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Catholic International University 43rd Annual Gala
"The American Promise, The Catholic Mission:
250 years of Freedom, Faith, and Education"

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As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Paul. And thank you for this great honor. Receiving an award named to honor Russell Shaw, and bestowed by the Catholic International University, is a high honor indeed.

Russell Shaw was a great Catholic. And a great American. And it was his Catholic faith that made his American patriotism better—and rightly ordered. Shaw spent his life serving important Catholic institutions—the USCCB, the Knights of Columbus, and this university. His work was directed both ad intra and ad extra—internally to catechize members of the church, and externally to evangelize those not yet in the church. My home library contains several of Shaw's books, especially those coauthored with Germain Grisez, a philosopher and theologian who responded to Vatican II's call for a renewal of moral theology. I'm considered something of a grand-student of Grisez's, so receiving an award named for his coauthor is particularly meaningful.

We gather tonight mindful that this is the 250th anniversary of our great nation. I've taken some comfort and mild amusement that we've referred to this as our semi-quincentennial—semi meaning half, quincentennial meaning 500th. I like the optimism that suggests we'll one day celebrate the quincentennial. If we do so, it will be because of a third great awakening. For the American political system only works on the firm foundation of Christian truth. And that's where a gala titled "The American Promise, the Catholic Mission: Celebrating 250 years of Freedom, Faith, and Education" comes into play.

As I've reflected on the Declaration's 250th, I've been struck by how central public theology and natural law philosophy were to the American founding. In declaring our independence from Great Britain, the signatories to the Declaration didn't appeal to their rights as Englishmen. They didn't

appeal to public opinion, or the views of some powerful political elite. Instead, they appealed to an eternal standard of truth, to right and wrong, to the Laws of Nature and Nature's God.

Baked into this appeal was the conviction that truth exists. That reason can know it. And that nature serves as a standard. To know something's nature is to know its end, the goods that perfect it, its form of flourishing. For the Founders, human nature is rational nature. Our end, to know God and the good, and to then freely act for God and the good.

The famous second paragraph of the Declaration makes these convictions explicit:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness

The founders held these truths to be self-evident because they lived 1700 years after the Christian revolution. To the ancient Greeks and Romans these truths were most certainly *not* self-evident. In fact, they weren't even held as true. I highly commend to you a doorstopper of a book by Tom Holland, titled *Dominion*. In it, Holland traces how the Gospel transformed the ancient world. Consider how the ancient world treated women, slaves, the sick and infirm, the poor. And then contrast that with how the early Christians did. Only in light of the Gospel could anyone see these truths as self-evident. For only a culture that embraced the belief that each and every one of us bears the *Imago Dei* could come to see these convictions as true.

We are created. We are equal. We are endowed, not by governments or the powerful, but by our Creator with rights. And amongst these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. Jefferson was using the Lockean triad of life, liberty and property, but intentionally transforming it, appealing to the ancient concept of eudaimonia—happiness—flourishing.

Thomas Jefferson was certainly one of the least devout and least orthodox of the Founders, but when asked to explain what he sought to do in the Declaration, he made clear that the purpose wasn't "to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of," but "to place before mankind the common sense of the subject." The Declaration "was intended to be an expression of the American mind," to draw upon "the harmonizing sentiments of the day," in thinkers as diverse as "Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney Etc."

In citing these four thinkers—Aristotle, the founder of virtue ethics, Cicero, the founder of natural law theory, Locke, the founder of natural rights thinking, and Sidney, a leading protestant theorist of republicanism—Jefferson reminds us that America is a mix of ancient and modern; natural law and natural rights; the common law, Jewish and Christian political theology, and Enlightenment liberalism—an amalgam balancing liberty and limits. Freedom and virtue. And the success of the American experiment depends upon the moral and religious character of the people. After all, as

John Adams explained, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Now this is a Catholic gala, and I shouldn’t obscure the fact that the founding was largely a protestant affair. At the time of the Founding there were suspicions about Catholics. Only one Catholic signed the Declaration. There was no Catholic church south of Maryland. And as professor Michael McConnell notes, John Jay, one of the authors of the Federalist papers and the first Chief Justice of the United States, “led an effort to exclude Catholics from citizenship, unless they forswore belief in transubstantiation and allegiance to the pope.”

That said, the American Revolution was not the French Revolution. The French Revolution saw the civil constitution of the clergy, the confiscation of church property, the dissolving of religious orders and communities. Perhaps the spirit was captured best by Denis Diderot: “Man will never be free until the last king is strangled by the entrails of the last priest.” Religious and civic values were at loggerheads in France. But that wasn’t the American Experience. Religion flourished in America because it was free. Again Jefferson, who would accuse those of us here tonight of “monkish superstition,” could claim that “The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.” Religion and American values went hand in hand.

And Catholicism flourished. Monsignor Denis O’Connell served as the third rector of the Catholic University of America before he became Bishop of Richmond, which at the time included what is now the Arlington diocese. This is what O’Connell said about America and Catholicism:

> Americans never suppressed a religious order, never confiscated a sou of church property, never suppressed the salary of a bishop, never sent a seminarian into the army, never refused permission to open a Catholic university, never forbade anyone to become a religious, never forbade a meeting of bishops nor claimed a voice in naming them.

Of course anti-Catholicism comes in waves, and while the US government never interfered with the freedom of the Church in any of these ways, there were attempts. A second wave of anti-Catholicism came in response to Irish and German Catholic immigrants entering America in the mid-1800s. It was then that we saw the rise of the Know Nothings, the spread of anti-Catholic propaganda like the Maria Monk stories and Thomas Nast cartoons, outside Boston a Catholic convent and school were burnt to the ground by Nativists, and in Philadelphia two churches were.

How did Catholics respond? We doubled down on our authenticity and distinctiveness. We didn’t try to find a lowest common denominator way of being Catholic. We didn’t try to become just another protestant denomination in America. No, faithful Catholics for generations in America built distinctive Catholic institutions and practices. As the Nativist rioters were threatening to come from Philly to New York City, Archbishop John “Dagger” Hughes made clear that “if a single Catholic Church were burned in New York, the city would become a second Moscow”—a reference to the

great Fire of Moscow after French soldiers took the Russian city. Archbishop Hughes would go on to build one of the largest systems of Catholic education in the world.

Indeed, in response to this second wave of anti-Catholicism, hundreds of parochial schools were founded as a faithful alternative to the government run, public, "common schools." Dozens of authentically Catholic colleges flourished, along with hundreds of distinctively Catholic hospitals, and orphanages, and soup kitchens, and other charitable organizations. Our liturgy was marked by reverence, with a distinctive language and distinctive music. We lived out distinctive devotional practices: eucharistic processions, Marian processions, the Friday fast from meat—so pervasive that McDonalds created the filet-o-fish sandwich to cater to Catholics.

Catholics did the most to set America on the right track when we were most authentically and distinctively Catholic.

Of course not everyone liked that. And so we saw a third wave of anti-Catholicism in the mid 1900s. It would lead to some of the worst Supreme Court decisions on church-state relations. Written by an anti-Catholic Justice who was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, I should add. We sometimes forget that today's Americans United for Separation of Church and State, was originally founded in 1948 as Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State. It was founded in direct response to a 1947 Supreme Court case that allowed taxpayer funding to pay for school buses to Catholic parochial schools. What started as Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State led to what my former boss Fr. Richard John Neuhaus so poignantly described as the Naked Public Square. A politics and public culture devoid of any religious content.

How'd we get here? In face of this third wave of anti-Catholicism in the mid-1900s, a generation of Catholics threw away their Catholic distinctiveness. In 1960, John F. Kennedy would tell The Houston Ministerial Association that if he was elected president his Catholicism would have no impact on his presidency. A generation later, in 1984, Mario Cuomo would go to Notre Dame and say while he was personally opposed to abortion, politically he was in favor of choice. At one point in the early 2000s, had you taken all the Catholics out of Congress, then—and only then—would you have had a prolife majority.

But it wasn't just Catholics in public life who gave up on being distinctive. So too in education, where many Catholic colleges tried to imitate the Ivy League, and many parochial schools became more focused on producing graduates who got into the Ivy League instead of graduates who might one day get into Heaven. Our social services and charities drifted to be secular NGOs with occasional crucifixes on the walls.

In order to "make it" in America, many Catholics came to believe that we had to give up on what made us Catholic in the first place. That being a successful American was more important than

being a faithful Catholic. That being a disciple of Jesus would have no impact on our lives outside the four walls of a chapel.

But this can be turned around. It *is* being turned around.

We gather tonight to celebrate 43 years of faithfulness on the part of Catholic International University. It was 43 years ago that the founding bishop of our diocese here in Arlington, Bishop Thomas Welsh, launched CIU to provide a faithful Catholic education to anyone, anywhere, from the comfort of their home. And unlike so many other institutions of Catholic higher education, CIU has remained faithful, authentically and distinctively Catholic.

And she's producing graduates that will serve the Church, just as Russell Shaw did, both ad intra and ad extra. Graduates who can serve their parishes as DREs, their schools as teachers and administrators, graduates who can also enter the public sphere of commerce, communications, technology, policy and politics, and make a difference as Catholics.

And let me make a prediction: The only Catholic institutions that will survive the coming demographic decline will be those that are authentically and distinctively Catholic. Students and parents will have little interest in paying for a Catholic education if it is just a more expensive yet second-rate version of what the state university provides. Many Catholic colleges will likely close their doors in the years to come, unless and until they embrace and live out their Catholic identity.

Let me offer a suggestion. I'm not sure if there's a Catholic way of doing dentistry. I'm not sure if there's a Catholic approach to algebra—though maybe trinitarian theology has something to say there. Yes, doing all things out of love of God is the distinctively Catholic way of doing anything, and everything. But if dentistry and algebra don't have as readily Catholic approaches, let me suggest some that do: Reproductive healthcare, a Catholic OBG is radically different than a secular one; end-of-life care, what the Little Sisters of the Poor provide for the elderly is radically different than what assisted suicide technicians provide; mental health care, a Catholic therapist helping a young person confused about their sexual identity is radically different than what transgender activists do; indeed, the formation of young people in general, an authentically Catholic school is radically different than the secular government-run public alternative—as so many of us who have made sacrifices to send our kids to Catholic schools know.

These are just some of the areas where CIU's distinctive teaching can prepare its graduates to make distinctive contributions to American life. And I mention these areas intentionally, as it strikes me that as we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary we may be in the midst of a fourth wave of anti-Catholicism, though now no longer "Protestants and other Americans" against Catholics, now its secularists and heterodox Christians of all ecclesial backgrounds against orthodox Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. That is, this fourth wave of anti-Catholicism is really anti-Biblical, period. Specifically anti- the Biblical understanding of the human person.

We've been here before. The two-thousand-year story of the Church's intellectual growth is a story of challenges answered. For the early Church, there were debates about who God is. In response, the Church developed the wonderfully rich reflections of Trinitarian theology and Christology.

A thousand years later, with the Reformation, the Church saw renewed debates about salvation, and they left the Church with a much richer theology of justification, ecclesiology, and soteriology.

Debates about the nature of God, of salvation, and of the Church never disappear. But today the most pressing heresies—the newest challenges for the Church's teaching and mission—center on the nature of *man*. The tribulations that marked the twentieth century and continue into the twenty-first—totalitarianism, genocide, abortion, and a sexual ideology that has battered the family and redefined marriage—have sprung from a faulty humanism, a misunderstanding of the nature of man.

Before he became a bishop, a cardinal, and eventually Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła was an academic philosopher. He thought deeply about the crisis of culture then enveloping the West and determined its cause: false anthropology. Shortly after the Second World War, he wrote to a friend about his main intellectual project:

> I devote my very rare free moments to a work that is close to my heart and devoted to the metaphysical sense and mystery of the person. It seems to me that the debate today is being played out on that level. The evil of our times consists in the first place in a kind of degradation, indeed in a pulverization, of the fundamental uniqueness of each human person.

The sad reality of the twentieth century is that secularists thought that by getting rid of God they'd be elevating man. Instead, by dethroning God they ended up debasing man.

And now, we live in an age that is deeply confused about what it means to be human, where public policy directly undermines the truth about human nature, where our culture generates profound sadness and unfulfillment. At the heart of this confusion is a rejection of the natural law written on the heart, and the very first page of the Bible. Four truths strike me as key. 1) That we're made in the image and likeness of God, 2) that we're created male and female, 3) that we're created for each other in marriage, and 4) that we're created for communion with God.

The truth that we're made in the image and likeness of God underlies our debates about abortion, IVF, and assisted suicide.

The truth that we're created male and female obviously has huge implications for our transgender debates, but also the proper understanding of masculinity and femininity, and the mistakes of both radical feminism and misogyny.

The truth that we're created for each other in marriage is at stake in all of our marriage and family debates—not just the gay marriage one. We have huge problems in America with people not getting married at all, not staying married, and not having kids. The marriage rate has fallen by 65% since 1970. We have fewer marriages, more divorces, and fewer births than when my grandparents were in their prime. The result is more isolation, fewer friendships and familial connections, more atomized individuals. Kids grow up without dads—and without siblings and cousins. Older people age without a spouse or children to care for them.

And the truth that we're all created for communion with God has huge implications for whether we view our lives as under a sacred canopy and with a transcendent horizon. And the rejection of this belief has both temporal and eternal consequences, and not just for religious liberty.

Historically, these four Genesis Truths were not partisan convictions. There wasn't a left-right, blue-red, liberal-conservative, or Democrat-Republican divide. This was the core creation narrative held in common by Jews, Catholics, and Protestants, part of what St. Paul referred to as the law written on the heart. Even a comparatively secular figure like Thomas Jefferson wouldn't have doubted any of these truths. And yet today, entire movements exist to advance the argument that they aren't just false, but bigoted and hateful. Amazon will ban your book if you defend them.

What the Church needs to do in this moment is recognize three things. First, the world loves our schools and charities and homeless shelters and hospitals—except for when we operate them according to the four Genesis Truths. Except for when we won't abort babies or perform transgender surgeries. Except for when we won't house the homeless or migrant according to "gender identity." Except for when we want moms and dads for orphans. The world isn't against the Church because of our monotheism or Christology or soteriology. The world is against us because of our insistence on these truths.

Second, the four Genesis Truths are true, they lead to happiness, and they deserve a defense. If we are to love our neighbors, we have to see that ideas have consequences, and bad ideas have victims. There are human costs to getting human nature wrong. Look at the millions of unborn babies slaughtered in the womb, look at the kids growing up without dads or siblings, look at the women used and abused for sex, look at the men addicted to porn living in their mothers' basement. And now kids who don't even feel comfortable as boys or girls, and the damage being done to their bodies and minds by adults. We need to defend these truths.

And since he is here tonight, let me thank Bishop Burbidge for his exemplary leadership in opposing the two constitutional amendments on the ballot next week that violate the Laws of

Nature and Nature's God. This is the sort of authentic, distinctive Catholic witness that our country needs.

Third, we need to play the long game. Rome wasn't built in a day. Nor were any of the great cathedrals constructed in the lifetimes of the people who laid the cornerstone. My colleague Carl Trueman likes to point out that the workers who laid those cornerstones knew they'd never worship there, but they did this backbreaking work for the sake of the grand- and great-grandkids. This should be our time horizon. These truths will not be vindicated by the next election, or on any ten- or twenty-year plan. These are civilizational issues that will take generations to correct. We need to lay the cornerstones.

Our task at this moment is both ad intra and ad extra. To help the Church be the Church, in forming faithful disciples who joyfully live out the truth of the Gospel. And to be the salt of the earth, to transform all temporal reality in light of the Gospel. As we celebrate our 250th, it's a time to call our nation back not merely to the Laws of Nature and Nature's God, but to the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier who calls us to holiness and eternal fellowship in the Kingdom. That is our mission. That is the mission of CIU. And thank you all for being here to celebrate and support that high calling.