have to constantly do for myself, to be in that position of accepting. When you accept reality as it comes because it is given, you are free, you are more human.

And just a few more examples to make you understand. Davide—he doesn't take anything for granted. He keeps asking me every single night to put a lovely note under his pillow so he can find it in the morning after. Yes, there's a stack of lovely notes from all these years that he keeps, and he also [*applause, audience reaction*] and he also is telling me how much he loves me, like: "I love you from Italy to Kansas." These are the two extreme points, the farthest he knows. He also has a sensibility for understanding when I'm down, when I am sad, so he starts acting like a clown, he makes me laugh, or when there is tension between me and Rick, he asks us to kiss. [*laughter*] In front of this, in these times I say I become more human, because in front of these simple things, at the end, I say yes. What they want, what they need, is this embrace, this holding of hands, this kiss. So I want to conclude with the phrase that is written in the book. It was written by Saint Paul and is found

in Hebrews 13:2: "Do not forget hospitality, for by practicing it some have welcomed angels without knowing it." Thank you.

Tobin: Okay. Go ahead, weren't you going to speak, too?

Rick Kushner: I was supposed to talk? [*laughter*]

Tobin: You don't eat of the seven loaves if you don't say something. You don't get the dinner if you don't say something. [*laughter*]

Rick: Thank you. I'm profoundly grateful for this opportunity. Over the past several weeks, I've lived with a heightened sense of attention that, ideally, we should all maintain. However, I often fail to do so. This chance to speak has given me the urgency to truly live.

There's a joke among my friends that I'm the one who cries, not her. But let's move on. I'd like to highlight some significant moments from Davide's life. First, when we discovered he might have Down Syndrome, my first thought was a realization: Jesus was entering our home in a tangible form. Now, reflecting upon it, I believe that whenever there's an unconditional embrace, it's Jesus present, whether we're conscious of it or not.

Let me share some pictures of Davide. For us, Davide was an amazing little boy. When Davide is happy, it's not the same as other people. When Davide is happy, he's clamorous, he's exuberant, he's explosive. The heart of Davide is sweet, transparent, open, very, very simple, and totally present. My tendency when I really need someone, my tendency is to retreat, to escape, to go away, to be by myself, and the only person who comes to get me is Davide. He would know, he would somehow know and he would come to comfort me. It's funny because he does the same thing. When he needs to be comforted, he goes off by himself, so I go get him. Davide was too much, almost too much in his sweetness and affection, and so I used to wonder, Why did we get this gift? Over time, a revelation emerged. My profound love for Davide felt like a glimpse of God's love for me. It made me realize the tangible nature of God's affection.

Fast forward, and Davide is now a preteen and teenager and started to become more and more defiant. The simple sweetness of his first 10 years became a little bit muddy and complicated. I would react, you know, because I was like, You have to brush your teeth, you have to go to bed, and so I was no longer able to just win the arguments. It was frustrating and confusing.

In fact, not that long ago there was a moment like this where I was ready to just get angry, explode, and just give up, but there was a grace: it was a particular, simple grace in that moment, that when I was ready to explode, I just stopped.

What followed was beautiful. The grace was to stop, to look, to be with Davide. So instead of trying to force him to do what he needed to do, I just stopped to hold him. He needed to be held. I did, too. And that's become a very educational thing for me. It's not that therefore the relationship is just sweetness and hugs, no. But to stop, and to look, and to be there. Davide is a gift, so you take him in. You take him in to experience how he is a moment of profound connection, reminding me to see Davide as a gift and to cherish him as he is.

Recently, during a basketball practice with a Catholic youth group, I saw Davide's interaction with his peers and coaches. While he struggled with exercises, the coach and team members continued to engage and support him. Their sincere inclusion touched me deeply. It also highlighted the widening gap between Davide and his peers. This realization was painful, yet the pain felt inexplicably sweet, blending seamlessly with my love for him.

From all these experiences, one truth stands out: when life offers a gift, I desire to embrace it wholeheartedly, experiencing it in its authentic form, whether joyous or challenging. Such challenges, frustrations, and pains are integral to the gift. In everything life presents, there's a lesson or blessing meant specifically for me. This belief has been reinforced through various circumstances, especially with Davide. That's the message I leave with you today. Thank you. [*applause*]

Tobin: Okay, we're going to go directly to our final panelist. Hashmatullah Wali, a native of Kabul Afghanistan, has a bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a major in financing. Now is working with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, manager of financial reporting, and the story that he has to go from Kabul to working for the Bishops Conference is quite historic. Hashmatullah has a slightly different story so he's going to be speaking more about in a way of being the recipient of hospitality, sort of the other end. So, you could begin please.

Hasmatullah Wali: Thank you. Thank you, Tom, and thank you

everyone. I appreciate the New York Encounter for providing me with this platform to share my story. Could the slides be played?

My journey began in Kabul, Afghanistan, where I was born and extends to Virginia, USA. Everyone is aware that Afghanistan has been war-ridden for 40 years. Initially, there were tribal conflicts, followed by the Soviet Union Wars, and then the Taliban wars post the 9/11 attack. The photographs from the 1960s depict Afghanistan as a regular nation where people went to schools, had a stable economy, and women pursued education. However, tribal wars ensued, gradually tearing the country apart. Subsequently, the Soviet Union invaded, and later, post-9/11, the U.S. intervened to bring freedom, hope, and transformation. Due to the mujahideen wars and Soviet conflicts, many migrated to Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, and other countries. Once freedom was restored, many returned, including my family. I remember being 10 or 11 years old when we moved back from Pakistan. A few years later, due to limited educational opportunities, I traveled abroad for my studies. After completing my education, I returned to Afghanistan to intern with a company called Morris Steven. This marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life. I got married in October 2022. The first picture on the left is from my wedding, and the second depicts my newborn. He was born around the 21st or 22nd of August—please excuse the typographical error. [*laughter*]

But soon after my son's birth, Afghanistan began to deteriorate. The Taliban was reclaiming territories, and in a shocking night, they captured the capital. On August 15th, 2022, they seized the presidential palace. Our president fled, and the infrastructure and system we had built over 22 years collapsed overnight.

The other photos show the mass exodus. Many lost hope in a future under the Taliban's reign, fearing their regressive policies, especially concerning education and women's rights. Given my nine-year association with U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense contractors, I was a prime target for the Taliban. My family's safety was also at risk. For two weeks, we constantly moved from one hideout to another. Then, in a miraculous turn of events, we received assistance to evacuate. Reaching the airport was a challenge with thousands desperate to leave. I had only an hour to pack. All I could bring was one backpack containing some documents and cash.

I cherished my life in Afghanistan, my homeland. But I couldn't risk my newborn's life, especially with the resurgence of the Taliban's oppressive regime. Today, they continue to deny girls an education, limiting opportunities even for female professionals. Such discriminatory practices were unacceptable to me and many others. If boys can pursue education and dreams, why not girls? What's the distinction?

We fled the country and arrived in Qatar, where we stayed for three nights. It was in Qatar that I truly began to understand the hospitality of the U.S. people. It wasn't just ordinary citizens; the Army, the Marines, the doctors – everyone extended their help. My son was just 20 days old when we left our homeland, and in Qatar, the temperature was soaring. There were thousands upon thousands of people on the streets, in camps, and under nets. U.S. personnel helped everyone there – doctors, Marines, everyone – assisting us in finding a place to stay, aiming to provide us with the freedom we sought.

On the last day at my office, I took a picture. I was employed at Morris Stephens, an international firm. In the picture, you can see my last salary in my hands.

My son was only 20 days old when we left. These are the backpacks I mentioned earlier. It felt like history repeating itself; my father had shared similar stories of fleeing the country when I was born. Years later, after the U.S. granted us freedom, we returned to Afghanistan. We aimed to rebuild our nation, ushering in new educators and more. However, suddenly, in just one night, we lost everything.

At the airport, there were thousands eager to leave, but not everyone was fortunate. Many of those left behind faced dire consequences. Some were so desperate that they clung to U.S. Army planes to escape. They took such risks because they no longer felt safe and had lost faith in the Taliban-led government.

We spent a night at the airport, sleeping over trash—my entire family and others too. I remember approaching a Marine and asking for assistance. He said they didn't have much for us at that moment but would ensure my baby had formula. Those Marines, despite being exhausted and working on limited rest, stayed up all night to help and protect us. They provided us with food and ensured our safety.

I had seen U.S. Army planes in movies, wondering what it would be like inside. When I finally boarded one, I realized there weren't enough seats. One plane carried over 800 people. We sat for hours in high temperatures, enduring these conditions for the sake of freedom.

Upon arriving in Qatar, we were given shelter, food, and medicine. Eventually, with the assistance of the U.S. Army, we reached Dallas Airport. By the time we landed in Dallas, I had been awake for 48 hours, tending to my family. Only my wife and I spoke English among us. The immigration officer in Dallas reassured me of our safety and advised me to rest. I slept soundly for several hours straight.

Later, we were transported to Wisconsin's Fort McCoy Camp to complete paperwork and health checkups. Our possessions were limited to a single backpack containing vital documents and a little cash. Generous people provided us with food, clothes, and medicine. Their kindness was truly extraordinary.

After two months, we left the camp. My first major outing was to Washington, D.C., guided by a friend named David. I took my first photo there, elated with my newfound freedom. I no longer feared for my sisters' education or our safety.

The U.S. community, including the Lutheran Social Services, the Catholic Church, and the Ethiopian Church, were all incredibly supportive. They provided us with essentials, and for that, we are eternally grateful. Our gratitude extends especially to the Marines who worked tirelessly to evacuate us.

We owe a deep debt to the people of this country. I'm committed to giving back in any way possible. A few months later, I sought employment and joined the USCCB, a church organization that helps everyone, regardless of their origin or faith. I see my role there as a way to assist others, just as I was aided in my time of need. This has been my journey from Kabul to the U.S. Thank you, everyone.

Tobin: As I spoke of the content of *The Miracle of Hospitality*, I wanted to stress that Giussani's point was we need to look to these people because they show us the right posture of life. I'm very grateful for our panelists today, because they did just that. Thank you.


SUN, FEB 19, 2023
5:45 PM ET
THE GIFT OF HIS OWN SELF
NEW YORK ENCOUNTER
Colonel Michael Dowe
Fr. Matthew Pawlikowski
Roy Wenzl
Fiona Holly
PAWLIKOWSKI
HOLLY
WENZL


NEW YORK ENCOUNTER

The Gift of His Own Self

*A presentation on the life of the **Servant of God Fr. Emil Kapaun**, military chaplain and medal of honor recipient, with **Col. Mike Dowe**, Korean war veteran, **Fr. Matthew Pawlikowski**, retired senior chaplain at West Point Military Academy, and **Roy Wenzl**, journalist. Moderated by **Fiona Holly**, librarian.*

Introduction

Servant of God Fr. Emil Kapaun was a military chaplain and POW during the Korean war. He is remembered for his heroic service to his fellow prisoners and his deep faith in God. In the end, he died at the hands of his captors after blessing and forgiving them, but those he cared for did not forget him. In 2013 he posthumously received the military's highest award, the Medal of Honor. In 2021 he made national news when his remains were finally returned home to the Diocese of Wichita. During the Funeral Mass, a fellow prisoner of war offered a moving recollection: "They killed him, not because of politics or because he was a soldier, but because he was a shining light in the darkness, living out his faith as a Christian. They martyred him." Fr. Kapaun cared for others to the point of giving himself completely. Presenting his life at the end of the Encounter is the most fitting conclusion of the weekend's journey.

Fiona Holly, moderator: Good evening. On behalf of the Encounter I welcome everyone, those here at the Metropolitan Pavilion and those

following us online. My name is Fiona Holly, I'm a librarian in Wichita, Kansas, and I will moderate this event. Before starting I would like to warmly thank Somos for helping and supporting this event. Before presenting our speakers today, we will watch a short video about the man we will be hearing about during this event.

Video plays
Applause

Holly: Now I will introduce our speakers. Father Matthew Pawlikowski was born and raised in New Jersey. He graduated from West Point in 1986, was ordained a priest in 1997, and in 2000 re-entered active duty as an army chaplain. In June 2015 he was assigned to West Point as the senior chaplain, the first Catholic to ever hold the position, until he retired in 2020. He has also served since 2015 as chaplain to the Army football team. "Beat Navy!" Father Matt has been awarded the Legion of Merit Bronze Star, is a senior parachutist, and is Ranger qualified.

Roy Wenzl is a newspaper reporter, editor, photographer, and non-fiction writer who worked in newspapers for 45 years. He is the author of various books. With project partner Travis Hein, he won a regional Emmy Award in 2022 for the hour-long documentary *Once Was Lost* about the 70-year search for Father Emil Kapaun's remains. In 1981, Roy was part of the news team at the *Kansas City Star and Times* that won a 1982 Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Hyatt Hotel Skywalk collapse. Roy grew up on a farm in Washington County, Kansas, which his family still operates.

I also need to make sure to mention Travis Hein, who very generously produced and edited the video we saw in the beginning, as well as recorded a short interview with Colonel Mike Dowe, which we'll see later in the presentation. Travis is an award-winning photographer, journalist, and filmmaker who works for the *Wichita Eagle*. As alluded to earlier, he and Roy worked together on covering Father Kapaun's story for the *Wichita Eagle*. On a personal note, I want to thank everyone involved in the preparation of this presentation, for the time that they've sacrificed for this event, even traveling

in the midst of various personal circumstances. So now we will begin with Father Matt's contribution.

Fr. Matthew Pawlikowski: Fiona, thank you. As a priest I'm also an army chaplain, which is kind of a call within a call, and one of the vocations I feel in my life as a secondary vocation is to tell the story of Father Kapaun. So anytime I have an opportunity to talk about him I'm always glad to do that. I want to talk about Father Kapaun's influence on the army, his impact on me personally, and then how that has turned out to be an impact on soldiers.

I was saying back in the Green Room that in United States military history since the Civil War there have been five chaplains that have won the Medal of Honor, and all five of them are Catholic priests. I do like to point that out all the time. There's a sailor, there's a marine, and there are three army chaplains, and I've done some reading and research on all of them. There's one that I really can't get good information on, Father Angelo Liteky, but the other ones I know fairly well.

Father's story is this: he was just a great chaplain. I mean, all these guys were great chaplains, they loved their soldiers, and they were where their soldiers needed to be, and there are numerous instances of fearlessness. They were calm and in very intense situations, because they were doing what they were meant to do, what they were called to do, and they knew they were in God's hands.

I got to know Father Kapaun through an article that was written by Mike Dowe, who you saw on the screen. We're going to see some more of him, but Mike met Father Kapaun in the prison camp and that's where they became friends. That was the extent of their relationship on Earth: they met in the prison camp and they parted ways in the prison camp when Father died. But Mike wrote an article about that and that's how I know him best. I also know him thanks to the work of Roy Wenzel, who's done fantastic work in compiling all sorts of information. Roy's book, *The Miracle of Father Kapaun*, is the single best source that I recommend to people because he brings all sorts of things together.

So Father was just being a good priest but had a real love for soldiers. That's something that God puts in your heart. All of us have particular calls from God. There's a million needs in the world but for some of us, for

whatever reason, there's certain needs that we see and burn within us and those are the things that our passion moves us towards. So, Father Kapaun certainly had that for soldiers. In fact, when he was in Korea, somebody asked him, “Father, here you are in the midst of combat and all this craziness, like, you could be back home with your parish,” and he said, "Well, have you ever dealt with the Czech Women's Group on Sunday nights?" [*laughter*]

I came across his story, I don't remember, 20 years ago or so. I was in a bookstore and found a little mimeographed copy of Mike Dowe's article. I read it and it brought me to tears. I shared it once or twice with some people, reading the story, and it brought them to tears too. In fact, it never fails to do that. And then I guess 13 years ago I very deliberately decided to start sharing the story as often as I can, and that's when it started to influence a lot more soldiers in my life and became, like, a part of my own ministry to soldiers.

I'd like to discuss something known as Ranger School. In the Army, Ranger School is recognized as a challenging program. One could describe its purpose in multiple ways. First, it has a tactical aim: to instruct individuals in small unit tactics. A squad consists of about 10 or 12 people, a platoon is roughly 40 people, and a company is around 100 people. The curriculum of the school revolves around tactical operations at these levels. That said, Ranger School also labels itself as a leadership school, which is primarily how I view it. At Ranger School, participants are subjected to highly stressful situations caused by sleep deprivation, insufficient food, inappropriate clothing in freezing weather, and sheer physical exhaustion from exercises like mountain climbing.

The goal is to intentionally induce stress. Once everyone is stressed out, you’re put in charge and tasked with a challenging mission, leading other equally stressed individuals. Ranger School claims to create stress levels that match or even surpass those found in actual combat. So, it's essentially a leadership school where participants discover hidden strengths and potential, both in themselves and in others.

When I reflect on Father Kapaun's story, I've essentially named him the patron saint of Ranger School. You see, there's no formal declaration from the pope saying, "This person's the official patron saint." It usually starts when someone decides on a patronage, begins a devotion, and it gains

traction. Father Kapaun's experience in a communist prison camp during the coldest winter on record, where he faced starvation, lack of clothing, no proper medical care, and endured physical beatings, mirrors some aspects of Ranger School. Yet he also lived under the constant threat of death, witnessed the deaths of friends, and experienced the sheer brutality of their treatment.

I began sharing Father Kapaun's story with soldiers informally. What were Father's standout actions in the prison camp? What distinguished his sanctity there? The answer isn't supernatural. He undertook simple acts of love for his fellow man: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, cleaning those who had soiled themselves, starting fires for warmth and purified water, and burying the dead. He also performed the Spiritual Works of Mercy. He encouraged, counseled, and prayed for others. His approach to holiness was human and straightforward, but it demanded consistent effort and commitment.

I often cite Father Kapaun's example to soldiers, especially those about to enter Ranger School. I emphasize the importance of selflessness and service to their peers in challenging times. This ethos, as demonstrated by Father Kapaun, has proven beneficial in such grueling settings. His life and deeds have impacted soldiers in tangible ways, and I continue to share his story frequently.

At West Point, I've had several opportunities to narrate his story to larger groups. So, while his life serves as a model for soldiers, Father Kapaun's influence extends beyond the military. It impacts the broader world and all those who consider themselves soldiers in Christ's army. So Father Kapaun's story—how does it affect all of us and how do I bring that to other people? He lived in a communist prison camp, in addition to all the physical stresses that were placed upon him and the threat of death. There were also very deliberate things that the communists did. They very much wanted to isolate and separate soldiers from one another. They had rules that encouraged people to tell on each other, and some people did that, and whenever that happened the people that had broken whatever rules there were, they weren't really punished because that wasn't the goal of the communists, they really didn't care that somebody was breaking rules so they could go punish them. What they really wanted for people to rat each other out. They wanted the soldiers divided from one another.

As a cadet at West Point, my field of study was "Soviet studies." The enture Marxist dialectic was basically class warfare. For Marx, it was the working class versus the employers. But in the modern forms of Marxism that are unleashed in the world now, the goal is to constantly turn groups against each other: black versus white, male versus female.

Father Kapaun actively resisted the divisive tactics within the camp. He consistently encouraged people to support one another, remain loyal, and ignore the misleading information spread by the communists. He warned against the ploys designed to drive wedges between them. An intriguing fact emerged after the war: in camps where prisoners resisted communist manipulation by secretly obtaining food and medicine and maintaining unity, the survival rate was notably higher. For instance, in Father Kapaun's camp, consisting of approximately 150 soldiers who staunchly resisted, the mortality rate was considerably lower than in another camp where prisoners collaborated with the communists. Even though the latter group received more food, medicine, and comparatively better treatment, their death rate was 10 times higher.

My perspective, shaped since childhood, is that communist forces epitomize evil because they disregard individual worth, focusing solely on state adulation. In stark contrast, Father Kapaun prioritized individual care, recognizing the intrinsic value of every person. He was a staunch advocate for freedom, understanding that resisting falsehoods and malevolent forces was vital for survival.

In recent times, various divisive forces have emerged, notably during the Covid pandemic. The enforced isolation, notwithstanding political implications, is something communists would have relished. Regulations in places like New Jersey and New York encouraged citizens to report quarantine violators, a strategy reminiscent of communist tactics. The increasing reliance on the virtual world often gives a false sense of connection, further alienating individuals. Father Kapaun's ideology was centered around genuine human connection, which contrasts sharply with the principles of communism. It's a perpetual battle between light and dark, good and evil.

A personal takeaway from Father Kapaun's story is the realization that "service" is synonymous with "love." His relentless service to his fellow

prisoners was a tangible manifestation of his love and charity. This love engendered hope, becoming a beacon of light amidst overwhelming darkness. It's no surprise that his communist captors despised him. Their animosity wasn't solely based on his political or military affiliations, but predominantly because he radiated hope and faith. In essence, Father Kapaun's tale is a clarion call to all members of Christ's army. It's a reminder to champion goodness in the face of looming darkness, always trusting in Christ's guidance and protection. Thank you.

Holly: And now Roy.

Roy Wenzl: Thank you, Fiona. In early 2009, my colleague Tom Shine at the *Wichita Eagle* proposed that I profile Chaplain Father Emil Kapaun. My initial response was dismissive: "He's been gone for 58 years. What's left to tell? Assign it to a new reporter." However, persistent as Tom is, he didn't let it go. After six months, just to end the topic, I made a single inquiry about Father Kapaun. I spoke with Father Hotze, who was overseeing Father Kapaun's narrative for the local diocese. To my surprise, he informed me that the Pentagon had revived the Medal of Honor inquiry and that the Vatican had recommenced its sainthood examination.

Despite this, I remained skeptical. Considering the Korean War concluded in 1953, I presumed that by 2009, Father's comrades would either be deceased or too aged for recollections. Yet, when I interviewed fifteen of them, I was proven wrong. [*laughter*] These veterans, survivors of intense warfare and the atrocities of the Korean prison camps, unanimously vouched for Father Kapaun. They passionately believed that he deserved both the Medal of Honor and sainthood, expressing their frustration at the Army and Vatican for their inaction.

Their stories challenged my prior skepticism about priests, which was rooted in my departure from the Catholic faith. They spoke of a priest unlike any other; Father Kapaun, they claimed, saved not just a few, but hundreds. He was their beacon of hope amidst sniper shots, rescuing the injured. With resourcefulness, he fashioned cooking pots from discarded roof metal, using them to boil snow—a necessity since their captors denied them water. This purified water was crucial for preventing dysentery in the camp. He cared for the ill, combing lice from their bodies and encouraging the despondent to

eat. Stories painted him as a legendary figure - the Indiana Jones of combat chaplains—whose acts of valor were unparalleled until he was tragically killed by his captors.

What stood out most was his profound influence. Despite the dire conditions and dwindling morale, soldiers listened to Father Kapaun. While they often dismissed their superiors, they respected Father, who technically held no formal authority over them. Throughout his 10 months in Korea and his tragically short 35 years of life, Father Kapaun left an indelible mark. Even 73 years after his death, his legacy continues to inspire countless people. I realized that his approach, his methods, and the reasons for his overwhelming success serve as a tangible model for contemporary society. Before his service in Korea, at merely 25, he penned a straightforward blueprint outlining his aspirations to make a difference. This guide, I believe, is so intuitive that anyone, even us, could emulate it, potentially leading all the way to sainthood.

I described this successful person in contrast to the many failures of institutions we once trusted. Our Congress has become a circus where clowns far outnumber lions. Our military failed in Iraq, failed in Afghanistan, and before that failed in Vietnam, after which we failed our veterans. The Catholic Church has failed many people. Our middle class, meanwhile, has mostly disappeared, replaced by day workers who struggle even as billionaires get richer by the hour. Television news shows are mostly bad news and breathless at the 5:30 hour, and are no more than smear campaigns into the evening. The smearing is even worse on social media, and it's you and me doing the smearing. Families disowned parents and children, uncles and siblings, based on whether someone in the family supports Donald Trump. These failures seem unsolvable, they tempt us to withdraw from civic life, from neighborhood relationships, they tempt us to balkanize our own families. Many of us have stopped contacting friends we supposedly loved for decades. I think Father could defuse this and fix all of us sinners if only we could meet him. I know that he defused me, a sinner. I'm a lapsed Catholic, but Father's story prompted me to overhaul how I dealt with people. I've tried to be like him in that way. I've tried to do for others. I tried to draw the best out of others, and I've tried to do this with a certain amount of calculation like he did.

Let me introduce you to the man and his blueprint. First, I'll describe what he did, then how he did it, followed by why it worked. The latter, explaining why it worked, is essential to understanding the essence of Father Kapaun and how we can all become successful and beloved in daily life. Father Kapaun's Eighth Cavalry Regiment was the first U.S. Army unit deployed into the war soon after North Korea invaded the South. From the outset, the chaplain and his mostly teenaged or early-twenty-something soldiers faced fierce battles, often outnumbered. Father Kapaun would rescue wounded soldiers by charging towards enemy snipers to drag the injured to safety. Many witnessed his acts. One soldier, Joe Ramirez, later told me, "That man was crazy."

They battled for three months. Along the way, Father Kapaun endeared himself with countless small gestures. He occasionally preached, but only upon request, and often communicated through silent actions. He made no distinction between Catholic, atheist, Protestant, Jew, or Muslim soldiers. He aided tired soldiers in digging foxholes and latrines, rarely mentioning prayer. He ventured into orchards and fields, returning with food for the famished soldiers and assisted wounded soldiers in writing to their families. His presence became indispensable. They wanted him beside them, hoping to earn his approval.

Consequently, young men accomplished nearly impossible feats despite being shell-shocked, exhausted, starving, and freezing in sub-zero temperatures. The 8th Cavalry's 3rd Battalion faced devastation at the Battle of Unsan in November 1950. Father Kapaun chose not to flee, and many witnessed his decision. During the battle, he saved 30 wounded men from execution by charging at Chinese soldiers, urging them to lower their weapons. Observers noted his courage. Later, while en route to the prison camp, fatigued soldiers began abandoning their injured comrades, who were then executed by the guards, perhaps as mercy killings. Initially, the weary GIs resisted carrying the wounded. Yet, when Father Kapaun encouraged them, they complied. They acted not out of duty, but out of respect for him, a man who consistently supported them, whether through simple tasks or acts of immense courage. In the camp, as POWs began stealing food due to hunger, Father Kapaun shared his rations and pleaded with them to care for

one another. He even risked theft to procure food for them, admitting his sin and praying for forgiveness. When camp officials attempted to brainwash the starving soldiers, he bravely mocked them. With his acts of defiance, he restored the prisoners' identities as U.S. Army soldiers, strengthening their resolve.

That summarizes his actions. Now, concerning how he accomplished this, my conversations with veterans clarified that Father Kapaun acted with a degree of purposeful intent. He focused on actions over preaching, ensuring the soldiers knew he was there for them. His actions reflected Jesus from the Gospels, emphasizing deeds over words. This approach resonated with the frightened young soldiers. Like Joe Ramirez noted, while they thought him mad, they recognized his genuine heart.

Now, regarding why his method worked: My research in 2009 revealed a sermon he delivered to his small hometown congregation in Pilsen, Kansas, on April 16, 1941, Palm Sunday. Although the U.S. wasn't yet involved in World War II and Father Kapaun was just a 25-year-old priest with limited world experience, his words remarkably outlined his leadership approach a decade later during the war. As I read some excerpts from the sermon, visualize him amidst the chaos of battle, selflessly serving others:

"Men find it easy to follow one who has endeared himself to them."

"A man finds it a pleasure to serve one who has saved his life."

"A great leader exerts a most powerful influence over the hearts and minds of his followers. Although the task of following such a leader is challenging, it becomes sweet, honorable, and more manageable when followers recognize the leader's stature, relationship to them, motivations, and the rewards he offers."

Do you see? His remarkable acts, from digging holes to retrieving apples and corn cobs for famished soldiers, were not just acts of assistance. They were intentional gestures designed to win the trust of desperate men, enabling them to help themselves. Father Kapaun understood that while he was driven to make a positive impact, he couldn't achieve it by himself. This blueprint wasn't even uniquely his; he drew it directly from the Gospels, mirroring Jesus's approach. I encourage you to delve deeper into his story. There are books and documentaries available—some even feature my name. You

might feel overwhelmed, believing your situation is bleak and your influence limited. You might feel inclined to withdraw from the chaos of the world: the dysfunction of Congress, the bias of the media, the negativity of social media, or even Uncle Zed's unpredictable remarks at family gatherings. But remember, even when institutions falter, which is an inevitability, there's hope. Emulate Father Kapaun. Become that vital individual who connects with others on a personal level. Make yourself someone people are eager to know, trust, and follow. As Father Kapaun showed, you can profoundly influence the sentiments and thoughts of those around you, including complete strangers and even those with questionable intentions.

While institutions have their moments of success, they can also cause harm, neglect, and alienate. But individuals can and often do make a difference, positively affecting the world one person at a time. You can be that individual. Be the one who offers companionship to the lonely, lends an ear to those in grief, or tutors a struggling student after a long workday. Be there, even for the challenging individuals like Uncle Zed. Consistently demonstrate such unwavering commitment that observers recognize the purity of your intentions. While not everyone will emulate your actions, some will be inspired to extend their own helping hand, ensuring that, like Father Kapaun, you won't be navigating challenges alone.

Holly: Thank you Roy. And now we will watch a recording of an interview of Colonel Mike Dowe recorded by Travis Hein earlier in February, which was recorded for the New York Encounter. Colonel Mike Dowe is a graduate of West Point and served in the Korean War, where he was captured and held as a prisoner of war alongside Father Kapaun, who became a personal friend. He is also a nuclear physicist and resides in Houston Texas.

Video plays
Applause

Holly: There are many things to be moved by in Father Kapaun's story. His bravery and heroism in the face of danger. His personal sacrifices to serve those who were suffering even in the midst of his own. His sense of humor in the middle of the most unlaughable of circumstances. They will say he

had a great sense of humor, and we can certainly praise these things for what they are. But the most significant for me in the journey of preparing this presentation is this hope that he brought to those around him.

I'd like to read a quote from the *Saturday Evening Post* article from 1954, which Father Matt mentioned was written by Mike Dowe soon after his return home. He says, "But there was something in his voice and bearing that was different. A dignity, a composure, a serenity that radiated from him like a light. Wherever he stood was Holy Ground and the Spirit within him, a spirit of reverence and abiding faith went out to the silent listening men and gave them hope and courage and a sense of peace."

This is a true exemplar of our theme: someone knows me and inexplicably really cares for me. Father Kapaun had a hope in something eternal, and if you have a chance you can look up, there's a recording on YouTube of one of his sermons and he preaches about heaven. Beyond the mud and stench, the suffering and starvation, he was able to face all of that with confidence, with certainty. That certainty was contagious, it gave men hope for their own lives and that hope is also for us.