MSGR. JOSEPH QUINN: My friends, thank you so much. I’m Monsignor Quinn. I serve as the Vice President for Mission and Ministry here at Fordham. It is my great privilege, on behalf of our President, Father McShane, to extend a welcome to all of you on this magnificent day in May.

As you all know, now that the polar vortex is gone — at least we pray that it has disappeared — any day with sunshine has its own reason to celebrate, and we do celebrate this day and its goodness.

But today Fordham has added reasons to celebrate — in fact, two of them — gathered with us right here this evening. In a moment, they will be given formal introductions. My hope is to enlarge the welcome that we extend to Cardinal Kasper and to Professor Kaveny, both a precious gift to us this day as we gather at Fordham for this obviously much awaited program.

Just a few months ago, a very well-known alumnus of Fordham, Cardinal McCarrick, the Archbishop Emeritus of Washington, was in Rome. He was there for the conclave in late February. He was interviewed at the North American College. He spoke of Pope Francis and how and why he has so captured the imagination of the world in such a short period of time.

Said Cardinal McCarrick, “I think it is very simple. The papers, the reporters, are analyzing and re-analyzing him, but I think they are having trouble with Francis because he is very simple and straightforward — what you see is what you get, and what you hear comes from his heart.” How true. Said Cardinal McCarrick, “He was there to serve, and I think that is how he looks at the Church today. He is there to serve in every possible way.”

Why do I mention this tonight? Because all of this was said in the context of an interview that ultimately made its way to our guest of honor tonight. Cardinal McCarrick pointed out that, prior to the beginning of the conclave this year — it was a long session, with all of the cardinals from throughout the world — and he highlighted various different addresses, but in particular he spoke about Cardinal Casper’s presentation to the cardinals. Oh, he’s a diplomat, he wouldn’t say which was best. But he underscored what Cardinal Casper had to say, calling the Cardinal “a genius.” I wish you could see the face I’m looking at right now. [Laughter]
He went on to say, “I said to him the other day, ‘I have to put your name in to be a Doctor of the Church.’” I just told that to Cardinal Kasper before we began our program tonight, and he said, “I don’t know whether I have enough patience.” [Laughter] German wit.

But apparently, the Holy Father holds Cardinal Kasper in equally high regard, having acknowledged the writings of Cardinal Kasper, in particular the very book that we are here to discuss this evening. As the Steinfelds know, you can’t get a better endorsement than that.

As I ask you tonight, my friends, to offer a heartfelt Fordham and New York City welcome to a true servant and leader of the Church whose message is still timely, whose passion for God is still vibrantly alive fifty-seven years after he was ordained, twenty-five years a bishop this coming June, and whose presence alone is a gift to all of us tonight.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, welcome.

[Applause]

Of course, the added gift this night is that of a gifted legal scholar, moral theologian, and noted professor, Cathleen Kaveny, formerly famous at Notre Dame and now ensconced as newly famous at Boston College.

Although Father McShane was unable to join us tonight for the lecture, he did remind me that had he known that Professor Kaveny was considering a move from Notre Dame to Chestnut Hill, he would have detoured your journey right here to Manhattan and made certain that you landed, not in the capital [sic] of Massachusetts, but the capital of the world, right here in New York, as he loves to call it.

Said one famed Jesuit of this amazing professor, “She brings the rare combined competency of vigorously mastering law and ethics and teaches and writes with wit and brilliance.”

How readily one can understand why this night, this program, is so special to all of us.

Join me in extending an equally heartfelt Fordham and New York City welcome to Professor Cathleen Kaveny.

[Applause]

I ask them now to join us onstage as I introduce through our guests the fuller telling of their extraordinary lives’ journey.

Please welcome Dr. James McCartin, the Director of our Center on Religion and Culture here at Fordham.

[Applause]

JAMES McCARTIN: Thank you, Monsignor.

Welcome again to all of you, and particularly to our guests onstage.

Let me not go any further before expressing my gratitude on behalf of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture and on behalf of the entire University to the Russo Family, and especially to Bob and Cathy Russo, here tonight, for their generous support of this evening’s event. The Russo Family Lecture has been the context for some really
superior presentations and discussions in the past, but I think tonight it may hit a high
note.

Before we go any further from there, let me make you all aware of this evening’s giveaway. Before you leave this evening, you will be treated to a complimentary copy of Cardinal Kasper’s new book, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*.

But you have to follow directions. To avoid a traffic jam in the hallway outside, I would ask that, either from the 12th floor or one floor down, from the 11th floor, take the elevator to the plaza level. There will be some students workers there distributing one book per participant tonight. Please don’t neglect to stop off in the plaza level

I would also like all of you in the audience to take the time to write legibly your questions for our guest this evening. When you have written them, hold them up. A student worker will come and collect them and bring them forward. Toward the end of our program tonight Cathleen Kaveny will be delivering them on your behalf.

Also, please — this is essential — silence your electronic devices.

Since his priestly ordination in 1957, Cardinal Walter Kasper has been a parish priest, a teacher, a mentor, a diocesan bishop, a leading voice in ecumenism and inter-religious relations, and it is no exaggeration to say that he is among the most important theologians and church leaders today.

In addition to his very many published works of theology, Cardinal Kasper has been a key participant in some of the most sensitive and complicated deliberations in recent history — conclaves, yes; but also, in 1994 he was named co-chair of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission of Unity, which in 1999 issued the momentous Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, a statement in which two Christian communities that had been at odds for centuries formally acknowledged a series of shared theological principles.

Understandably, after that he became a cardinal in 2001 and St. John Paul XXII appointed him to the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, a position which not only made him the Church’s primary representative to Protestant and Orthodox churches, but also placed him in a special leadership role as the Church’s primary representative to the Jewish people.

He retired from this post in 2010. But to say that he is retired in the broader sense would be misleading. In February, at the request of Pope Francis, Cardinal Kasper took on the task of addressing his fellow cardinals in Rome with the purpose of providing a theological foundation and framework for the much anticipated, the much awaited, extraordinary Synod slated for this October, about which I suspect you will hear more later tonight.


Lest you think we have only one distinguished guest tonight — that has already been dispelled — allow me to introduce to you Professor Cathleen Kaveny, who is the Darald and Juliet Libby Professor of Theology and Law at Boston College. Before joining the Health Care Law Group at the Boston firm of Ropes & Gray in the early 1990s, she clerked for The Honorable John T. Noonan Jr. of the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, known to very many of you here tonight as one of our nation’s foremost Catholic intellectuals.

Thereafter, Professor Kaveny served on the faculties of theology and law at the University
of Notre Dame for eighteen full years.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I was twelve. [Laughter]

JAMES McCARTIN: For the past decade she has written a column for Commonweal magazine, where I think it is safe to say she can always be relied upon to parse issues of political, moral, and religious significance with what I can only think of as a stunning and revealing clarity. I am always — and this is not an exaggeration at all — very grateful after having read Cathleen Kaveny.

Professor Kaveny is the author of Law’s Pedagogy: Fostering Autonomy and Solidarity in American Society. I am told she is presently completing no less than three books, ranging from topics from religious rhetoric in the public square, to the relationship between Christian ethics and U.S. law, to the state of the ongoing culture wars in American life.

Now it is my distinct pleasure to hand things over to the distinguished Professor Kaveny.

[Applause]

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I first would like to say how delighted I am to be here, to be in New York, and to thank Monsignor and Professor McCartin for their tremendous welcome to me, and I think the Cardinal — I can tell from the beam on his face — feels the same way. It’s wonderful to be in this great city of New York at such a lovely event.

Spring has finally come to the East Coast. We are an Easter people indeed!

I first encountered Cardinal Kasper as a graduate student at Yale — not in person, but in his book on Jesus Christ — in a course that I took from Professor George Lindbeck, who was a Lutheran theologian who was one of the Protestant parities at the Second Vatican Council, and who worked with Cardinal Kasper on the Joint Declaration that we just heard about on faith and on grace and on the importance of Christian life. I can’t say what a tremendous privilege it is to now, many years later, have an opportunity to meet you as a whole person, as a believing Christian, and without a footnote attached to you, just a smile. [Laughter]

I think the personal aspect of things is where I would like to start. You have been a theologian, you wrote these tremendously erudite books of Christian theology; but you have also been a pastor, you have been a bishop for many years, you have worked in a parish.

The topic of mercy really bridges all of these areas. It involves dogmatic theology, it involves Church teaching; but it also involves practical living, living with people in their joys and their sorrows and in their challenges.

Could you just begin by telling us a little bit about your own path as a theologian and a pastor, and also let us know a little bit what being a pastor and a bishop did to shape how you think about theology that you didn’t know maybe when you were a doctoral student pursuing your first degree back in Germany?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: My biography goes back very far. I grew up before the Second World War. When I was about five years old, I told my mother, “Mom, I want to become a priest.” My mom answered, “You will never be a priest. You are too bad.” [Laughter]

I was born on the same day that the last democratic elections took place in Germany, in
1933, and my mother always said, “Certainly I did not vote for Hitler. On this day I was busy.” [Laughter]

I became a priest. I was first a priest in Stuttgart in a parish. But then I was called back to the university by the bishop. This was my vocation. But always during my studies and later on when I was a professor I went every Sunday to a parish to give sermons, to say Mass, and I went very often to the clinics in Tübingen, the university clinics. There was a certain chaplain there, and I learned a lot from these visits to very grave sick people at the university clinics. This was very helpful also for me.

Later on, when I became bishop, I knew what is a bishop; I could teach about it. But how to do it, to be a bishop, is a different question. I asked the [inaudible] of the Church, which were all famous theologians but also pastors of local communities, how they did it.

I found two points. One of them, they made synods — well, in a diocese you do not have synods — but to meet on a regular basis with the clergy in the different [inaudible]. This was very important for me to meet the clergy in [inaudible] and also with the lay ministry.

The second point was I went every Sunday to a parish to celebrate Mass and to meet people and to listen to people. When I was a professor, I learned a professor doesn’t only teach his students; he learns also from his students from their questions. And so a bishop does not only teach doctrine, he has to listen — the sensus fidelium, the sensitivity of the faithful, of their problems. He has to learn a lot. This became very important work for me.

Later on, when I was bishop, I was responsible for the relations of the German Bishops Conference to so-called Third World, and I traveled around the world, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. I was in many slums, in many dangerous situations, to meet really misery in this world. I think it is very important to be confronted with these very difficult situations. You cannot change them. You can help, you can bring a beam of hope to these people, not more.

So I think this term “mercy” became very important for me. Mercy, misericordia, it means cor, “heart” for the misery, for those who are in distress. I think that is very important. That is the background of this topic.

CATHLEEN KAIVENY: I think it is extremely important, because the topic we are talking about, the topic of the book, is something that is about misericordia, it is about the response of one human being to the suffering, to the needs, of other human beings.

In your book on mercy, you say this is such a central aspect of the Christian tradition, of our religious tradition. But you also have some strong words about how it has been treated. You say it has been “criminally neglected” as a topic in the theological world and in the world of the Church. Why do you think it has been criminally neglected, and why do you think it is so important that we bring it to its rightful prominence here and now?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: First of all, it is central already in the Old Testament. If you read the Psalms, always you find “God is merciful to his people,” and you find it all in the words of the prophets, and certainly it is the center of the message of Jesus Christ.

So I was shocked when I prepared a homily for retirement of a priest, and I wanted to write a homily about mercy, and it didn’t click. I could find nothing in the handbooks of theology, in the dictionaries — well, some quotations, but that was not helpful. So I started to search the fathers and the saints — the [inaudible] of the saints is very important — and came out this book.
But I think it is also important for our days, where we are coming from the 20th century, a very dark century — with two world wars, millions of dead people, destroyed Germany, also with their threat, and then two totalitarian systems. I was very often behind the Iron Curtain, in Eastern Germany, in Poland, and in other countries. I learned the book about the Soviet Union. It is described in this book how a world where no mercy is there looks about, a merciless world. It is not a human world.

So I think it is important for our times — and it is not only the last 20th century. I think the 21st century did not start much better since the 20th century ended.

CATHERINE KAVENY: I think that that is true, certainly with the attacks here in New York.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: The Twin Towers.

CATHERINE KAVENY: The Twin Towers. We are a 21st century that is starting with the need for mercy.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Yes, all these problems of terrorism, and you look to Syria, and now to Ukraine, other things. It’s a terrible world and people need mercy.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I think that’s right. What is so impressive about the way you articulate the case for mercy in the book is the bridge it builds between who God is and who human beings are. For me, I think the fundamental question that we have to answer, not just as theologians but as believers and as people, is really: Who is God; what is God like? Everything else really follows from that.

I was struck when I read your book, you start building a positive case for mercy by looking at Scripture and by look at who God is. You quote the Book of Exodus: “The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”

What I would like to ask you next is really: How does the notion of God in the Scriptures provide us with roots, with justification, for a vision of mercy that you might not find in, say, secular philosophy? What does the Bible give us in the vision of who God is that helps us pursue the path of mercy?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: God in all religions is a mystery. But in philosophy, classical philosophy, it remains an abstract supreme being, an absolute being. But also Thomas Aquinas tells us we can know that God is, but we do not know how and who He is. God is a mystery. He must reveal, communicate himself.

In the Bible, in the Book of Exodus, God is revealing himself as a burning bush. He is listening to the cries of His people. He is looking down at the misery of His people. He accompanies His people through the desert and then all through history. But then the people fall apart, become unfaithful. God is angry first. The Prophet Isaiah describes the anger of God, finished with His covenant, nothing more, and he persecutes people.

But mercy becomes victorious over justice and over the wrath of God, and God says, “I am merciful because I am not a mortal, not a human being. I am the only one holy.” And so God makes mercy as a self-definition of himself. He gives always a new start, a new beginning, a new chance towards the human beings. Also, when it becomes sinful and falls apart, God gives a new chance to those who convert, who cry, who ask Him.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: You make a very, I think, profound and bold claim in this book about God and mercy. You are arguing that mercy really is the name of God. Mercy is, he
goes so far as to say, the justice that is idiosyncratic to God. When we want to understand who God is, we don’t start with justice and kind of fit a little mercy, kind of like little flowers, around the edge. We start with mercy.

Could you explain why you think it is so important to start with mercy?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: I found the answer to this from Thomas of Aquinas. Thomas of Aquinas was not a Thomist. [Laughter]

He was very clear about the teaching of the Bible. He says mercy is the justice of God. He does not relate to an order of human beings; He relates to himself. Mercy is the faithfulness of God to his own being as love. God is love. Therefore, mercy is a mirror, a reflection of God’s own being, and in the mercy of God we can participate in the love of God. That is the most important. Therefore, for Thomas Aquinas, mercy is the most fundamental and central and the first attribute of God. God is merciful as a mirror of His own being, to be love.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: To talk about God in the Christian tradition, we also have to start talking about God’s activity in the second person of the Trinity, in Jesus Christ. I read, as I said, when I was a graduate student, your book on Jesus Christ. I see deep continuities between your very, very theological early work on the centrality of Jesus and the role that Jesus plays in your articulation of mercy, especially as it is seen in the Christian tradition.

One of the things that struck me as very important — it could be controversial; I happen to agree with you on this — is you take very seriously the notion of atonement, Jesus’s dying and atoning for our sins on the cross, a type of self-emptying love, but also a sacrifice that in some sense paid the price for the sins of humanity.

Now, some theologians will say, “We don’t want to do that. That’s a little too barbaric. What kind of a God would do that to his own child, or her own child?”

But I see it as also paying respect to the deep injustices that we have to account for so as not to have a cheap mercy.

Could you say something more about how you see Jesus’s activity on Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday as revealing something about who God is as a whole?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: It is not easy to explain it in two phrases. It all depends how atonement is understood. It is not in the sense of a God who wants punishment [inaudible] and He wants conversions[?], and all this. This is a bit of wrong understanding.

But some theologians interpret this God’s teaching as Jesus is [inaudible] for us only in the sense of solidarity. Of course, God is in solidarity with us.

But our deepest need and our deepest poverty[?] is not that we are not free; it’s death. We are captives of death and how we can be freed from death? Death is against the deepest desire of human beings. One wants life and wants full life. Here only the Lord of life and death can help us. And Jesus enters — God enters in Jesus being in death; but, because He was God, death could not hold him.

So the death of Jesus was the death of death, as the Easter liturgy is saying very often. So he died in our place, that he kept our [inaudible], he became like man, he ended up in death, but in doing so he freed us from this captivity in death in the deepest understanding.
We need a new understanding of atonement and of all those things. But I think in this deeper sense it is very, very important. It is not only social solidarity, social needs — they are of course. But the deepest distress, problem, is death. Here Jesus along with God could free us from death and from the captivity of death.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Freeing us from the bonds of sin as well.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Death, as the Scripture is saying to us, is a consequence of sins, alienation from God, alienation from who is life. Therefore, we have fallen into the captivity of death and Jesus frees us. But not only hearing us a little bit and it’s all okay. No, he took over the consequences of sin. He was not sinful, but he took the consequences of sin. And so He overcomes this power of death. I think it is very important today. The powers of death are very powerful in our time.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Yes, they are.

One more theological question before we get on to some of the practical questions. One of the areas where we see the tension between mercy and justice and about God is actually in the notion of hell, damnation, the Last Judgment, sending people to final damnation.

There have been some theologians, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, who have expressed the hope, at least, that all humanity could eventually be saved through Jesus Christ.

That hope for universal salvation was not met, one might say, with universal approval by all of the theological community. There were other theologians who said, “We cannot go down that path because that will trivialize human choice to do good or evil, that will level the people who have lived good lives and the people who have lived bad lives, and that will simply destroy verses in Scripture where it looks like there is going to be a final judgment with teeth, so to speak.”

At the same time, I myself — I am interested in those concerns, but I myself am very sympathetic to Balthasar’s hope, because the idea of hell as unending torture of a finite creature seems to me to be something that is, in a way, almost unworthy of a God of love, that God would go down there and try to teach those people what the truth is, what beauty is, what goodness is; and then, if it didn’t work, explain another way to get repentance.

So I am trying to move toward a hope for universal salvation. I was wondering if you can give me some ideas about how to think about this in a way.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: You did explain it very well. I am very much [?] in favor of Hans Urs von Balthasar and I am not in favor of the theologians of the 19th century. He knew the temperature of the hell. [Laughter]

Now, it is clear in the New Testament that God wants the salvation of all men, of every man, and He wants it. But God, on the other hand, respects the freedom of the human being. He does not impose His salvation on anybody, but He respects it. Therefore, He must be aware that we can go astray in our lives, that we can miss the final goal of our existence.

But on the other hand, God offers his love to everybody, and often in ways we do not know. Therefore, we have reason to hope that God may reach the heart of everybody in ways we do not know. We can hope, but we cannot know whether it is.

Therefore, when Jesus speaks about hell, he does say we have to take it seriously. It is a
strong warning. You can go [inaudible], you can go astray. But it is a warning, and you have to decide, you have to make the choice.

But you have the hope — and it is not only individual hope; we can also hope for the other. We can offer a prayer for all humankind. It is important to help with the salvation of other people.

When I was a young man, I heard on the radio about the death of Stalin. Everybody would say, “But he killed millions of people, he is a criminal par excellence, he goes immediately to hell.” Then on the radio it was told that Pope Pius XII, when he was informed about this, went in his chapel and prayed for the soul of Stalin. This means he wasn't [inaudible] that he goes to hell. It is meaningful to pray even for such a person.

Well, we do not know, but God — die means to fall into the hands of a merciful God. So we can have this hope for everybody and for all. But we are responsible, not only for our own salvation, but also for the salvation of the other by our prayers, our good deeds, and our missionary work at the same time. It is a deep mystery of salvation that the salvation of other people depends often on prayers and good works of the other.

I think in this sense I am totally in agreement with Balthasar. This does not mean that there is no hell — we do not know it. There are others who say, “Well, hell exists but it’s void” [?]. That is a stupid position of course.

Balthasar does not say such a thing. He appeals for hope and for the solidarity of hope and the responsibility of the Christian for the salvation of mankind.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I think the problem, too, is sometimes the idea of hell may be something that we should hold over ourselves, holding ourselves responsible before a just and a merciful God, but we should not try to populate it with other people, particularly the ones we meet in the blogosphere. [Laughter]

What you just said about depending upon the prayers of other people I think is an extremely distinct part, and beautiful part, of the Catholic tradition. We see ourselves as upheld by the communion of saints. Even someone who has no one to pray for them on this Earth has the communion of saints to pray for them.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: In every Eucharist we do it.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: In every Eucharist.

In your book, also you talked about, in the last chapter, the Blessed Virgin Mary as the sign and, in a way, the supreme exemplar of the virtue of mercy.

When I reread your book, a line caught me. You talked about being a little boy in Germany and the bombs raining down on you. There was an image in Germany of Mary being the cloak, of putting the cloak over the people she is trying to protect. You saw this as an image that was very, very important to you as a little boy who needed a cloak against the bombs.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Oh yes. Every night we needed this. We were very attentive to this prayer “Mary, spread the cloak over us this night.” Every evening we prayed this.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: “Mary, spread the cloak over us.” It is truly beautiful.

I think what you say about Mary and mercy is true. She is so important as a sign of mercy
and as an instantiation of mercy in the Catholic tradition.

At the same time, there might be a couple of questions someone might ask about Mary.

I am channeling a little bit George Lindbeck, my Lutheran professor, in the back of my head, who said, “If we emphasize Mary and mercy so much, aren’t we in a way giving the wrong impression that the mercy of God and Jesus Christ isn’t sufficient? Is Mary like the mother who sneaks you in the back door so that your just and angry father won’t get mad at you?” That’s one question.

Then the second question — I’ll let you address them all at the same time — would be: we have a very complex world, and men and women are individuals and they are not just character traits. So we don’t want to have, at least it seems to me, a world where you have God/male/justice/objectivity ranged against, on the other hand, Mary/female/mercy/subjective feeling. While there is a complementarity between men and women, what that consists in is very complicated on a human level and doesn’t translate perfectly to the relationship between God and Mary in soteriology.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: There are a whole bunch of questions there.

I will say, first, we cannot start from a wrong description or conception of God, that God is just only and Mary is a merciful mother. Mary is an icon of God’s mercy. She is not the merciful in herself. She has all from God and gives this to us. She does not substitute, is not a complementary person to God or to Jesus Christ. But she exemplifies that God’s mercy goes through human mercy, that we are, in a certain sense, all — not only Mary in a unique sense — mediators of God’s mercy.

That is also a beautiful sign of God’s mercy. He does not impose all this to us. He uses this young woman, or girl — she was probably very young. He wanted her, yes, for our redemption. It’s the beauty of the Gospel. It’s the mercy of God. He wants to have this handmaiden, servant of God.

It’s not an angry God and then Mary tunes it a little bit down. It’s a very bad, wrong description.

But then we come to the questions of gender. I am against the specificities — women are emotional and men are more intellectual. I know many stupid men and very bright girls. This does not work in this way. [Laughter]

But on the other hand, He took one which was considered at this time a poor people and a weak people, and they were not equal, men and women, at this time. He took the weaker one and the poorer one. She was a woman from the people, very simple people. Nazareth was a little village at this time. Nobody knew about Nazareth. He took this girl — young woman, whatever — and He wanted to say, “Yes, this person is for our salvation.” It had nothing to do with gender or non-gender.

I think, of course, Mary is not only for mercy; she is also for justice, because when you read the Magnificat — there is a wonderful explanation of the Magnificat by Martin Luther, wonderful. In his younger years, he wrote this, and I read in a Lutheran catechism: Mary is not only Catholic, she’s also evangelical, because she occurs in the evangelical in the Gospel. Therefore, Mary is Magnificat: “He throws the mighty from their thrones and gives power to the powerless.” So there is also justice.

Mercy and justice are not in contraposition. Justice is, I would say, the minimum we do to other people, it is the minimum — human rights and what is his or her own. Mercy is the completion; it’s the fullness of what we can give to the other people. Therefore, Mary
is an icon of mercy and is also an icon of justice.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY**: She throws the mighty down from their thrones and sends the rich away empty.

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER**: She doesn’t. God does it.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY**: That’s true. She talks about God doing that, yes.

So there is a complementarity in your view?

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER**: Of course.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY**: And especially in Mary, as well, between mercy and justice.

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER**: This has nothing to do with gender, with men and women, and so on. It’s God and human beings.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY**: God and human beings. So you’re not making a claim about gender here?

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER**: No, no, no. There’s another question we have to discuss for a long time.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY**: No, no, okay.

We are going to switch to a little bit more of an image question here of mercy. We have plenty of icons of justice. The most prominent icon of justice is the woman blindfolded with two scales — impartial, not looking at people, weighing things carefully.

If you were asked by the most prominent sculptor of our time to create an image, a statute, for mercy, what would it look like?

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER**: I would tell you the parable of Jesus of the Good Samaritan, who bent down in the dirty street to a powerless man who had fallen among robbers. Yet who cared for this man and who bent down in the dirt of the street? The priest and the Levites? No. But he bent down, the Samaritan. He was a Samaritan. A Samaritan was not a true Jew as far as — he was a semi-heretic. But this was the man who does this work, bending down to people in the street. And how many people we have overnight on the street and also people who are suffering? He bent down. But we cannot do it with everybody. Of course nobody can do it.

But Jesus was asked, “Who is my neighbor?” — Who? He does not give a definition. He tells this story. The story tells us to whom it is needed, who needs, in this situation, my help, that is my neighbor. I cannot help everybody, billions of people. This must be an excuse — “I cannot help everybody; I help nobody.”

No. To whom I give what he needs, this person I have to help. That is, for me, the best part of what is merciful.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY**: So it would be a statue of the Good Samaritan?

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER**: Oh, yes.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY**: Or a painting?
CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: A painting or a statue.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Even a movie.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: A movie.

I think on the Prodigal Son. The parable is not about a prodigal son; the parable is about a merciful father. He expects his son, goes to meet his son. This tells us God expects us, God goes to meet us, that in death, we are expected by the merciful God, we fall in his hands. It is a wonderful image also of what mercy is all about.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Two movies.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Yes, two.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: And when you talk about the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan, what is evident in those parables is that there is new life for the son, there is new life for the man who is picked up from the dust and taken care of.

When I went through your book, I was trying to come up with a definition of mercy. I realized that it was really in images, rather than in a simple definition that I found “mercy.” These are images that you gave:

“Despite every human fidelity, God concerns himself with people again and again, and then forgives them and gives them another chance, even though they had deserved punishment.”

“In his mercy, God repeatedly creates new space for life and blessing.”

You talk about new beginnings, “life and living space anew.”

“Mercy is God’s option for life.”

And my favorite one is this: “The story of Jesus bursts the parameters that had been confined to the people of Israel and opens itself to the entirety of humanity.”

When I put those images together, you have the sense that justice freezes something at a moment, at a true moment, a right measure — this is how much this weighs now; this is the correspondence between the deed and the punishment; this is what you do with your allotted social service — and that what mercy does is breaks through barriers to create the possibility for a new life and a second chance.

Do I have you right on that? Is that what you are getting at?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Yes, you are right.

I cannot give a definition in a formal sense. But you can say mercy is a faithfulness, God to Himself, to His essence, which is love. God is faithful to his love. But love is not only compassion, a positive act, because love is always creative. Therefore, God is creative in His mercy. He gives new life, a new situation, a new chance. He creates also a new chance. Easter, the resurrection of the Lord, is the new creation. It’s the “big bang” of the new creation, Easter.

There cannot be any situation for a human being to fall into a hole and there is no way out. That is impossible for God. Therefore, God gives a new chance, gives a new way out. I think we can [inaudible] that God gives a new chance, a new life. He bursts all the
captivities in which we are and also the parameters also in which we think. He is very innovative. He gives new hope to situations. That’s mercy. It is a creative activity of God.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: A creative activity of God.

Now, I don’t know if this says something about one half of my chosen professions, but I have talked to some people — I remember having a conversation with a lawyer, a very good man, a brilliant man, who was a wonderful pillar of his community.

He really had a couple of big problems with the parable of the Prodigal Son, saying, “What about the older son? It’s not fair to him” — and especially the parable of the laborers in the vineyard: “You mean I worked all day in the hot sun, digging this sod and doing what I was told to do, and this guy comes in when the sun is down and works in the shade and gets just as much as I do?” “Therefore,” my lawyer friends said to me, “mercy is unjust. Never mind the younger son or God. What about the good older son? What about the people who were in the vineyards at the very beginning?”

How would you respond to that very common challenge against mercy, namely the challenge that it is unjust?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: This means, as a last consequence, “because I cannot help everybody, I cannot help one single person. I cannot help everybody. I have to give mercy to whom I meet on the street” [inaudible] another one.

This mercy is not in contraposition to justice. First, justice is needed for everybody, it’s clear. Mercy [sic], as I said already, is the minimum we have to do, and mercy is for us the maximum we can do. Therefore, mercy does not abolish, does not eliminate, justice. This would be a cheap mercy, to eliminate justice.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I’m going to ask you to put your pastor hat on and pretend that I am my friend the lawyer, who says, “I came in at 10:00 in the morning and I broke my back all day, and I got a hundred dollars from the master. These guys came in, they had a glass of water and they picked up a little bit of weeds in the shade, and they also got a hundred dollars from the master. I’m really resentful because they got as much as I did.”

If you were the pastor to a person complaining like that, what would you say?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: I would say not every human being is the same and not everybody has the same money. There are rich and there are poor people. Everybody should have what is necessary for life, what is necessary for a life with human dignity. Everybody should have that.

But God can be generous to one. We have saints who are full of grace. I’m not a saint; I have a little bit less. But is it unjust?

At our end, it is also a question of the interpretation of the parables. The parables you cannot take every detail. You have to interpret the parables from the very center, from the goal that they tell you, and not to explain all the details. It’s a whole interpretation of the parables, as the biblical scholars tell us.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Yes, the parables are the hardest part.

So you would tell this person, my law professor friend, that he was not done an injustice simply because somebody else, who may have needed it just as much, got the same amount of money from the person who hired him?
CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Yes. But He gave to everybody what was due. Of course, it says, you can [inaudible] world. A child is born in a more richer family, in a good family, and another child in a poor family. You can say it’s unjust for God, but it is the world. To make everything the same would be also very boring.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: That way lies madness in a way, too, trying to equalize everything.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: You cannot equalize everything and you cannot equalize every situation. We have to give justice to everybody. Some have more — well, it’s good. And also the lawyer cannot change it. [Laughter]

CATHLEEN KAVENY: They like to think they can.

I am going to give you as my other challenge of justice to mercy a case that I gave to my students. For many years, I have taught a seminar on mercy and justice. One of the segments we look is the relationship between retributive justice — punishment — and clemency.

This is a story, an actual story, that involves Pope Saint John Paul II. In 1999, John Paul II visited St. Louis, Missouri. Missouri is a state that has the death penalty. They were about to carry out an executive of a man named Darrell Mease. They postponed it because the Pope was coming. The Pope said to the governor, Mel Carnahan, “Please, governor, pardon — not let out of jail, but commute the sentence to life without parole of Mr. Mease.”

They were upon the podium together. The governor, who has full power to do this, actually pardoned the death sentence and commuted it to life imprisonment of Mr. Mease, who is still in prison to this day.

Then the guy behind him comes up for execution. In the meantime, there was an uproar because here was the governor giving in to the Pope’s request. The governor is somebody who’s not Catholic. The governor claims that he is pro-capital punishment. So this man who followed Mr. Mease had no chance of getting any kind of clemency and was, in fact, put to death.

The only problem is, as the newspaper stories at the time said, there was real doubt about this other man’s actual innocence, where there was no doubt about Darrell Mease’s guilt. It was a terrible crime; he killed three people, including a paraplegic teenager, with a shotgun blast. He got clemency and the other one didn’t.

The question I ask my students is: Should the Pope have said, not “pardon Mr. Mease or commute the sentence of Mr. Mease,” but “pick the most deserving man of mercy and commute that sentence”? Was what happened unjust to the man who followed Mr. Mease? Roy Roberts was his name. That’s the final exam question, Cardinal. [Laughter]

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: First of all, mercy and clemency are not the same. It is different.

The second point — well, the Pope was confronted with this concrete case. He did not know who is the next guy in the line. He cannot know and he cannot buy clemency for everybody in this state. This was a concrete case he was confronted with. And he did this act to pray for clemency for this man.

It’s like the man of the Good Samaritan. He makes this man fall under robbers. There were many others also falling under robbers and there was no Good Samaritan. But the
Good Samaritan could only say, “I cannot help the other ones, I can only help this one.” This is not possible.

So the Pope did what he could do in his situation, and not to ask about the whole line of others which are there.

I would also say that the Catholic Church today is against the death penalty. That’s also a very important point. We are not in favor any longer of the death penalty, which the Pope also said. Therefore, he pleaded for all these people who are in line, because the death penalty is a problem for us today as Christians.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: One more question from me and then we will move to questions from the audience.

You talked about how God’s mercy means nobody can be stuck in a hole that they can never get out of it. You have also talked in your book about the importance of the Church being seen as a dispenser of mercy, as being merciful herself.

We are in the middle of a discussion — not me, but you are in the middle of a discussion — about how those insights can be applied to the situation of divorced and remarried Catholics who would like to be able to accept the sacrament of the Eucharist, to receive Holy Communion.

I was wondering if you could say a few words about that.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Yes, that’s my main argument. God can give mercy to such people. Also Pope Benedict said it several times. These people can receive the so-called “spiritual communion.” They can be in communion with Jesus Christ. This means they cannot be in a situation of grave sin if they are in communion with Christ. It’s excluded.

Therefore, when God can act in this way also with such divorced and married people who have the desire for the sacraments — that’s my question also — why the Church cannot? The Church has defined, more or less, itself, in the Second Vatican Council as a sacrament of God’s grace. It means an instrument of God’s grace, also a sacrament of God’s mercy. Therefore, the Church cannot say, “God [inaudible] but we cannot be as Pontius Pilate.”

That’s my main question for this point. The Creed is another argument. We say, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” Every sin can be forgiven — even a murder, even an abortion; all this can be forgiven — while this other error, or whatever it is that is sinful, cannot be forgiven?

I cannot understand this. Therefore, my argument is that they must have access, first of all, to the sacrament of penance, this absolution. Of course I must convert and say this is all, because it’s not cheap grace without conversion.

But then why I cannot give absolution to such a person? I did not correspond with what I have promised and the promise of God that is this task. I failed to realize my promise. But now God forgives this intellectual puzzle [phonetic].

And then, the absolution is access also to Holy Eucharist. That is my argument in favor of the change — not of dogma; dogma cannot be changed. I do not change the dogma of the insolubility of marriage. No, this remains. But a concrete practice, a concrete discipline, of the Church in such situations I think could be changed.

This was my proposal to the consistory of the cardinals, and I hope that the Synod will
discuss it and take it seriously. I think the most in favor of this proposal was the Pope himself.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: That’s wonderful.

I think one of the most important things you said in your little book on this is that law, canon law, always has to be interpreted in light of the ultimate purpose of God’s community, which is the salvation and reconciliation of souls. So the law can’t be just a free-range —

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: We have to take seriously the word of God about [inaudible], that’s clear. They cannot abolish it and we cannot find a solution against it. But you have to interpret this word of Jesus in the whole context of his message of mercy. Otherwise, we make a legalistic interpretation of it. We have to interpret it also with the hermeneutic, as we say in theology, in the interpretation of mercy.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Wonderful.

Thank you very much for answering my questions.

[Applause]

Now I’m afraid you are going to be getting some even more challenging questions from the assembly here.

Here’s the first question: “It would appear that in the universe of theological controversy feminist theologians — people like Elizabeth Johnson and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza — are regarded as particularly suspect. Why do you think this has been so? Are there feminist theologians whose work you have admired? And who might be a feminist theologian you have especially learned from?”

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: I know both. I know very well Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. She knew her husband in my first lecture in Münster. This is a long time ago. Since this time I know her very well, and I esteem her also.

I know Elizabeth Johnson from my first day in Catholic University in Washington, D.C., when I was a guest professor there in the 1980s.

I esteem both. But I think they are suspected by some people in Rome, that’s true. But I also am considered suspect by people. I cannot help them. [Laughter]

But the Pope, when he spoke about my book from the window the other day, a cardinal, an old cardinal, came to him and said, “Holy Father, you cannot do this! There are heresies in this book!”

The Pope said, “This enters in one ear and goes out the other.” [Laughter]

There are some people who will never — but there are different kinds of feminist theology. I will not now defend everything that they are doing, but it’s a tendency in present-day theology. They have to seek their way. And, of course, some critique is always allowed in the academic field. But the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith sometimes sees some things a little bit narrow.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Maybe the Pope will blurb Elizabeth Johnson’s next book.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: I do not know. But I think that [inaudible] a
tragedy. We will overcome also such things.

Also, Saint Thomas Aquinas was suspected by the bishop of his time. He condemned Thomas Aquinas also. She is in good company. [Laughter]

CATHLEEN KAVENY: This is a similar question, but I’ll ask it, because I think it’s going at a different angle: “What do you think, Cardinal, regarding the head of the Doctrine of the Faith coming down so hard on the Leadership Conference of Women Religious regarding their honoring the work of Sister Elizabeth Johnson?”

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: I do not like to speak about another cardinal. Let’s leave him in peace.

I am not very well informed about all this controversy of this women’s leadership. I think, in the meantime, it became a serious discussion, a dialogue between them. This is needed also in the Church.

If we have a problem with this leadership of women’s orders, then we have to discuss with them, have a dialogue with them, an exchange of ideas. Perhaps they have to change something. Perhaps also the Congregation has a little bit to change its mind. It is a normal way of doing in the Church.

I am for dialogue. Dialogue presupposes other different positions. The Church is not a monolithic unity. Yesterday I heard a sermon about to catch a fish, that there are big fish and small fish and ill fish and good fish.

So also the Church. It’s a very interesting company, the Church. We should be in [inaudible] also in dialogue with each other. I hope all this controversy will end in a good, peaceful, and meaningful dialogue.

[Applause]

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Here’s another question: “Recent popes have expressed deep concern about liberation theology, but Pope Francis seems to be more open. Is he more willing to accept a theology rooted in the experience of the poor or is his concern simply pastoral? Your idea of mercy seems very close to the ideas of liberation theologians. What do you think about that?”

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Of course Christ came to announce good news to the poor. The poor are the [inaudible] you can start from the needs of the poor. The [inaudible] can look for themselves, but the poor need firstly our heart.

But there is not one liberation theology. There are different liberation theologies. Some of them the Holy Father is very in favor of. There is also an Argentinean form of liberation theology.

Also, already I spoke with John Paul II. John Paul II said, “No, no. Rome was [inaudible] need a liberation theology, but I do not want to mix up liberation theology with Marxism.” He added, “What Marxism is all about I know by experience, and this I do not want for the people in Latin America.”

It was not that liberation theology as such was condemned, but some elements, some aspects, which mixed up too much liberation theology with Marxism. I think this is a serious problem.

But Pope Francis is favorable to some tendencies of liberation theology. With some
others he has also his problems.

This is also my personal — I know some people of this liberation — Gustavo Gutiérrez I know very well since some decades of years. He is a very faithful Catholic theologian. He was the founder, so to say, of liberation theology. He was never content.

But other people can think “This Marxist approach makes problems, and this is not good for the Church. Pope John Paul II was right to say, ‘I do not want Marxism for the people of Latin America because I have experienced what it’s all about.’” And I think that is also similarly the problem of Pope Francis.

Now, in the meantime, all this problem with Marxism has softened down since the breakdown of the Iron Curtain and of the [inaudible].

CATHLEEN KAVENY: So it’s all particulars, there is no general answer to liberation theology?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: No, no, it's not general, because liberation and freedom is a fundamental term in the Holy Scripture. We cannot take out — it's our issue, it’s our topic, our message, to be for freedom and for liberation of people.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: We are switching from South America now to the United States: “In the United States, mercy seems to be more characteristic of political support for public welfare and programs like assistance for the poor in housing, food, and income. Do you think those people who would oppose these programs are rejecting the idea of mercy as you conceive of it?”

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: No. They are realizing this idea of mercy to give houses, to give vestments, to give food to people. It’s mercy. It’s practiced as concrete mercy. They are not opposed to this.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I think the question is more that there are some people who are opposing health care, universal health care, or aid in housing or income support or programs of that sort. Some of those people are Christians. Would you say that the Christians who oppose these programs of providing food, health care, and education are opposed to mercy?

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Oh, yes, they are. I can't understand such Christians. I can't understand such Christians —

[Applause]

You have to do what you can do for these poor people, to give them housing, to give them food and income support and all these things. For us in Germany, this is absolutely usual, it's normal. This is social work. I think it's imperative, it's obligatory, for a Christian to help poor people. And those who are opposed, I do not see how they understand the message of Christ.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I don't think there is a way of topping that one. [Laughter]

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: I do not enter now into discussions in this country and all these political things I do not know so precisely. But in general this is my position.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I wouldn’t expect Fox News to be asking you to be a guest anytime soon. [Laughter]
CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: The doctrine of the Church is the doctrine of the Church. They should read the encyclicals of the popes, beginning with Leo XIII, and all the popes to Pope John Paul II. They say a lot about these things, to care for social justice and to help the poor. That's Church doctrine.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Yes.

“How do we, as the Church community of the kingdom of God, begin addressing the moral teaching concerning liberal capitalism at a time when economic inequalities are becoming greater in the United States and in the world?”

I think what the question wants to ask you is: What are your thoughts about global capitalism and the role of mercy? You talked about it in your book, about how the capitalist system and the way the world is now organized is really increasing the need for mercy.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: First of all, we should define what is the capitalism system. As I understand it — I'm not an expert on it — it is when money is all, you get money, money, and you step over corpses.

This cannot be a Christian issue. I was in many countries of the so-called Third World, in the Southern Hemisphere, where it is the case that this global capitalism has a very bad effect on many people.

The Pope knows it also. He was often in the slums of Buenos Aires. I was in many slums in Latin America and also in Asia. This has very negative effects.

We in the wealthy countries of the North have to reflect what we are doing to millions of people — to starving, dying children — with this system. We should do our best to change, to some degree, this system which exploits other people. We cannot do it as Christians. It's a question of our Christian conscience.

Not for socialism, for communism, for another heresy. But capitalism has this effect; something does not function.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: One of the points you made in your book I think is very apropos to this question. You said Catholic social teaching isn’t an eternal plan; it’s always responding to the needs and the signs of the times. We have to make sure we understand what capitalism is, and is doing now, and respond to that, and not freeze ourselves in 1890.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Yes. But if you come to the Third World, come to Latin America, you see the effects of it. We cannot live with it. We have to take seriously the needs of these people. Two-thirds of our Catholic brothers and sisters are living in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a problem for us.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: So these are brothers and sisters in the faith.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: In the faith, but for every human being, of course. But also for us as Catholics, we must be concerned about it because these are our brothers and sisters in faith, and also for other people.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: We are going from the question of mercy, now pushing back from the side of justice. So this question reads this way: “It seems that a world without mercy would result in harshness; but a world without justice would result in anarchy, chaos, and possible extinction. Therefore, when faced with a choice between mercy and
justice, shouldn’t men and women lean toward justice; and, if so, how do we reconcile this with our desire to imitate Jesus God in his mercy and love?”

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** There is no choice between justice and mercy. That is a wrong contraposition. It would be a very cheap, mercy which is not also justice. Justice and mercy are complementary. As I said already twice, justice is a minimum of mercy we do to the other people. There is no choice. Of course, this would be very cheap and a misunderstanding to [inaudible] mercy in contraposition with justice. There’s no choice.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** So a mercy that violates justice is a false mercy?

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** Mercy, yes, if it violates justice, of course it is false. Mercy is also an eye-opener to see a new situation where the rules of justice up to now have no solution. It opens the eye and gives us also the force to engage now, to find also rules of justice. The rules of justice are also not eternal; they have to adjust to a new situation, and merciful people see a new situation.

Also a just society — and we are proud to live in a state of right in northern countries — cannot survive without volunteers. Volunteers in the parishes and in society are needed. But the volunteer is not — it’s not a question of justice. He is not obliged to do this. He does it for other reasons, for reasons of mercy. Therefore, also a just society needs people of mercy. Look to our volunteers. Nothing would function in our society without them.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** Without mercy.

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** Without mercy, yes.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** Here is a question about Pope Saint John Paul II. The question reads: “Pope John Paul II wrote the magnificent Encyclical ‘Rich in Mercy.’ Does your book repeat or go beyond his work? And is the problem of mercy not merely a theoretical problem, but a practical problem, one of practical action?”

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** It is both. It is a theoretical problem of theology, which has neglected mercy, so therefore a theoretical problem; and it’s, of course, also a practical problem. We have to do it. We cannot only talk with our lips about mercy. We have to realize there is much we can. So both belong together. Mercy without practice would be a void ideology. It has to be practiced.

But it has also to be reflected in a good way, how it relates to justice, how it relates to truth and to Church doctrine. It’s a question of reflection and also a theoretical problem, in order that mercy remains healthy and doesn’t [inaudible] mercy. So they are both interrelated, theoretical reflection and practical realization.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** Okay.

Here’s a theoretical question — we have talked about practical: “What exactly is ‘cheap mercy’ or ‘cheap grace’ or — the phrase that I love most from your book — ‘fabric-softener mercy’?”

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** That’s the English translation. I do not know how it is formulated in German. [Laughter]

“Cheap grace” is a famous phrase of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the great witnesses in [inaudible]. He was a Lutheran, but he was a martyr. He spoke about cheap grace. It means grace without conversion, grace without penance, grace without willingness to
cooperate with God. So this is cheap grace.

I would say cheap grace would also be mercy without justice.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** All right. Now we’re moving into the very practical. Your head must be spinning, because I went from very theoretical to very practical:

“As a professor now on the verge of grading final exams and papers, I am feeling a great tension between practicing mercy toward my students and seeking justice. As a former professor, perhaps you can offer me some advice.” [Laughter]

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** You should be good to your students, of course, and bad when you take exams from them.

But take an example, a practical example. There is a student of medicine, and he knows nothing in the exam. It would not be very merciful to upgrade him, because it would be very bad for the ill people he has to serve later on.

So there’s also a responsibility that people will become [inaudible] can in a responsible way realize their professions, and also to be only merciful in the full sense toward one who studies theology, but doesn’t preach afterwards. It’s my responsibility also, when you take an exam, that he is well prepared. It’s merciful for the people who he has to serve later on.

So it’s not so easy, the whole question. But I have to be just. I have to be benevolent to the people who come to the exams, but also just. I cannot [inaudible] since I have to do a [inaudible] semester and come again. [Laughter]

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** I teach first-year law students contract law, and they are very nervous about their grades as well.

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** Yes, it belongs to an exam.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** It does. But I always say to my students, “I don’t only see you standing before me. I see the little old lady that you will be representing in two and a half years. It’s not just a question of you; it’s a question of that person.”

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** Yes.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** Justice and mercy are social.

I think we have one more question. We’ll go back to the theology. You’ve been spun around like on a ride at an amusement park — from very practical, to American politics, to global capitalism. Now we’re going to go back — I think this is our last question — to, in a way, where we started, to God:

“Why would a God of love demand atonement? Why would the sacrifice of Jesus not mean he decided to follow the will of God and to show men how to face the evils of the world and transcend them in order to draw people to God? Thirdly, why do you not clearly differentiate between compassion and mercy?”

Those are three questions, I think.

**CARDINAL WALTER KASPER:** I’ve forgotten the first now.

**CATHLEEN KAVENY:** Why don’t we just answer the first one and call it an evening?
“Why would a God of love demand an atonement?”

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Atonement, as I already tried to explain, is not a punishment, but God wants to cleanse our love. To acknowledge or to recognize that I went astray, that I made an error, is not so easy. It may suffer in me. But this suffering is cleansing my soul. To have failed in love — suffering is a cleansing by God, so then I am ready to love God more. That is atonement, not a punishment or such a thing.

There is also a certain discipline we need as human beings. We need a certain discipline in our lives. Also the Christian life needs a certain discipline. We have to realize [inaudible]. So atonement has a deeper sense, to mature in the love of God.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: To mature in the love of God.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Of God, yes. And to practicalize it concretely. That is atonement in a deeper sense, not to punish people.

But to mature is also sometimes a little bit difficult. Of course, suffering is also human life because when we go through suffering we become more mature and more wise.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: And more able to appreciate God’s love.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Appreciate God’s love, yes. We understand God deeper and so forth.

Many people I met in the clinics of Tübingen. It was a very hard time in the clinics. But it was also a time of human maturation in this time and growing in love and growing also in your own humanity.

This is atonement in a deeper sense. It’s often, of course, misunderstood as a punishment — also in Church practice. In the past we made many errors. But it has also acquired a deeper and more profound meaning, mature in God’s love, mature in love also among human beings. It’s not always the easiest thing. We have to neglect our bad sides and give up some practices to grow up in love.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: Grow up in love.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: Sigmund Freud was not a Church father, not at all. But Sigmund Freud said there is no character without sacrifice, because a character needs to be oriented to higher values, and we have to sacrifice also other values. Otherwise, we do not reach any character. That’s also a human order, and it is similar in the Christian life.

CATHLEEN KAVENY: I would like to thank you for a wonderful conversation. I am so honored and delighted to have had the chance to both read your book and to talk with you about it.

I would like to ask your fellow conversation partners to thank you for spending this time with us.

[Applause]

This was fun.

JAMES McCARTIN: I think you are probably all glad you came.
Thank you, Cardinal Kasper. Thank you, Professor Kaveny. I ask us all to thank too the Russo family, who made this terrific evening possible.

[Applause]

Good night. God bless.