JAMES McCARTIN: Good morning. Welcome back to Fordham.

Last night John McGreevy and Bronwen McShea and Michael Lee gave us a grand overview of a number of very significant themes: the decline of a unified Christendom, globalization, connectedness, dislocation, the Church at the margins, the collapse of a Catholic subculture, the generational gap between the pre-conciliar and the post-conciliar and the post-post-conciliar. We’ve seen much already.

But today we have a lot more to see. We will range from the cultural wars in domestic life to global peacebuilding, parish life in North America, to interfaith collaboration in Asia, how technology shapes our spiritual orientation, and how the community of faith should respond to challenges like global climate change. We have a lot to do today. It’s tightly packed.

But before I jump in, I want to raise a few practical matters.

First, we will tend to stick to our schedule today, beginning each of our four sessions on time. So please take note of the conference schedule and be in your seats when it’s time for us to start a new session.

Second, we have breaks between all our sessions, and there is coffee, tea, water, some
fruit, presently available in the back. Please help yourself.

Third, speaking of food, lunch options for members of our audience are listed on the yellow sheet that will be available as you walk out at lunchtime on our table outside the door. Please do pick that up and check out what is in the neighborhood. And please make a plan to join us at the end of the day for our reception.

Fourth, please know that we have reserved time in each session for audience engagement and questions. After the conversation that each moderator undertakes with panelists, the moderator will open the floor to you, at which point raise your hand, the moderator will send over a student to give you the mic. But here’s the thing: we have a three-minute rule around here: Say what you like, but do it in three minutes or less. Please observe our rule.

Finally, in lieu of offering extended oral introductions of presenters and moderators, I want to call your attention to the program that you may have picked up last night or that you can get at the table outside the door. We have brief bios of each presenter and moderator in there.

Now, having dispensed with all those practical matters, let’s begin this morning by engaging multiple sources of tension inside and outside the Church. Our first session is called “Politics, Culture, Gender — Successes, Disappointments, Opportunities.” To take charge of that session, please welcome Jamie Manson of The National Catholic Reporter.

JAMIE MANSON: “Politics, Culture, Gender” — I’d like to thank the program committee for dedicating an 8:45 a.m. session to hot-button topics that, hopefully, will wake us all up.

I think it is fair to say, in the incessant finger-pointing and hand-wringing about the decline of interest in the Church and the rise of the nones, politics, culture, and gender seem to be a holy trinity of what ails the relationship between the post-conciliar generation (namely, young adults) and the Catholic Church. The Church’s participation in politics seems unseemly to many among the new generation of Catholics. They are turned off by the bishops who devote so much time and money to culture wars. Young adults are discouraged by restrictions that the hierarchy places on women and the lack of welcome offered to members of the lesbian, gay, and transgender communities.

Lumen Gentium famously taught that the laity have the right to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church. It further instructed that lay people have the right to receive in abundance the help of the spiritual goods of the Church.

Now, that sounds like a perfect fit for many young adults, who have countless opportunities to express their opinions through social media. And young adults, as members of a very therapeutic culture of self-disclosure — perhaps even over-sharing — newer generations of Catholics would seem to want to jump at the opportunity to tell the Church what does and does not feed them.

But is Lumen Gentium’s vision of the Church the actual concrete Church that has been inherited by the post-conciliar generation? We know that the Council has had an enduring impact on previous generations, who lived through the Council’s most obvious changes. But is it relevant to those who only know a post-conciliar Church? Does Vatican II have any bearing on the decline of interest in the Church among young adults? Or is the Church a victim of cultural and social forces that are beyond its control?
Our panel of three experts will help us explore the limits, the breakthroughs, the possibilities of the teachings of Vatican II, as they relate to politics, culture, and gender. We will begin with Vincent Miller of the University of Dayton, who will discuss politics; Michael Murphy of Loyola Chicago will then consider culture; and Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado of the University of Miami has the unenviable task of talking about gender.

Let’s welcome Vincent Miller.

**VINCENT MILLER:** Thank you, Jamie. I’m honored by the invitation to present here today.

Last night, when people were establishing their bona fides, they were talking about their birth dates. I was born shortly after the Council ended. But I realized, doing the math last night, that I was conceived during the final session. So I don’t know from a Catholic perspective if I’m a pre- or post-conciliar generation.

While on the issue of temporality and periodizing, I think it is very important that we gather. I very much like the focus of this conference, “The Post-Conciliar Generation Looks at the Next Half Century,” a very nice way to frame it.

But when we talk about the Second Vatican Council and its reception and its influence on politics, we need to do some other math, which is it has been fifty years since the close of the Council, and thirty-four of those years were during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict. So as we try to think where we are after the Council, we are also after John Paul II and Benedict. The situation we face today — politically, culturally, with gender — is as much a legacy of their great reforming work. These were people who changed the Church and were very clear about an agenda to do that, as it was of the Council. So our job today is to reflect on the Council, but where we stand is as much after those watershed papacies as after the Council. When we look at diagnosing the contemporary culture and the contemporary Church, those causes have to be in the mix as well. I won’t speak of them very much, though.

I was asked how did Vatican II change reflections about politics, how was this inadequate, and where do we go from here? There is a lot I would like to say about politics, but I chose only one issue, division, which seems to be quite contemporary.

I would say the Council had an enormous impact upon Catholic involvement in politics through its acceptance of the Church’s location within history as the sacrament of the salvation of the world. This moved Catholicism away from a view of politics concerned primarily with its own rights as an institution — quite understandable given its history — to a broader politics that sought the shared common good. Rather than a sphere of conflict between secular powers and the Church, the temporal realm was now conceived as both possessing its own legitimate ends, which the Gospel could illuminate, and being called to a transcendent salvation in the kingdom of God, which was the mission of the Church to make sacramentally present.

Central to this mission from the first dogma to the last was unity. Unity is a fundamental aspect of the nature and mission of the Church, described in the opening lines of Lumen Gentium: “Since the Church in Christ is in the nature of a sacrament or as a sign and instrument” that is of communion with God and of unity among men and women...

This expression of unity as a mark of the Church is nearly matched in frequency — it’s all over the place in the Council — by invocations of the growing secular unity of humankind,
who are joined more closely today by various social, technical, and cultural ties. That paragraph follows.

Likewise, from the first document to the last, the Council portrayed the laity as full, active disciples who share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal offices of Christ through their baptism. The laity had a particular role in these politics mediating between the Church and the world, witnessing to the Gospel like a leaven in their involvement with the world, sharing their scientific and cultural expertise with the Church. These issues are intertwined in practice. The ability of the Church to be present in the world presumes a highly formed laity with a strong sense of unity and belonging in order to work with a particular mission in the world. Notice I did not say “identity” there; it’s a word I avoid.

How was the Council inadequate on these issues? I don’t think there is any problem with these ideals. They are linked to bedrock doctrinal commitments. There is, however, in the Council documents a serious inadequacy in its theorization of unity and the problem of division. This inadequacy leaves the Church ill-prepared to deal with the profound cultural polarization that has emerged in the five decades since its close.

In some ways, this is the flip side of the rhetorical mode that John O'Malley has identified for us as so central to what the Council achieved, epideictic, which paints an idealized portrait to excite admiration and appropriation, or it excites an emulation of an ideal. And O’Malley said this is the spirit of the Council; if you look at the documents just to find particular doctrines, you are going to miss what’s going on there; they are all written in this epideictic mode. It’s a hortatory mode; it shows you the beauty of what the Church can be and it wants us all to achieve that together. That’s what the documents did.

But this rhetorical mode must be supplemented by a hardline analysis of the problems being faced and the many concrete proposals for correcting them. Our society, like those in much of the rest of the world right now, is riven by cultural wars and polarization, this polarization which is born of difficult revolutions around the year of my birth and political organizing around reaction against them. They have been further exacerbated by a media ecology that fosters heterogenization, sorting us into like-minded niches who talk only to ourselves.

This cultural and political division has colonized the Church through my entire adult life, often making it appear far less a sacrament of unity than just another fractured battleground in the culture wars amidst the world that seems to be coming apart.

What did the Council get wrong? It underestimated the degree to which the social unity of the Church in the 20th century was a result of extrinsic factors. Negative factors included political and cultural exclusion, such as the French political regime of les états, and the marginalization of immigrant Catholicism in the United States.

Michel de Certeau, a Jesuit historian, theologian, philosopher of culture, was a member of a generation that came of age after the war. He made a comment about Catholicism in France. He said, “Christianity had a stronger social existence when it was granted less place in Le Temps yesterday than in Le Monde today.” Le Temps was the republican newspaper that no Catholic voice could ever be published in. It was remade after the war because it had been collaborationist. They kept the type font and it became Le Monde, and it is now the central paper. Catholicism was now granted access to these institutions.

But he said, “This resulted in the dilution of institutions and doctrines within the new structures of the nation. Catholicism passed from the state of being a resistant and
opaque body to a state of mobility and transparency.” De Certeau was a conciliatory author actually, just to focus on the divides that would happen.

Marginalization, as much as religious commitment, had reinforced belonging and formation before the Council. Positive factors included postwar political economy in the West that combined political oversight with market economies, various forms of Keynesianism and social democracy, and, often enough, Catholic-led Christian democratic politics provided a coherent national-scale unity that very much resembled Heinrich Pesch’s vision of a solidarist economics that inspires Quadragesimo Anno and so much of Catholic social teaching.

The replacement of these models with neo-liberal ones contributed to the erosion of national solidarity and the promotion of moral individualism, what Daniel Rodgers has aptly named “the Age of Fracture.”

The Council also overestimated the degree to which the theological and sacramental practices can ensure unity. De Certeau is equally illuminative here. He cited the worker-priest movement as a species of Catholic action that displayed the limits of theologically grounded unity. As he said, “The experiment could not but demystify the unitary ideology of the Church, whose principle it had initially preserved. Involvement in practical action required choices and caused differences that could neither be solved by appeal to Catholic action’s hierarchical mandate or to dogmatic statements open to multiple interpretation. Divisions between those involved became stronger than the Christian label they had in common.”

The theological mark of unity does not tell us very much about how to bring unity about. Understanding that, in the words of Lumen Gentium, in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of all the believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about, can help us understand that that unity is a gift. But, like other aspects of our salvation, understanding as a gift does not give us a specific understanding of how to live out that gift in so divided a context.

Now, it’s tempting to say that the Council experts and the bishops could have never anticipated the profoundly divisive cultural and political climate we currently inhabit. But, upon a second’s reflection, that is clearly not true. There was a fundamental political dimension to the pre-conciliar theological conflicts concerning Nouvelle Théologie in France. Opposition to the aggressive secularism of the Third Republic often included profound sympathies with Charles Maurras’ Action Française movement, long after its condemnation.

During World War II, when Yves Congar was a POW in Colditz Prison, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, the paragon of Thomas orthodoxy and lead critic of Nouvelle Théologie, supported Marshal Pétain and the Vichy regime. Garrigou’s admonition to Jacques Maritain at the time has a stunningly contemporary resonance. He warned Maritain that support for Charles de Gaulle’s Free France movement “manifests theological error and doctrinal deviation,” and in fact amounted to a mortal sin.

Stephen Schloesser has argued that the Council’s frequent epideictic invocations of increasing unity were spoken in a context when the Council participants were all too aware of profound social division and political conflict.

Much of the same can be said about the Council’s frequent invocation of unity as a primary mark of the Church, arising from a generation that knew such profound division. They knew the realities of this division viscerally but bequeathed little of their painfully
won wisdom to us in the documents. They say very little in the way of offering concrete methods for responding to division and working for unity. Perhaps this is not surprising, as the resolution of the polarization only came with the final discrediting of Maurras after Vichy and the surprising election of John XXIII and the ensuing rehabilitation of these theologians.

The document’s silence about the problem of division in the Church left us unprepared to face it in two important ways. We know that not only should the Church be united, it should serve as the very sacrament of the unity of humankind in God. So profound a vision, however, untempered by awareness of divisions in the Church, can ironically bring about greater division by raising suspicions concerning difference and pathologizing any expression of conflict or disagreement and allowing them, in turn, to fester into more profound divisions.

“What do we need to do?” is the final question, which is a daunting one.

I would say there are two levels to this. First, obviously, we need virtues, practices, and skills oriented towards the unity to which we are called. But perhaps even more fundamentally than that, we need a thicker theology of the precarity and difficulty of union — not in the sense that this will allow us to settle for its sporadic and fragmentary realization this side of the eschaton, but we need to understand it as something to which we are called that is profoundly difficult. Division could then appear not as an embarrassing deviation from unity, but as a privileged locus of Christian discipleship, where the sacramental work of the Church needs to be undertaken in real life.

Thank you.

MICHAEL MURPHY: Good morning one and all. Good to see you.

I’m going to call this little talk “Post-Conciliar Tensions — Boomer, X, and Y.”

While reflecting about the various fruits of Vatican II, the Jesuit theologian and paratust to the Council Henri de Lubac discerned a classic expression of an ancient conflict. He wrote, “If the spirit is lacking, dogma is no longer anything but a myth and the Church is no longer anything but a faction.” “I still think so,” he said, “but what has happened since then would prompt me today to write the complementary truth: if dogma is lacking, the spirit is no longer anything but wind and the Church becomes a progressive faction.”

Uttered at the height of the so-called culture wars in the mid-1980s, de Lubac’s insight also captures the crux of the Church in all of its days, the enduring tension between the both/and and the either/or. But it also discloses an implicit hope, both for the Church eternal and for the cultural context of our post-conciliar present — the hope, that is, to name, to navigate, and to cultivate finally the unity that exists in tension.

Father Benedict, writing as Pope Benedict XVI twenty or so years later, suggests two quite different ways of understanding the Council, ways that have become immediately recognizable to anybody remotely interested in this topic. “On the one hand,” he writes, “there is an interpretation that I would call a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture. It has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media and also the trends of modern theology. On the other is the hermeneutic of reform, of renewal, in the continuity of the one subject, the Church that the Lord has given us. She is a subject that increases in time and develops, yet always remains the same, the one subject of the journeying people of God.”
Father Benedict’s assessment not only discloses the dynamic forces of continuity and discontinuity that have always characterized ecclesial and non-ecclesial culture. But it also alludes to the famous concilium/communio rivalry in which he participated, illustrated best in terms of the oft-colliding editorial missions and ecclesiological trajectories of the two theological journals *Concilium* and *Communio*.

This rift is loaded with drama and requires its own panel, certainly, and I hate to mention it here so quickly only to table it. But I will say this, as long as we’re on birthdays. I was born between the founding of *Concilium* and *Communio*.

[Laughter]

In any case, Benedict’s insight about continuity and rupture builds on de Lubac’s and reiterates the kind of critical impasse and polarization that we often see in post-conciliar culture. Polarization not only characterizes and disturbs the late-modern geopolitical climate; it has also emerged as a chief feature of the Catholic Church in the West and in the Americas.

My goal here is to take a closer look at how the phenomenon of tension paradoxically produces, enlarges, and sustains culture broadly writ. But in order to say something larger about culture that might be contextual and constructive, one must go smaller. So the main thrust of my remarks will be built around exploring the cultural tensions of a single culture, the Millennials of post-conciliar Generation Y.

While this group appears somewhat uniform, perhaps as marketing demographics anyway, it is by no means a homogenous monoculture. Rather, like all cultures, Gen Y is a cohort that subsists in a cascading mix of hegemonies and subcultures. Millennials emerge in a context that is liberal media consumerist, American enlightenment religious, white patriarchal secular, privileged, post-hetero normative, post-human, post-Christian, cyber-digital culture. Yeah, that’s a mouthful. And we are hearing a lot about this because Millennials are the darlings of our scope these days — and rightly so. So let’s take a closer look.

Many of us here know Millennials, teach them as students, sired them or mothered them, as it were, and there are on our collective radar for better and worse.

Much has been said about this group, especially about their spirituality and their religious identities. Among the many current studies, a recent Pew Survey found that nearly 32 percent of the Millennial generation — this is the cohort born in the early 1980s to the late-1990s — claim no religious affiliation. These are the famous “nones” that Jamie mentioned — not n-u-n-s, but n-o-n-e-s — and we hear a lot about them.

While much has been said about this, very little has been written about why intellectually they are this way, even the ones who are affiliated with religion, and how they were formed intellectually. So a brief consideration of this context will help sketch the evolving shape of Catholic culture in our post-conciliar world, replete with its unique array of tensions and its emerging spirit of creativity, and perhaps even renewal.

It is interesting to note examples of unexpected tensions or contradictions right off the bat. It boggles the mind of many that Millennial Catholics are more likely to be pro-life and fully supportive on theological grounds of a host of LGTBQIA issues. This is a pairing decidedly out of alignment with previous generations.
In a similar war, on my campus at Loyola in Chicago, it is realistic to encounter a scenario where a Catholic from the Baby Boomer cohort encounters a Millennial counterpart on her way to Adoration on a Tuesday night. The Baby Boomer good-naturedly observes, "You’re going to Adoration? Wow, that’s so pre-Vatican II!" The Millennial says, "What’s Vatican II? I just want to be closer to Jesus." These scenarios confound conventional 20th-century categories and are the stuff of new demographic insight.

One possible reason why Millennials are redrawing the categories, and maybe even annihilating, is because they can be viewed as fully formed post-modernists who have been constructed into being by their intellectual and cultural forebears. The cultural milieu of Millennials has been mediated, propagated, and bequeathed by the lives of both Boomers and Gen Xers. Of course, Catholic Boomers and Xers are also post-moderns whose identities were shaped by the explosive event of Vatican II, especially their ecclesial identities. And, while the growth of lay ecclesial communities is one of the most fruitful and interesting offspring of Vatican II, the more pervasive phenomenon to notice is the dissipation of traditional ecclesial relationships that can be summed up in four words, “spiritual but not religious,” a status that some critics cite as a main deleterious outcome of Vatican II.

Be that as it may, Millennials bear the stamp of what we can call late-post-modernism, and their self-understanding as “none” as a religious location can be viewed as the logical offspring of “spiritual but not religious.” So while we are certainly into a new-but-as-yet-unnamed epoch — Jim was talking about post-post-post; I think I’m done with the posts, let’s find something new — a consideration of post-modernism will not only help us understand the rise of the Millennial nones, but may also reveal how post-modern postures of belief exhibit patterns and tensions that resonate with many of the practices of Christian spirituality that inform our post-conciliar context.

As good post-modernists, Millennials are suspicious of claims made regarding absolute truth, and even more reticent about making such claims themselves. This often frustrates those who prize conviction and certitude above all else. That said, many Catholics are worried that the Church is dying and that these “fickle Millennials,” fed on the cuisine of post-modernism, are the harbingers of the disintegration.

The Millennials are saying no to much more than institutional religion. They are saying no to other institutional pillars of late-modern American culture as well, perhaps because so many institutions are saying no to them.

Kevin Sullivan over at Georgetown, a young Gen Y Catholic, wrote in a recent article in The Washington Post: “The American political system is marred by instability and dishonesty. The idols of our pop culture are arrested, embarrass themselves publicly, and live lavishly.” Mr. Sullivan’s complaint could well include the moral failures involved in the subprime loan fiasco of recent memory, the corpse-cold versions of corporate culture, the fatigue of endless war, the shameless battering of our ecosystems, and the disequilibrium of health care, and so we admit these by implication.

But Mr. Sullivan’s main message to his fellow Catholic Millennials is the lament that their shared quest to find a vibrant faith life in their own church is becoming a fool’s errand, a church that “lacks the courage and joy” — as Father Matt Malone was talking about, to live, in essence, counterculturally — and whose “timid response to the child-abuse scandal and political division among our own bishops and religious orders has left many Catholic Millennials timid themselves. This is a church that itself requires correction, renewal, and spiritual reinvigoration.”
In this context, Millennial nones — indeed, all of us — can welcome Pope Francis’s reminder that “the Church is a love story, not an institution.” Moreover, Pope Francis, who is clearly the first Pope (at seventy-seven) of the Millennial Age, claims an important solidarity with the theological ethos of the nones, a development that promises to bear much fruit. In his suspicion of the stagnating charms associated with institutional power, his rank distaste for curial cronyism, and the other iterations of clericalism, Papa Francisco knows the indispensable vitality of restoring and cultivating an ecclesial existence proper to the Gospel.

And so he also recognizes something profoundly pastoral in this negotiation, especially when it comes to nones — namely, that the nones and their no’s in ways consonant with the long tradition of sound spirituality by and large affirm the Christian yes.

But how can this be? Let me allude briefly to history for an account. Millennial nones dwell in a relatively new terrain, a terrain that Charles Taylor calls an “exclusive humanism.” This development more or less completes the enlightenment project, which in its school of intellectual and political liberation was also a move to displace religion as a dominant cultural force.

But what we have seen in the so-called secular age, and post-modern thought has been astute in helping us to see, are the many ways that one orthodoxy is so easily replaced with another — this and a realization that exclusive humanism is not without its problems. Clearly, this can be disconcerting to both a culture that claims to value the coherence of the common good and a Church that draws life from a fixed yet mysteriously dynamic mark.

But there is a bright side of all of this, I think, especially when we view it against the very post-modern theology that provides the backdrop to these remarks. As introduced above, it is difficult to offer a uniform description of post-modernism. There are various camps — some are hostile to theism; some are sympathetic to theism.

But one area in which there is consensus is the weakness of words and language. Some things are unsayable, especially when they purport to describe absolute phenomena, like God, truth, and the geography of spiritual encounter. Still, any serious thinker knows that a thing that cannot be spoken of is ultimately a thing worth speaking about.

An entire vein of post-modern thinking speaks creatively about this in ways not lost on the ironic imagination. From the classic text by Jacques Derrida, How to Avoid Speaking; to Julia Kristeva’s insights about language, silence, and gender; to Richard Kearney’s notion of anatheism, the notion of a God after language or a God after God — post-modern approaches are suddenly not as novel or impenetrable as they first appeared.

When Kearney observes how post-modern thought embraces “the appreciation of the mystical moment of nothingness that precedes the breakthrough to a mystical epiphany of renewal,” one hears the echo of the psalmist’s report from the frontier, “Be still and know that I am God.” In this way, post-modern thought can be read as a 21st-century version of an apophaticism that has long been part of the Church’s spirituality.

The humble reticence in the face of divine majesty to whisper “Adonai” or nothing at all, instead of a proud “Yahweh,” the clarity of beholding the cloud of unknowing, the resolve to cultivate both the will and the intellectual nimbleness required to abide in the mystery of Jesus’s incarnation — these are proper rejoinders to the incomprehensible mystery of God.
Millennial reticence, then, may in fact cloak a theological and epistemological hospitality, consistent with the Gospel. Arguably, this is an optimistic reading of Generation Y. But it also discloses the way that Millennials of a certain disposition, while they may be questioning of organized religion, are neither swayed by other religions of contemporary culture — materialism, scientism, or the Utopian Shangri-La promised by the high priests of consumerism.

More importantly, post-modern Millennials reject the idea that enlightenment rationalism can account for, in the final analysis, transcendent, or at least transcending, values like personal dignity, heroism, and human rights. In this sense, the penchant of post-modern nones to retreat into sanctuaries of indeterminacy and ambiguity can be viewed more as an act of respect and intellectual receptiveness than indecision.

In the face of the many linguistic tensions that attend God-talk, more of us would be well advised to mind our tongues and pray for humility when we sit at the foot of such resplendent phenomena. Post-modernism, after all, was founded in part as a rejection of empty rhetoric and a denunciation of the violence wrought by human hypocrisy.

Still, there is work left to be done by Millennials. Just as apophatic spirituality is ultimately a one-winged spirituality, so too perhaps is the reticent fence-sitting of the nones.

Among others, C.S. Lewis observed that the apophatic is necessary because it cleanses us of our erroneous ideas about God so as to make a space for the revelation of the positive, the kataphatic theology, the explosion of God’s incarnational presence upon the scene.

There is a point in every life where one must respond to God’s perceived presence or absence and reckon with the traces and tensions left behind, where one must make the Kierkegaardian leap or not. Put another way, as Daniel Lanois, an artist who dwells well in post-modern spaces, observes, “Jesus ain’t comin’ in ‘til we lay the table.” As Pelagian as it sounds, it suits Millennials well. It builds on their already entrenched habit of community service, which for Millennials is the code term for religion. And one can work with that.

Millennials would do well, then, to face the music, to face the tension, and to heed the exhortation of their peer Kevin Sullivan when he says, “Do not throw your hands up in the air and wait for the community we seek to form. Instead, try returning to the pews, this time with a friend.”

If we are truly to find our identity as a generation, we cannot keep living in a paradox of being accepting of others’ convictions and beliefs but denying ourselves our own. This appeal to returning to a physical community, to engaging in an ecclesial existence, may be somewhat scandalous to the Millennial ear. But there is ample evidence that Millennial Catholics are addressing this tension head-on and, through the very apparatuses of the cultural habitat in which they dwell, this is to say that the volume of Catholic new media is off the charts and that the Web is abuzz with an abundance of substantive Catholic content — bundled, of course, in sleek digital design aesthetics. But the media in this case is not the only message and the digital initiatives have Millennial Catholic, Lux Populi, The Jesuit Post, Bad Catholic, Inebriate Me, Cosmos The In Lost, New Projects at American Media, and others, not to mention the zillion other blogs out there on the digital hacienda. These are promising.
Speaking from my main scholarly interest, the future, which is Catholic intellectual and literary tradition, the future of Catholic literary tradition is alive and well, and there has never been more activity in that cultural universe, as the Gen X Journal Image and the Gen Y House, Wisebloodbooks, and Dapplethings will attest. So many promising filmmakers as well – William Price, Zach Martinez, and many more.

I think the goal for Boomers and Gen Xers was to get a Web presence for their physical world endeavors. Perhaps the goal for the Millennials should be the retrieval of a physical presence for theirs, so as to move more sure-footedly in and with the Body of Christ, holistic, integrated, present, Catholic.

Last move. The Catholic revival of the 20th century was largely an intellectual revival. It came on the heels on the 19th-century Age of Ideology and was populated and propelled by first-class intellectuals – Jacques Maritain, Edith Stein, Christopher Dawson, among so many others. The renewal of a post-conciliar Catholic culture will be something else. Resonant with post-modernist premises, this revival may be unsayable, more about actions and less about words.

“You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness and to walk humbly with your God,” says the Prophet Micah, an exhortation that appeals to the ethos of Gen Y.

As important as apologetics are, the style of a 21st-century Catholic revival there seems to be more about walking than talking, more about the performance of ethics and aesthetics than philosophical apologetics. A Church that is clearly under a reformative spirit, as it is just now, is a Church that can embrace the Millennial nones with their unique tensions, and a Church with its unique tensions that Millennials can embrace. The sacramental heart of Catholic spirituality, moreover, is premised upon the navigation of such mysterious tensions.

It can also provide a good liturgical venue for Millennials, for it is clear to me that Millennials do have a liturgical vision, a liturgical intuition. If we are lucky, the liturgical milieu can contain both Burning Man and the God human that burns with love, and then quickened to Jesus in whom all tensions are negotiated, calmed, and redeemed.

Thank you very much.

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: Good morning.

So I get gender. Well, I could just say nothing has changed and go sit back down. But I won’t do that.

As a post-Vatican II Roman Catholic, I was born into a Church where the many changes implemented by Vatican II that we reflect on today were already in place.

Intellectually, I study Vatican II at a distance, as a piece of history. When I read about abstinence from meat every Friday, when my mother would tell me about missals in Latin, and when my father and I would talk about a Church that was hostile to my modernity in a very overt way, it evokes a Church of the past, one that I only encounter in these stories and in books. And yet, traces of that Church remain in the altars to saints in Hispanic homes, processions on Good Friday with the crucified Jesus in Guatemala, and the strong Marian devotion of the millions of Catholics in Latin America.

This disparity represents the divergent ways in which the academy and many everyday
Catholics received Vatican II. As a Cuban-American Roman Catholic feminist scholar, it is a paradox I live.

In my brief time with you today, I have been tasked with reflecting on the legacy of Vatican II in light of the question of gender. So here we go.

Intellectually, one cannot deny the impact that Vatican II has had on the academy. The prominence of the theology of Karl Rahner, the darling of the Council, in Catholic theological education testifies to the intellectual stamp that Vatican II has left on Roman Catholic theology. It would be difficult to find a graduate program in theology at a Roman Catholic institution – and, frankly, many Protestant ones as well – that did not read Rahner’s voice as the central voice in 20th-century Catholic theology. From the Rahnerian tradition emerge scholars with liberationist, feminist, and inculturated theologies.

Rahner stands in contrast to the lukewarm reception of scholars, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, who represents a different theological take on contemporary Catholicism. Von Balthasar highlighted the reception of God’s grace as the starting point of theology.

Rahner’s claim that anthropology is the starting point of theology liberated scholars, particularly those from the Global South, to take their context and culture seriously within their theological reflection. Now, while not all liberation theologians connect themselves to a Rahnerian legacy, this anthropological starting point of his theology led to a framework that allowed Roman Catholic liberation theologies to flourish in the second half of the 20th century.

In his depiction of Rahner’s anthropology, Cuban-American theologian Miguel Diaz emphasizes the importance of the everyday in his theology, for Rahner situated the experience of grace in everyday experiences. Diaz interprets this, and Rahner’s positive interpretation of popular religious practices, as a precursor to contextual theologies.

Within the realm of feminist theology, Rahner’s work has not been the direct focus of substantial feminist critique. In fact, various prominent Roman Catholic feminist theologians, such as Elizabeth Johnson and Anne Carr, have used Rahner’s theology as the starting point for their feminist anthropologies.

Nonetheless, Rahner is not immune to critical engagement. In attempting to articulate a theological anthropology that describes human experience as a whole, Rahner places little attention on the contextual nature of human experience in his own theological analysis. He attempts to speak of universal experience, an endeavor that today is clouded with serious suspicion.

Ultimately, Rahner takes the human experience that emerges from his cultural, intellectual, and social context and applies it to all humanity, this in spite of the fact — and here feminists would celebrate Rahner — that he privileges the everyday as a source of theology.

Rahner, however, did not write extensively on the question of biological sex or sex and gender. On one level, he is celebrated for not containing a hierarchy of male over female within his theology. Nonetheless, he ignores this vital dimension of our embodied humanity. Indeed, embodiment is not a concern for him.

While Rahner indirectly opened an intellectual space for the contributions of
marginalized voices, when it came to the field of feminist theology he offered a limited understanding of the human. Here many have been surprised when I claim that Hans Urs von Balthasar offers a refreshing alternative: When examined, gender is treated primarily in light of Balthasar’s anthropology, which, while fundamental to understanding the function of gender in his theology, is not an exhaustive approach.

Perhaps one of the most creative aspects of Balthasar’s theology is found in the fact that gender is not merely an anthropological category; in other words, gender functions in his concept of God and his Christology. However, I would push it further and affirm that gender permeates every aspect of his theology. Unlike many of his contemporary Western European counterparts, gender is a central analytic category in his work.

Balthasar’s model of humanity is based on an understanding of the female as primarily receptive and the male as active. Balthasar models human sexuality in very clear terms of activity and receptivity. This giving and receiving constitutes the Trinity and is also linked to Balthasar’s kenotic Christology and concept of God. So for him the self-giving and pouring out that is manifested on the cross and Holy Saturday is identical to the inter-Trinitarian relations of giving and receiving. God’s nature is thus relational and constituted by action. This, in turn, leads to a Christology that understands Jesus Christ, and consequently humanity, as constituted in relation. Relationship and action are foundational to our understanding of God and our humanity.

This understanding of God and humanity as relational echoes the insights of various contemporary feminist theologians who see relational anthropology as central to undermining individualistic and hierarchical understandings of the self.

While feminists may find what Balthasar writes about gender problematic — and I do as well — he must nonetheless be commended for attempting to understand the human person in light of his or her embodied sexuality. So Balthasar constructs gender theologically. It is not merely a socio-political category in his work, and instead has theological value.

As feminists currently attempt to navigate an analysis of gender that speaks to the complexity and diversity of humanity, coupled with an emphasis on the embodied significance of gender, dialogue partners such as Balthasar offer unanticipated avenues of theological reflection.

If our embodied gender is significant and reflective of the image of God and all humanity, it naturally follows that a theological analysis of gender is a necessary step in the development of feminist theology.

While I realize that Balthasar’s theology is often used to construct a theological anthropology of gender complementarity that limits the full humanity of women, I do believe his key insight into the theological construction of gender is fundamental to the future of feminist theology.

I have always believed that theology is at its best when it is connected to everyday, concrete lives of faith and not overly wedded to the theological pronouncements of an elite group of primarily men that have been canonized as definitive sources by consequent elite groups of men. And yet, it is on this issue of everyday life that Vatican II has an ambiguous legacy. The overwhelmingly positive academic reception of Vatican II by the Catholic academy is contrasted to the manner in which Catholics received some of the revisions in ecclesial life.
While the Council argued for the centrality of Jesus and the sacraments, many Catholics found such pronouncements foreign to the manner in which they lived their Catholicism. For Catholics across the globe, the local devotions that Vatican II discouraged were at the center of their faith life, and they were not about to give them up. Similarly, while never denying the centrality of Jesus, these devotions represent a communal sense of the sacred, where Jesus is always accompanied by the communion of saints and, of course, his mother. Vatican II appeared to want to strip these devotions away in its emphasis on the sacramental life of the Church.

I always think of my grandmother’s altar as the classic example of that, that had about ten saints, I think three or four different Marian statues, and no Jesus on it.

I am often struck by the manner in which progressive Catholic intellectuals, like myself, have read the documents of Vatican II and lament a Church that once was. I am not sure that Church was ever there.

The sense of the Church we find in those pages is not the Church today. While intellectually those of us with the privilege of studying and writing about the Council have been thinking about its theology for decades, for many Catholics Vatican II never happened.

Sure, the masses are in vernacular and you can enjoy a good steak every Friday. But the spirit and the theology behind the Council has not trickled down to many parishes, particularly in the Global South. This is not a critique of the Council; it is just a reality. I mean I have to be honest, I often think that the Council of Trent has not trickled down to parts of the Global South.

Much reflection on gender and feminism within Catholicism turned to the usual suspects of birth control, gay marriage, and abortion. As I am not an ethicist, I am not going to dwell on these issues — we can talk about that as a panel — particularly because I am not going to be the woman on the panel talking about the issues that often get sort of clumped in as exclusively women’s issues.

I will say that in light of the numerous pronouncements celebrating the openness of Pope Francis’s papacy, particularly when it comes to issues of women, I am not quite ready to pop open the champagne yet. While he has in some ways changed the tone of the papacy, he has done nothing to concretely alter the sexist power structure of the Catholic Church, where only men have authority.

This is perhaps best seen in the recent annual meeting, entitled “Women’s Culture, Equality and Difference,” which was a three-day gathering of celibate men to discuss the role of women in the Church. Now, to me that last sentence sounds like a bad joke.

There are times when I am deeply troubled by the actions and attitudes of the Church towards women, so much so that I want to pull my children out of CCD, which I actually teach, actually get to sleep in on Sunday, and frankly walk away. As a CCD teacher, I find it painful to tell a group of twelve-year-old kids that the girls in the room will never become priests because of their bodies. I thought, as I said it to them, am I the first person to tell a girl, “You can’t do this because you are a girl?” which I have to tell you was probably one of the most horrible moments I’ve had as a teacher.

I also go between feeling extreme optimism when I think about the words I have heard come from Pope Francis’s mouth and, again, when I think about the fact that absolutely
nothing has changed since he assumed the papacy.

I am actually incredulous at the confusion expressed by the Vatican, Church leaders, and scholars concerning the increasing departure of the Millennials, even twenty- and thirty-year-olds, from the Church. Citing the Church’s stances on homosexuality, divorce, and women, overwhelmingly young people do not see the Church as a place of inclusion and tolerance.

Pew’s recent report on the decline of Latin American Catholics shows us that the Church is becoming increasingly irrelevant in the region, which is home to 40 percent of the world’s Catholics.

The “Francis effect” has clearly not caught on, though I have to be honest — I was saying this earlier — you know, people sort of celebrate Francis as the first pope from the Global South. I think he is the first Italian pope from the Global South, but I am not sure he is quite representative of the Global South, or Latin America in particular. So it would seem that the Church, while no longer publicly hostile to the modern world, is not yet a part of it.

And, of course, over fifty years later, the legacy of the Council, while contested, remains profound. Vatican II did change the way Catholics understood their relationship to the world. The ways in which the Church did not change as a result of the Council are for mixed reasons. Some of this is a reflection of the Vatican’s relationship with its legacy. Some has to do with the Catholics’ themselves resistance to change. So I think it’s both. We can’t just talk about top-down change; we have to talk about on-the-ground resistance as well.

Among academic circles, the Council is a clear watershed moment. I would not be a theologian today if it were not for Vatican II. And the Council, with all its ambiguity, remains the definitive moment in modern Catholicism and, of course, should be warmly commemorated. However, I would push us further to not merely speak of its legacy but actually dare to embody it.

Thank you.

JAMIE MANSON: Three very articulate presentations on a diversity of topics. But, interestingly, what I heard was that the legacy of Vatican II remains ambiguous. Vincent is saying that it gave us this beautiful vision, this epideictic vision, but didn’t give us any practical sense of how to deal with polarization, even though the men who were creating those documents lived in a very polarized place.

And then, of course, we have Mike saying it’s unclear that Vatican II has affected the Millennials at all, and in fact that their vision of Church will be apathetic, with the hope that eventually they will encounter some sort of incarnational reality.

So is there any fruit of Vatican II? This conference is called “Our Inheritance.” Is there an inheritance at all for the post-conciliar generation? You can just say no and leave. It’s okay.

VINCENT MILLER: Yes. As I said, I think the transformations that the Council wrought around politics, my issue, but for ecclesiology in general, were profound and important. The difficulty lies in specifically enacting them. There is really nothing in the doctrinal changes —
Yes, there is a lot in the Second Vatican Council. I think what it said doctrinally about the nature of the Church and the nature of Christian participation in the world was true and beautiful. The problem lies with enacting it.

I was asked to be critical about what was inadequate and what we need to change. With any vision as profound as that offered by Vatican II, those will never be easy to enact. If it was easy to enact, the vision was probably perhaps far too small. So I wouldn’t want my comments to suggest that there is no inheritance from the Council.

MICHAEL MURPHY: I think Michelle said it as well. I wouldn’t be doing this work if it was not for Vatican II. There is erudite and expansive prose in the documents about why that is, in Gaudium et Spes particularly. So that’s good.

I think the reticence I speak about — there might be other cultural forces that are impeding. But I’m swirling around this deal, like Rahner and Balthasar being in dialogue — you know, Rahner is always being tagged with that the Church is capitulating to contemporary culture, that it’s being integrated, that there’s nothing kind of sacred about it anymore. Balthasar is the one saying, “Let’s keep it sacred” in its not-otherworldly location, but the fact that it is more than just the here. Maybe familiarity breeds contempt, so if everything’s sacred, why stop and get liturgical about it?

But, as far as me, theology was done by priests until probably the late 1960s. So that’s a whole new world. But yeah.

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: I would add very concretely — and Michael mentioned this last night — Vatican II led to Medellin and led to — I mean, speaking just of Latin America and Latin American liberation theology — a Church that sectors of which became very actively engaged in saving human lives and really saying, “We are going to be of this Church, we are going to look at the world around us, and it is one of poverty and violence and horror, and we are going to do something about it.” So for me that is a very profound inheritance that we have from Vatican II.

JAMIE MANSON: I wonder. There is a lot of conversation I have found among young theologians about the need for unity, defining not what we’re against but what we’re for. I’m curious. Where is the role then of the prophetic voice in all of this? When I hear the words “culture wars,” I always bristle a little bit, because what’s underneath very often a culture war is a profound struggle for justice, whether it’s justice for equality for women globally, justice for sexual minorities. So there is something real going on. I know it feels polarizing very often, but there is a real struggle for justice underlying this.

What’s your sense about where the role of the prophetic voice is in all of this?

VINCENT MILLER: I think it is absolutely essential. The way I think about it, I’d say two things. One, one of the problems we face in our contemporary cultural formation is that being countercultural is the cultural default. We define ourselves against other groups. That’s how we establish identities. That is a profound problem for the Hebrew and Christian call to the prophetic voice, to the demand for justice, to the demand for mercy.

You can tell the difference. I’m not sure I’ve ever been successful at this. But the difference is do our Jeremiahs actually speak and try to move others to act and live in justice and mercy; are these actual rhetorical engagements with the public, with the
Church, designed to convince them of the good and to act for it? Or are we just declaring our truths over against those we know will never agree with us? That’s the distinction.

The latter is often called prophetic. That feels quite good, right? But that’s not the actual engagement and trying to speak to hearts.

**MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO:** I also think — and I’m trying to think how to formulate this without rambling too much — because I think a lot about this. I don’t think this is just an issue for Catholicism in the United States. I think this is an issue for religion.

Scholars of religion were not really good at talking about religion in a public way. I mean, forget even prophetic. And particularly, theologians were not good at talking across disciplines. We say words like “kenotic” and “soteriology,” and people are like “What?” and it’s over.

But I think that the way that — you know, I’m not going to just blame the media — the way that religion is constructed in the public space and talked about in the public space is very limited. We don’t offer a good counter-narrative, not only do I think in — I mean I always think where are all the public intellectuals, like where have they gone? So I think part of that is the failure of us.

We don’t even talk well with other academics, to start out with, so forget about us talking to a broader public. For me that’s the stuff that needs to happen even before you can get to the prophetic voice.

**MICHAEL MURPHY:** I’ll pick up on that.

This is where you get arrogant. But I think the discourse is juvenile in regards to religion in the public square and it’s very divisive. I have noticed that more academic theologians are getting populist — they’re on blogs, they’re hitting the middle.

Which gets into my next insight. Briefly, the old line that “a prophet is not known in her own land,” I think that’s as true as ever. But it’s harder now. I don’t want to blame the media either, but there’s just so much noise. The Millennials, because of their laissez-faire approach and their open approach to their parents perhaps — this is a generalization — they are theologically illiterate. That’s something that we talk about openly.

So, on the one hand, the theologians are over here, the younger people are over here. So where are the mediating areas for intimacy and encounter? If you know the answer, let me know.

But I do think that there is some hope because I do see a hunger and I feel a hunger from young people for “the real deal.” That gives me heart.

And then, I think that there is always need for prophetic voice and you recognize it when you can hear it, when you are able to be in a position to hear it.

**JAMIE MANSON:** I’ve asked you two questions. I’m curious if there is anything you heard in one another’s talks that you wanted to raise.

**MICHAEL MURPHY:** I have one for Michelle, and maybe for the room too. This is what Pope Francis will say about the ordination of women, which gets me thinking. He calls it a kind of clericalism. So the need for women to be priests, “get over it, get over it.”
Why do you want to be so clerical? It’s not that important. It’s just a role.” That’s a tough pill to swallow, I would think. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: If I could answer that, the fact is that, as ANCR reported recently, the Pope referred to gender theory as a “nuclear weapon.” I don’t even know how to respond to that, with him being Pope saying that. I mean really, to “get over it” — I mean that’s why it’s something that — you know, I was there when Francis was elected. I was actually teaching in Rome, so I was there when they announced him. I had a surge of optimism, being there in that moment and having him be the first Latin American Pope.

But it is all just gestures. There’s nothing of substance. And, increasingly, it becomes harder for me to explain it. It really does. I mean I have to say that.

I don’t know about those of you that teach the Millennials, that teach undergraduates, but for me they think it’s crazy. When we talk about the fact that women cannot be ordained and we look at the arguments — and I do it in a very, I’d like to think, unbiased way. I want them to react to it and respond to it. They’re like, “Is this for real?” For them it becomes then this notion that the Church is so out of touch with how they —

I mean one of the things I think that really marks the Millennials is they are told they can do anything. They are told that they are special. They always get a trophy, even for participating. I mean seriously. My son, who’s nine, his team came in last in a basketball tournament and he got a medal. I was like, “You know, you came in last.” I had to root it for him. I don’t want him to grow up thinking you always get a medal for trying.

My parents never told me I was special. They told me to work hard. They said, “Work hard and you’ll do well.”

So I think this is a generation that has been told that they’re special, that they can do anything that they want to do, that the sky is the limit. But then when they hear things like “Well, you can’t do this” or “they can’t do this because of their bodies” and then they hear the arguments — they’re like “Are you serious?” I say, “Unfortunately, yes.”

So that would be my response. I’m not going to get over it. [Laughter]

MICHAEL MURPHY: Good.

JAMIE MANSON: Other ideas that you heard in one another’s statements?

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: I am fascinated by the “spiritual not religious.” I actually have a colleague that just designed a course with that title. I was pushing her to do it. I think it’s increasingly this culture of there’s an anti-institutionalism to the Millennials, which to me is underlying that. So I don’t know if you could say more about that.

MICHAEL MURPHY: I’m will. I’m sure Vince has something too. I’ll just say it quickly because I’ll forget it otherwise.

I wrote a little bit about this. There are some great sociologists in the room who have worked on this as well I know. But I think it’s almost the opposite, that people say “I’m spiritual not religious.” I think they’re more religious than they give themselves credit for. They just have trans-signified their pathology, their semiology of belief. They have
new gods. So you have the religion of consumerism or football on Sunday replacing classical approaches to religion and spirituality. So I think it’s a really interesting and fruitful conversation.

What do you think, Vince?

VINCENT MILLER: I confess that the “spiritual not religious” sounds to me much more like a Boomer and Gen X transitional statement than something that I would associate with the way Millennials actually live out their lives right now. That was a way of explaining to a world that expected you to have a denominational location for your spiritual life that was not institutionally grounded anymore. So it was a story for leaving.

I think the contemporary spiritual landscape perhaps is still described by that, but I think a lot of their spirituality is not particularly thematized. They have experiences of wonder, experiences of transcendence, solidarity, that can matter for them very much. Mercy matters for them tremendously. They live in a world that’s much more stressful than mine was.

But I don’t think they thematize that in contradistinction from participation in organized religion. I think it’s out there and largely anonymous. I would say the work that needs to be done with that generation is to help them recognize that and organize that and relate that to the great religious traditions.

JAMIE MANSON: Vince, you talked about the need for a thicker theology of the precarity of unity. Do you have any hope that will come from the hierarchy, or do you think that is going to come from the theologians? It seems like something that the Millennials are hungry for.

VINCENT MILLER: I think the Millennials and late Gen Xers are deeply, deeply disinterested in conflict. In teaching in the 1990s, if I would describe any of the conflicts within the Catholic Church, that was a surefire way to get them not interested in the whole package. It wasn’t simply that they were on the left and the right was doing this, or the other way around. It was they had had enough of that – “The world is full of conflict, and if you folks are fighting it out, then I’ll go someplace where I don’t have to be involved in these kind of conflicts and get something done.”

Do I hope that it is going to emerge? One of the things that Francis has clearly done is called an end to the cultural wars. He has performed an end to the cultural wars. I think he has done so quite intentionally.

I talked about my anxiety about the word “identity.” I think his phrase “culture of encounter” — that sounds like something he would toss off. But if you had to sit down and mathematically come up with a way of undoing all the mischief of transforming ecclesial terminology into cultural terminology that happened in the 1980s, and you had to make one word that was sort of the Möbius strip that would make that explode, it would be “culture of encounter,” which is precisely about having a culture that cultivates encounter across difference, that sees boundaries not as what define us but as where we’re called to go by the Gospel.

His first trip outside of Rome was to Lampedusa. Rather than talking about the essence of Europe, the historical tradition of Christianity, how essential it was for that culture, he went to the well of Fortress Europe where people died trying to get in and celebrated Mass. None of that was unplanned. That was a brilliant move that fundamentally transforms the mischief that boundaries did to Catholicism over the past forty years.
Hope? I think we’re all tired of conflict. I think perhaps what’s happening on the episcopal level is as cultural warrior is no longer the kind of résumé you need to develop to advance in the episcopate, there’s a lot of people who haven’t wanted to do that and who are now suddenly advancing wanting to do something else. Now, the Church does not depend solely upon the action of bishops, but new ways of being Catholic are now authorized and not beaten down. These changes will take time, but I think there is a lot of hope there because the Gospel calls us precisely to that transformation.

JAMIE MANSON: Are you all chomping at the bit to get in on this conversation? Okay. Why don’t we open up to some questions.

QUESTION: Barbara Andolsen from the Fordham Theology Department.

Vince, I’m going to challenge you to respond to the woman sitting to your left. I don’t see how anyone who understands the reality of the fight that is not over for equal dignity for women can be blissfully saying, “Oh, I’m tired of conflict.”

And I will also say one of the things I find about the youngest students — I, like you, am not sure they’re not a new group — is it’s the first time in my lifetime that I have seen a minority, but a significant minority, of younger men recognize gender inequality and sometimes be the first one in class to complain about it, to bring it up in an article.

And the Catholic Church is in terrible shape around the issue of gender equality. It is clear that Francis buys the whole complementarity package. It seems to me you can only say what you’ve been saying because you’re a man.

VINCENT MILLER: That may be the case. Where the Church is with gender? The most daunting fact I know is that the Millennials are the first generation in history where less women attend Mass then men. That’s the fruit of the work of the past forty years. That’s the most apocalyptic demographic fact that we can imagine, because when you lose the women, you lose marriage, you lose baptism, and you lose all the generations that follow. So I am in no way Pollyannaish about this. These are profound problems.

What do I expect from Francis? There are going to have to be concrete changes. I don’t expect them in this short order. I don’t really have a plan for exactly how that would look. I absolutely simply did not expect him to begin to ordain women in this period of time. I don’t envision that he will before the end of his papacy.

He has made it very clear that he expects that there should be ways to find for women to have major positions within the Curia, and he has raised questions about what the qualifications for heading curial offices are. Those things have to happen. You can’t just talk about them.

His statements about so-called “gender theory,” the official phrase that is always used in Vatican parlance — in terms of my answering Michelle, Michelle was proposing precisely some kind of essentializing talk about gender as a necessary thing that we contribute, that we were lacking in the post-Vatican II context. So I think that that is something we have to look for and find some kind of critical essentialism, as Nancy Dallavalle speaks of, that can make an argument and demand a place at the table and have a particular reason why women need to be in all sorts of positions. So I certainly agree with much of what Michelle said.
Now, I can find causes for hope without saying that everything is hopeful. That demographic simply is the most apocalyptic thing I know of. That portends perhaps the end of Catholicism more than anything else we know. So I am far from optimistic on all fronts, but there are signs of hope on some.

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: Can I just say I do think part of what — and this might be me reading into what you said — what I was thinking about when you made that comment about conflict — I was just interviewed for my university's student paper. They did a whole issue on the “F word,” on feminism.

One of the things that I said in the interview that bothers me is that — and I hate saying “this generation” — they think liking something is a form of social protest. Do you know what I mean? Or like re-Tweeting or doing — I mean they really do. I think about the whole KONY campaign against child soldiers, and then everyone ordered these packets, and then no one showed up.

I was thinking about this in particular in contrast to all the commemorations of Selma. For them, their sense of activism — they don’t want to do anything. They honestly think that re-Tweeting something or putting it on their Facebook page, that they’re having a profound social impact. I’m not dising that kind of stuff. I think that’s important. But I don’t think that’s it.

QUESTION: Thanks. My name is Aileen Meaghan [phonetic]. I’m not a Church professional. I’m a lawyer.

I just wanted to say I was in college in the late 1970s, and the way the Church treated women bothered me a lot. But it has become much more difficult in the last fifteen years, becoming conscious of the oppression of women all over the world — the Taliban, what we see in Afghanistan, women not being educated. I say this with regret, but it has become much worse, because you see the Church’s treatment of women, not only in terms of ordination or contraception, as part of a much broader primitive pattern. It is really a comment, not a question, but it’s very upsetting.

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: I would also add to that the increase of sexual assault on U.S. college campuses. It’s on the rise. So we don’t even have to go abroad. Some of us here teach at universities. There is a culture of hatred towards women that is increasing globally. It’s not getting better. I never thought I would see sexual assaults go up, I really didn’t, on college campuses. But they are. To me it’s alarming.

JAMIE MANSON: One thing I didn’t hear so much from the panel is to what extent is the institutional Church responsible for some of the polarization. I am serious. Many people don’t believe this. In the National Catholic Reporter a month ago, Josh McElwee reported that the Pope referred to gender theory as a “nuclear weapon.” That is a very destructive metaphor.

VOICE: I wish it was that powerful. [Laughter]

JAMIE MANSON: To what extent also — you know, we want unity, we are tired of conflict, but don’t we have to make the Church accountable for its own participation in creating conflict?

MICHAEL MURPHY: Absolutely. If that did not come across — I firmly believe that the Church’s embrace of identity talk and culture talk over the past forty years bought
lock, stock, and barrel into the culture war and fundamentally compromised the Church’s sacramental mission to be a sacrament of unity of humankind in Christ.

When I talk about the need for the actual practice of unity, I in no way want that to gloss over the real profound injustices that are present in the Church in the world. I said “the hard work of unity,” not the “let’s all get along and nothing can be as important as the Eucharist right now.” No. To have Eucharist and to claim that that is the defining means of unity is an enormous demand upon us, to really embrace difference, to be Catholic, to really engage difference, to really engage those conflicts, take them seriously. We are not going to resolve any of them anytime soon. But it is an enormous demand upon us. So if my call for unity in any way sounded like “let’s all get along,” that is certainly far from what I was proposing.

To say something about gender theory and the comment that Francis has made several times — and I’d ask this back to Michelle — what he is reacting against is an understanding about gender theory that understands that it is completely in play, there is no essence to it, it can be completely reshuffled in any way.

You have called for some kind of essentialism here. I am not going to try to pin you to his comments, but the concern he is expressing there, that backlash from the Vatican on so-called gender theory — that is the proper term, it always appears that way — they want some kind of essence. Is perhaps the pathway to critically, using all of the resources we have academically, to come up with some critical way of talking about gender that can accept some sort of essentialism without all the pernicious consequences that flow from most gender essentialisms? That is a question much easier to ask than to suggest an answer to.

**QUESTION:** My name is Marian Ronan. I’m an American Catholic studies scholar. I have a research appointment at New York Theological Seminary up near Columbia.

In an essay in a collection of articles about the fortieth anniversary of Vatican II, a theologian whose name I am blanking on — I think his last name is West — pointed out that one of the great gaps in the documents of Vatican II was that there was no reference to the environment at all. Of course, part of it was that we Catholics were fighting our way into the modern world just as everybody else was exiting it. Therefore, we were certainly not thinking about things like the environment, even though Silent Spring was published during the Council.

I’m wondering two things. It seems to me that the almost total obliviousness to women during the Council — I’m doing a lot of reading on it right now — the astounding thing is that in all of the documents and the scholarship the word “woman” hardly ever appears. I mean it’s breathtaking. You’d think that we lived on a planet just with men. Even in the case of scholars of Vatican II, they are almost all men, Carmel McEnroy excluded. So they ignored the environment and they ignored women.

Now the Pope is going to come out with this Encyclical on the environment. But if you read any of the theology, the connection between the earth and women is unbreakable. So how is the Catholic Church going to attend to the environment, in this Encyclical or any other way, attend to climate change, which is the pressing issue of our time, when the essentialism of women and the earth being one thing and waiting to be penetrated — pardon my French — how are we going to deal with the environmental crisis when we are not doing any more than we are about complementarity?
MICHAEL MURPHY: I’ll briefly respond, Marian. Maybe that’s the gambit, that’s the way in, to retrieving some language. Maybe it will come through the environmental discourse. It is immoral, to put it lightly, that we have ignored the environment for so long.

I like to think in my Jesuit universe we did well with the School of the Americas. The Ignatian Teach-In is a very popular alternative break immersion, and more, for Jesuit undergraduates. The Ignatian Solidarity on Life Issues is articulated.

The third leg in the stool has to be the environment. The fourth leg? I don’t know if you can get gender — gender has preceded all this. But maybe the environment, because of the intimate connection, as you put it, between women and the earth. And there are theologians much more erudite than me who have written about this connection. I’m hopeful that that will be a way into it.

I look forward to reading that Encyclical. I think it’s done. They are just polishing it. Thank you for the question.

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: I would just add I think we need — I know I just talked about it — I think we need to stop talking about anthropology and talk about cosmology. If you are talking about theologians, what theologians need to do is talk about the cosmos, cosmology, and not just anthropology. I think we have become obsessive. All we talk about is anthropology and method.

VOICE: It’s narcisstic.

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: Yes, it is.

For me, that needs to create the intellectual framework, then, to have these more concrete engagements.

JAMIE MANSON: I want to move to this side of the room here.

QUESTION: My name is Richard O’Connell. I’m not a scholar or a teacher, but I have spent a lot of time around them.

We’ve been talking about implications for the Council. It’s now 2000 years since the Word of God became man. It’s a mystery that it took four centuries for the Church to resolve the question of the divinity of Jesus. It took eighteen centuries for the question of slavery to be — I wouldn’t say resolved, because it is still in existence, but for humankind to realize the evil of slavery.

Obviously, if we had our druthers, we would have done it differently. Jesus would not have given his message over to human beings who would write it in a way that it would be lost, that it would be corrupted.

It seems to me that in talking about the expectations for Vatican II, we have to think about our own history. How can it be that so much evil has perdured for two millennia? Why should we think that our problems are things that are going to be solved in fifty years after the Vatican Council?

Michelle said something very important, I think, that the Council of Trent has not yet percolated down.
MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: In Latin America.

QUESTIONER [Richard O’Connell]: Obviously, we have to keep fighting for all these things. It’s terribly important that my daughter, if she wishes, can be ordained a priest. But do I expect that that will happen? I don’t know. I guess I don’t. Why? I don’t know that either. Mystery of evil. Why did the incarnation come about in the way that it did? Why has it taken us so long to get to the point that we are now? Why has there been so much suffering among women, among men, among the poor, among the marginalized, not only in the last fifty years, but since human beings first became conscious?

The sad fact, the tragic fact, is that, while we have to work for justice, those of us who have Ignatian backgrounds, and most of us do — I don’t remember exactly what his words were, but he said that we have to be as content with failure as with success. Sadly, everything having to do with the culture, there’s no guarantee, or even a prediction, that in our own time we are going to see any of this happen. And I don’t think we have an answer for it. It’s a mystery. It’s something that, unfortunately, we are going to have to live with.

We are in an age where the weaponry is growing. There’s a much greater possibility that something tragic is going to happen than that something progressive is going to happen. We hope for the opposite. Yet, we have to keep faith and we can’t really, as they say, give hostages to fortune and say that our faith, our continuation as Catholic Christians, somehow turns on Pope Francis turning out to be what we hope. Maybe he won’t be. Why did we have what we had?

JAMIE MANSON: I have to stop you there. We have a three-minute rule. What you say is very beautiful, but I want to make sure — is there any particular question?

QUESTIONER [Richard O’Connell]: It’s about expectations. Are our expectations reasonable?

MICHAEL MURPHY: I’ll give you a short answer on the mystery part. I think it’s one of my favorite quotes by Charles Péguy, the famous French poet. He said, “What begins as mystery ends in politics.” That’s unfortunate, but that’s a tension in which we dwell.

JAMIE MANSON: I have been remiss. If you would, when you ask a question say who you are, where you’re from. And again, we do have that three-minute rule.

Paul Lakeland, in the lovely yellow sweater.

QUESTION: Thank you, Jamie. Paul Lakeland from Fairfield University. A question for Michelle, I think. Quick preface: the very first little book I wrote forty years ago was called Can Women Be Priests? I said yes. It was not a very good book, but I have always been proud that it had an imprimatur from Cork in Ireland. This is something to do with the development of doctrine. I’m not sure exactly what.

That’s my credential for a not-very-liberal question. As we had this conversation about the ordination of women, I kept wondering, Michelle, how this looks from the Global South. [microphone malfunction — inaudible].

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: Not well. I suppose women’s ordination crept in with the example I gave from my CCD students. But I tend to agree that from the south looking north this is not on the table, it’s not a question. And, frankly, it’s not as
important.

One way to respond to you is I would delete that anecdote that I gave and focus on the other things I was trying to say, maybe sometimes too implicitly. When we do look at the Global South and we look at the feminization of poverty and we look at all of these issues that are, frankly, life-or-death issues that women are confronting, the Church’s theology of women as second-class citizens is a huge part of the problem and is in no way part of the solution. I think we would be naïve to think, even though it’s theological categories and theological jargon, that it doesn’t have a profound impact on people’s everyday lives.

QUESTION: I am Gary Adler. I’m with the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies. Mike mentioned that there are some great sociologists here. I’ll just say I’m a sociologist and leave it at that. I know there’s other ones here. I should also mention, too, that when sociologists meet we pull our hair out about some of the same issues about communicating with our students and the sorts of things we are working on. So I actually have a sense of joy in being with people who have that same struggle.

The question I have is about Vince’s and Mike’s use of the “culture wars” phrase. It has been a long-running finding, ever since a sociologist invented it — James Davison Hunter, a kind of modern American, invented the phrase “culture wars” to talk about a very particular set of relationships among elites, especially political elites, in the United States. It has been a long-running finding in the thirty years since then that fragmentation is not increasing, that culture wars don’t exist for most Americans, that on most issues, abortion, the death penalty — homosexuality might be the one outlier — that there has been a lot of change or polarization in the spectrum of opinions. There has been this long-running finding that sociologists kind of keep tripping on.

So I wonder how useful the “culture wars” phrase is. It’s not useful at one level of empirical reality. It seems totally true at another level of where elites play and do their work. But I wonder what role it has then as part of our conversation for understanding what Vatican II is doing in the lives of Catholics.

I might just throw in a citation from a terrific sociologist, Brian Starks, who was at Notre Dame for a couple of years and is now at a college in Atlanta. He has some terrific research showing among lay people in their parishes most of them have no idea what NCR is, what Commonweal is, what First Things is. They just have no idea. These aren’t identities that are important to them. So the culture-war concept at some level doesn’t make sense for understanding their Catholicism.

I look forward to your answers.

VINCENT MILLER: When I say “culture war,” yeah, I can’t dispute the sociological findings that division has not increased, although that does surprise me.

The primary way in which I mean it is that identity is established by focusing on certain polarizing differences that function as shibboleths. It seems to me — I understand the culture wars to be the outcome of two things: the conservative mobilization of Christianity in the 1970s, which was a specific and pervasive and extremely effective strategy on the part of the Republican Party; and the Catholic World, by mobilizing around one polarizing issue, abortion, was able to take the broader, instinctual Catholic commitment to the common good and to the kind of New Deal politics that defined an epoch in this country, and made that the centerpiece of Catholic identity and Catholic voting, and allow a lot of that common good infrastructure to be dismantled.
The second part of it I would say is again a media context in which you now win by finding a niche market, by finding a plurality, rather than seeking the lowest common denominator. So the shift from Walter Cronkite to Fox News as the most important voice in media is not simply the sign of changing politics, it’s a different strategy. The first one, the “Big Three” always fought over the lowest common denominator so they’d get the biggest market share. It was an intrinsically homogenizing way of building civil society. Fox comes along, and — let’s just bracket completely their ideological orientation — they said, “We are not going to fight for the lowest common denominator; we are going to win our demographic,” we are going to build our demographic, and now they are the most powerful news source in the country. It’s a fundamentally different move.

So that’s what I mean by the culture war mode. Again, it’s hard for me to believe that that doesn’t show up in any kind of sociological polarization, given the email I receive from my family. [Laughter] But that’s a small sample.

MICHAEL MURPHY: I thought that was superb insight, Vince. I’ll just add it was a historical reference, the culture wars of the 1980s. There are some different types of tensions and war maybe today.

But what I noticed — I’ll say one observation — is that what happens is in the digital world you select your world. So there is a myopia, there is a narrowness, and there is an insularity that is not healthy for public life and civic life. So it’s a different type of tension, and I wonder what will happen as things proceed.

JAMIE MANSON: I apologize. Here I was ready to go for twenty more minutes of delight here. Maybe one more question.

QUESTION: My name is Linda Crone. It’s a very quick question. I’m both a Catholic worker but I am also a hospital chaplain. I embrace the common priesthood, and as a hospital chaplain I feel very called to this work and this ministry.

One thing I’m very surprised about is that when I encounter a patient — and I’m a credentialed chaplain, so I’m not a volunteer — they will say to me, “Oh, I didn’t know women could be chaplains.” This is something that I’d like to hear your response on.

MICHAEL MURPHY: I will just say thank you for your work.

MICHELLE GONZALEZ MALDONADO: I think that points to a general — I talk about this all the time with my colleagues. Until last year, I was the only tenure-track woman in my department. I have been in a department for eight years where I was the only woman. A couple came and left, they were run off, and I stayed. I was the first woman to be tenured in my department.

I constantly over the years would debate with my colleagues about embodied authority in the classroom and that they, as white males primarily in their fifties and sixties, could get away with saying whatever they wanted about whatever they were talking about, and that I was constantly challenged in the classroom when I tried to critically engage my students. And I still continue to be.

So I think it goes even beyond — do you know what I mean, your experience in the field of religion?

JAMIE MANSON: Thank you all so much. I appreciate your comments and your excellent presentations. We will be reconvening at 10:45 because I’m keeping us on
schedule.  

[Break: 10:33 a.m.]