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THE POST-CONCILIAR GENERATION LOOKS
AT THE NEXT HALF CENTURY

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Session II: 10:45 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
From a European Church to a Global Church:
Perspectives on Globalization

Moderator:
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Panelists:
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NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the second session of this wonderful conference. The title of this session is “From a European Church to a Global Church: Critical Perspectives in Globalization.”

My name is Natalia Imperatori-Lee. I am at Manhattan College. Our distinguished speakers today whom I have the privilege of moderating are — we are going to shift the order of presenters a little bit, if that’s alright with you all. Or first presenter is Maryann Cusimano Love from The Catholic University of America; she will speak to us on peacebuilding efforts in the global church.

She will be followed by Marcello Neri from the University of Flensburg; he will speak to us about European Catholicism in the present, and possibly also the future. He will be followed by Tracy Tiemeier from Loyola Marymount University in California, who will speak to us a little bit about the variegated contexts of Asian Catholicism and how we can better navigate that going forward as a global church.

We are very much looking forward to our conversation afterwards, and so we encourage your active participation and look forward to the presentations.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE: Thank you for inviting me to be part of the
conversation here today. I am going to use some pictures that will hopefully help go through what we are talking about today. 

We were assigned a couple of questions that I won’t read. They are in your program. My view that I will be talking about is from the point of view of a political scientist. So I’m a little orthogonal to some of the theological discussions we’ve been having. I look at it from the view of international relations.

I won’t be using any jargon from my discipline, with the following exception. There are two words that we use in my discipline that mean a little something different than the general discourse. That is the word “nation” and the word “state.”

There will be no math required to follow what I am going to say, except for the following. When I talk about a “nation,” I’m talking about a cultural group, a group that shares religion, language, ethnicity, race — so a people. There are 8,000 nations in the world today.

When I talk about the word “state,” I am talking about a recognized political authority, a government of a country. There are 193 countries in the world today.

So the only math you need to follow is that 193 is not equal to 8,000. We really don’t have now, nor have we ever had, nation-states.

That difference of location between the people groups and the government groups is something that Catholicism has been dealing with since before the modern era, since Christ’s time. Catholicism is a pre-state actor. It is often talked about as a non-state actor in an era of globalization. That’s not actually true. We were a pre-state actor; we were around millennia before the modern sovereign state.

That just situates a little bit the use of those two terms. Otherwise no jargon, jargon-free.

[Slide] My view on this is — the question we were given is, how did we move from a European Church to a global Church? I think we need to take the question back a frame further.

From my perspective, the Church was global, was networked, and was pluralistic before it was cool to be any of those things. That was our origins in the time of Christ. So what Vatican II did was freed us from the sovereign state attachment of being a European principate that we picked up as baggage along the way, and it kind of brought us back to our roots of being a pluralistic Church.

Also, we were a peacebuilding Church from the very beginning. Again, Vatican II frees us to be that again in a different way, because we are freed from this constraint of being associated with a sovereign state.

So in my view we are kind of going back to the future, to our roots, just in time for the 21st century, when all of these characteristics that are really true to Catholicism — of being global, a network, pluralistic, and peace-building — are more needed than ever before because of the types of conflicts we face in the 21st century. So it is returning to a skillset and a structure that is very appropriate for our era.

The pictures I’m showing there — this was a challenge for Christianity. Jesus embraced people from different national/language/cultural groups. So he was reaching out to the
Roman Centurions, reaching out to the women at the well, praising the values of the Samaritan, in ways that were very countercultural. So he was reaching across these cultural groups.

That is really something very different from some of the other major world religions. If you look at Hinduism and Buddhism, it never really left the cradle where those religions came from, they’re still 99 percent Asian for both of those religions, where Christianity moved around the continents at a very early time period and really from the example of Christ, of being much more pluralistic in its look at reaching beyond these cultural borders.

[Slide] The part about peacebuilding I think is key. We often get a very depoliticized view of Jesus. I know I’m speaking on a precarious perch here because there are all these theologians in the room. But as a political scientist, what I notice about looking at the Gospels is Jesus was born in a war zone. He was born in a war zone that had known decades of civil war, that was currently under foreign military occupation. He was immediately a refugee upon the moment of his birth by the 1952 Refugee Convention’s definition. He had to flee for his life for the well-founded fear of political persecution because of his status of his religion ethnicity, and he had to flee a genocidal leader who was engaged in genocide and gross human rights abuses. He comes back later as an internally displaced person within the area of his birth. And who was he doing ministry to?

One of our speakers yesterday said some of the foundational characteristics of Jesus’s ministry was he heals and he expels demons and he ministers to the poor. Yes, that is all true. But who is he doing that to? He is doing that to people in a war zone who have been impacted and traumatized by conflict that is still going on. They are under foreign military occupation. Crucifixion was a form of terrorism being done to terrorize the civilian population into complicity with the Roman rule.

So to take that piece out of the context I think does a profound disservice to what it was that he was actually doing. He was reaching out to people across these borders when it was very dangerous to do so, in a very dangerous environment. This is of course what got him killed.

So he was engaged in peacebuilding in a war zone, engaged in building pluralistic networks, engaged in relationship-building across these cultural boundaries. So when I say that the Church was global, networked, pluralistic, and peacebuilding before it was cool to be any of those things, I’m talking about this was right at the time of Christ.

[Slide] How do we go from there to being the nascent global Church? It moves very quickly from Asia, where the religion was born, through the disciples to Africa and Europe very quickly. So right in the time of Christ and the Apostles you have the beginning prototype of these global networks.

[Slide] The other thing to remember about Christianity that is distinct from some of the other religious traditions is that throughout human history there has been a very close intertwining. We heard yesterday that we have these global networks. And yes, it’s true that we have them from the missionary era, and that was very, very important. Certainly, they were strengthened, enriched, and continued. But they were also right there at the beginning.

[Slide] But one of the things that was distinct about these networks and about the way Christianity spread in the era of the Apostles is that it was spread not by force. The
example of Christ was very different to the expression of other religious traditions.

[Slide] If you look throughout human history, there has been a very, very close intertwining of religious and political authority. Whether you are looking at ancient Egypt, whether you are looking at cases where the rulers were the gods, whether you are looking at indigenous religions in the Americas, whether you are looking at Buddhism or Hinduism or the Jewish kings, throughout history there is this close intertwining of religious and political authority. So again, whether the leader is the god, whether he is the relative of the god, whether he is appointed by the gods, there is this story of a very, very close intertwining of religious and political authority throughout history.

[Slide] Theocracy is very old. You see this, of course, with the Roman gods and the Greek gods as well.

[Slide] Jesus breaks that mold. He quite clearly says that, while his mission and his work is clearly not apolitical, it has a very clear challenge to the political authorities of his day, which is of course what gets him killed as an enemy of the state. But he is not running for office. He is challenging the state. He does not want to be the state. He says this quite explicitly: “My kingdom is not of this world.” He is not looking to enforce his ministry or his values by force. That is quite countercultural for his time.

This was much to the disappointment of some of his disciples, the Zealots, who wanted him to be a political Messiah and overthrow the Roman Empire and push out the foreign military occupiers. So this is right in the Christian DNA from the beginning, that we are separate, we are not entwined with political authority, we are not trying to be the separate state.

[Slide] I always talk in my writing and my work about religious actors bring three I’s to international politics: We bring institutions, we bring ideas, and we bring imagination. You see at the time of Christ the institutions that we are bringing are global, networked, and plural; the ideas are these ideas of reaching out and building relationships across those cultural barriers; that leads to an imagination of communion, of the ability to have relationships across these boundaries.

[Slide] What does that mean for the Church’s teaching on war and peace? Well, I have already said at the initial time of Christ and the immediate Apostles, the story that is usually told is the early Christians were pacifists. It is certainly true that Jesus and the Disciples went around Galilee not killing anyone. But I think that’s a rather incomplete and distorted description of his life and ministry and work. Yes, they didn’t kill anyone, but they were doing something much more robust than that. They were building peace, they were building relationships, among these groups that were engaged in live conflict and war.

[Slide] So, yes, he did not fight back with the Galilean Liberation Front even while he was being murdered, but he was doing something much more profound than simply not killing anyone.

[Slide] How does that change? How do we move from this heritage of a peacebuilding church to a different type of church? Well, it’s Constantine. This is the baptism that changed the world.

[Slide] So overnight you have Christianity metastasizing from this pretty much Mediterranean religion, as far as they could get by feet and not very good technology at
the time, to the entire Roman Empire.

[Slide] Prior to Constantine, you became a Christian by persuasion, by attraction, not by force. Now that Christianity is the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity becomes spread by force. So it’s a huge, huge difference.

[Slide] With that, we have then the intertwining of religious and political authority with Christianity that we had seen with other religions because this is now the official religion of the Roman Empire. You see the changes that that brings.

[Slide] The change is also that now that the state gets the Christian religion, the state gets religion, it also changes the religion. So we have a move from a point of peacebuilding and nonviolence to Just War tradition: “Thou shalt not kill” — with an asterisk — “except under these certain circumstances, for self-defense, if no other means is possible, for protection.” For the first time you have the use of military force being part of the Christian tradition, which didn’t exist prior to Christianity being part of the Roman Empire.

That is a little bit of background to just remind us when we talk about how does Vatican II moves us from our European past. The European past is the end of a long millennium, it is not where we started. So kind of reconstituting and recovering that I think is really important.

Now, when Rome fell, Christianity, the Church, picks up lots of functions of the state. First, you had the state get religion. Now the religion gets a state. So Catholicism becomes a sovereign state. They pick up land from the Roman Empire, they pick up many of the governing functions that had been done by the Roman Empire in this period of lawlessness and disarray and periods of increasing conflict and cycles of conflict. So the Church becomes someone to provide law and order, to provide social services, to provide education, to be the record keeper of births, deaths, and marriages. It picks up all of these functions that you would usually look to governments to do.

[Slide] You see this close intertwining as the Church becomes a state of religious and political authority.

[Slide] Of course, that leads to being just another European principate, which means the Church engages in war, like other European monarchies and principates do. You see lots of corruption that occurs with becoming a state.

[Slide] Of course all the things that lead to Father Martin Luther, this German priest, saying, “Hello, there are some changes here that need to be made because of the corruption that leads to the need for reformation.”

[Slide] What Vatican II does is it liberates us back to where we were before, these global plural networks and a Church built more on peace-building.

[Slide] From my perspective, with peace it becomes very clear, because World War II was a scandal for Christians. Christians slaughtered Christians in horrific numbers. We can grouse all we want today about Islamic terrorism and the Islamic state, but the numbers of people killed were far worse in the 20th century done at the hands of Christians. This was a huge scandal for the Church.

Hitler and Mussolini were both born Catholic. You can certainly have a very robust discussion about whether they were truly Catholic. But we could also agree that, at the
very least, it was a terrible failure of faith formation. So this was a big scandal for the Church.

[Slide] Vatican II rises to that challenge. Rather than looking at the loss of the papal lands, the loss of the sovereign state, the loss of the European principate as a loss, they look at that as a blessing: what are the ways that we can recover some of our Christian roots going forward?

From a political science point of view, this made a huge difference. Our last panel asked what difference did Vatican II make. In international politics it made a huge difference.

[Slide] Prior to Vatican II, we had seen this graph, that democracies were spreading all over the world. If you look before the last large spread, that’s where we were in 1962, before the last large spread. Democracy is spreading all around the world except in Catholic countries. Catholic countries prior to Vatican II were not democratic. That led to many scholars in my field talking about there’s something wrong with the Catholic DNA, or that we’re very hierarchical, we’re fascist, we’re autocratic, we’re monarchic, we are incompatible with democracy, which is something only Protestants can do. There was a lot of actual serious scholarship about that.

[Slide] After Vatican II, Catholic countries become democracies in record numbers. All across Latin America, southern Europe, Eastern Europe, etc., you have this huge expansion of democracy.

[Slide] The last blip up in the graph that I showed you is the Catholic wave. It led to this being called the “Catholic wave.” Even in my discipline, which never has anything to say about religion and never has anything positive to say about the Catholic Church, they recognize this as the Catholic wave.

[Slide] When the Church changed, the world changed. With more democracies, there is less war. Democracies do not fight one another. When these Catholic countries become democracies, you have a huge decrease in war in countries that had known decades, if not centuries, of war — like Ireland, going from being one of the most warring countries to now it’s always in the top ten of the Peace Index; to Latin America, those Latin American wars resolved. So you see this huge uptick in peace with the spread of democracy in Catholic countries.

[Slide] Also what Vatican II gave us was organizational tools to build peace. The Justice and Peace Commissions at every parish diocese level around the world, those were huge tools that are being used today to help build peace in areas which are still war zones.

[Slide] Whether you see the Church active in Uganda to settle the civil war, whether you see the Church very active across Africa in engaging with building peace in areas of civil war, we see this huge decrease in conflict.

[Slide] Peace is breaking out around the world, no matter how you measure it. There are fewer than half the number of major armed conflicts. There have been no international wars or great-power wars since the middle of the last century. That means there are many fewer casualties from war. And all of these things are happening in that post-Vatican II period, that we get these tools for peace-building.

[Slide] Now, does that mean there is no conflict? Of course not. There is still war in the world. We have to be able to think more nimbly about this.
[Slide] It can be sunny in Florida and snowing in Boston at the same time. So while peace is breaking out around the world, which is a wonderful thing to herald, it doesn’t help you if you are living in the Congo or if you are living in Syria or Iraq, where war is still very, very hot.

[Slide] But Vatican II did give us these tools, the three I’s. It gave us institutions to build peace. It brought us back to these ideas of human rights, of justice, of development of religious freedom, which are key for building peace around the world. It recommitted us to international institutions, to working with non-Catholics, and all of these things which are the toolbox for peace-building.

The last thing I will say is we have changed from a Church that was two-thirds northern to now a Church that is two-thirds in the Global South. Does that happen without Vatican II? Does that happen without a thorough disclaiming of racism and colonialism and a thorough commitment to human rights and democracy?

[Slide] We now have the first Pope who is clearly a son of Vatican II and who is very committed to implementing it at a time when this is more necessary than ever.

I think that, in terms of the area that I have been asked to speak about, the impact on peace and globalization was very clear, and Vatican II gives us some very useful tools for going forward.

Thank you.

MARCELLO NERI: I have to thank Jim and the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture for inviting me to this conference. It is a pleasure being here. So thank you very much.

I beg your pardon for my terrible English. I hope you can understand what I will say.

Jim asked me to talk about European Catholicism and the passage from modernity to post-modernity. So I have to summarize 200 years’ history in fifteen minutes. I will try to do that.

European Catholicism is a much more complex reality than one might think from the outside, also I would say from here, from the United States. Looking at European Catholicism from within, we will see that it is not at all a uniform reality. Each country and local church has its own features both internally (for instance, the understanding of pastoral life or the parish life in Germany and Italy is very different) and externally (we had after World War II for a long time Catholic political representation as a party in Italy and Germany but not in France or in Spain).

A larger picture could be offered by the European Bishops Conference. But I would say that, up to the times of Basil Hume and Carlo Maria Martini, the European Bishops Conference didn’t have any more real impact in shaping the life of the Catholic Church in Europe at a broader level than the national one.

Generally speaking, one could say that European Catholicism is shattered in a variety of forms of being Catholic that are strongly related to each nation and national history. On the one hand, this plurality could be seen as a strength because the idea of a European Catholicism can draw on many ways of living Catholic faith in the complexity of our time, with different pastoral models and forms of presence in the public life of the continent.
On the other hand, it is also an extreme weakness because of its almost constitutive link with the political and territorial idea of the nation-state in a time today where the modern concept of nation-state is challenged and transformed by processes of globalization and the phenomena of migration. Under this point of view, European Catholicism has remained petty-minded and unable to face the contemporary transformation of the continent at the political, social, and cultural levels.

Briefly said, in the passage from modernity to post-modernity, European Catholicism has been remaining a step behind, both in the way of shaping the pastoral and institutional life as well as in its mentality.

In Europe, the Catholic Church lives within the post-modern condition as if modern context and institution would still be very much alive and working well. This means that European Catholicism is living in a kind of fictional world, showing signs of a cultural and pastoral schizophrenic behavior.

If one moved from the local level towards a more general European sketch, we could find in all differences a common denominator. Between modernity and post-modernity, European Catholicism is lost in translation. Just a few points to sketch this thesis.

First, in the last fifty years European Catholicism has been dealing almost just with itself, fighting for internal affairs without paying too much attention to the socio-political changes of European culture and society. One reason for its being lost in translation lies even in the structural self-preferentiality of the Catholic discourse and thought.

Second, contemporary time is characterized by a religiosity which is becoming more and more erratic and nomadic, on the one hand, as well as by a migration of the sacred from the traditional institution of religion into a vague and unrestrained sphere of human and social life, on the other hand. European theology does not have the necessary set of tools for understanding and coping adequately with this deep transformation of religion which has broken its alliance with the institution of modernity.

Third, in my opinion, it would not be a mistake to understand European secularity as a [inaudible] from Christianity and religious stance in the public space. On the contrary, secularity in Europe is made by a dialectical movement between and by a transmigration from the religious sacramental space of Christianity into the profound sphere of everyday cultural, social, artistic life.

The Catholic dilemma nowadays in Europe is not so much a potential public bias against religious belief in the European society, but that out there — namely, in the secular space — there is too much Christianity. In front of these externalities of defeat, European churches and theologians feel uncomfortable, and they do not have almost any clue what to do with this Christian permanence outside the traditional walls of Christianity.

Fourth, if we look at the most influential Catholic magazines around Europe, it is possible to perceive how the European Catholicism is still living, or is still thinking, in a way that fits with modernity but that is inadequate for dealing with the transformation of belief and religion in the post-modern context. These magazines go on to understand and to explain in the public space the Catholic Church under Francis as if Ratzinger would still be the Pope.

Lost in transition, European Catholicism has been becoming also a stranger in its own house, the sense of alienation and uneasiness with regard to those externalities of the
faith of which I spoke before, where the Catholic tradition is still very much alive in its secular encryption is a clear sign of this condition. European Catholicism is living in Europe as an alien citizen.

Now the more constructive side. I almost buried European Catholicism, but there is still something good at home. So I would say if I should pick some aspects inside the Catholic tradition that are still flourishing and able to bridge the gap in the transition to post-modernity, I would suggest the following three:

First, hospitality as a religious counterpart to the European idea of citizenship, in order to develop a sense of belonging which is deeper than the legal one and broader than the one set by state national borders.

Second, restorative justice as a way of shaping a common life in which it could be taken into account and overcome also the negative side, the [inaudible], the lack of balance of living together within a shared space.

Third, etiological reflection on the quality and on the modality of the divine that is paradoxically going around with great strength inside the secular space of contemporary European society.

The fact is that Catholicism has not just become a minority position in European public life, but it is also no more a central issue around which people can build their entire lives. Even to a believer, the Catholic tradition is slipping toward the margins as one of the many pieces that they are trying to put together in their attempt to give form and meaning to their lives.

Marginality is the post-modern name of European Catholicism both at structural and existential levels. After a very, very long time, the European way of being Catholic is exactly in the same position of all Catholics around the world — at the margins, without a center that can exercise some sort of supremacy.

The election of Pope Francis was the symbol of this post-modern condition of the Catholic Church. As he stated in very simple but expressive words, “You just called someone who comes from very far away, namely from the margins of the world.”

Now the last passage to Vatican II. Vatican II tried to close the modern question inside the Catholic Church. In this sense, it belongs culturally and theologically to another time than ours. We must be aware of this diachronicity when we look at Vatican II as an adequate resource for dealing with the challenge of a post-modern world as a possible future for a global Catholicism behind any sort of Euro-centrism.

What we have to hold at any price from Vatican II is its style of thinking of the Church and Catholic life in a given time of human history. We are talking about a style of openness, where the Catholic Church can grasp the meaning of its historical presence only while dealing with the broader phenomena of human life in the contemporary world, a style of open hospitality where every externality can rest for a while in the space without borders — what other could “catholic” mean? — of everyday living faith and reaching the faith with something that came from outside, something that only the stranger can bring to us.

What I am here thinking of is a kind of new humanism, inspired by the style of the hospitable openness of Vatican II, where the secular and the religious could meet somewhere at the margins of the powers that are leaving our common world adrift and
work together without losing their reciprocal dialectical stand.

In a time when God is not anymore secured by previous processes of socialization, we do urgently need imagination, imagining God as if He would be somewhere among us without knowing in advance where He is, perhaps because God is not anymore in front of us, what made us so sure for a long time about the direction we had to go. But He is behind us, what lets us see the world in front of God as the only way we have to approach Him.

"Who knows, I ask myself," wrote once Rainer Maria Rilke, “whether we do not always rise so to speak from behind the shoulders of the gods, separated from their sublimely radiant faces through nothing but themselves, quite near to the expression we yearn for, only just standing behind it? But what does that mean, save that our countenance and the divine face are looking out in the same direction, are at one; and this being so, how are we to approach the god from the space that lies in front of him?"

Thank you very much for listening.

TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER: Thank you so much. It is an honor to be here today.

Asia is a vast continent of diverse peoples, languages, cultures, and religions, home to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Confucianism. It is also home to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as the Near East and the Middle East are geographically a part of Asia. Moreover, early Christianity traveled further east along trade routes and impacted Asia long before Western missionaries arrived.

Christianity is an Asian religion. But although the roots of Christianity are Asian, it is often perceived as a new foreign religion in Asia, as much a bearer of strange beliefs as it is a bearer of a Western agenda.

Western interests and concerns may have dominated the Second Vatican Council, but the Asian bishops did participate actively. During the Council’s preparatory phase, the Asian bishops’ concerns were varied. Some protested the use of Latin for the Council. Some wanted communism condemned. Some wanted an emphasis on devotion to Mary and Joseph. Some insisted on a complete overhaul to the Roman institution, pushing for liturgical and legal reforms, enculturation, and dialogue; more lay involvement; and participation of the whole Church in central governance.

In each of the four sessions of the Council, close to 300 of the 2,500 participants came from Asia. The interventions by the Asian bishops at the Council demonstrate a focus not on doctrinal issues but on practical ones. They were particularly forceful on liturgical reform, but also interested in enculturation into religious dialogue, religious freedom and communism, mission and evangelization, priestly formation, and rethinking mandatory celibacy.

While liturgical changes had an immediate and obvious effect on the Asian Church, the formation of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) in 1972 has had the most enduring impact on the identity and mission of the Asian Church. This nonbinding and voluntary body of bishops from South, South East, East, and Central Asia is a thoroughly Vatican II-inspired congregation that has worked tirelessly to grow a new way of being Church, a truly enculturated Church that emerges from the ground of Asia itself.

For the Asian Church to emerge from its own ground, the Church must dialogue with the
three primary characteristics of the Asian context: religions, cultures, and the poor.

First, the bishops recognize that the reality of the profound religious diversity, as well as Christianity’s minority status in most Asian countries, has made interreligious dialogue a necessary feature of Asian Catholic life.

Second, although Christianity is an Asian religion, the Romanization of the Catholic Church has meant that the Church in Asia is often under suspicion, seen as too Western in Asia and too Asian in the West.

The Asian bishops have insisted that Western approaches and preoccupations do not work for Asia. They have pushed for real enculturation from bottom to top.

Finally, the bishops have consistently sought to address injustice in Asia, from devastating poverty and health crises, to political oppression, to persecution of Christians, to sexism in the Church and wider society. They have emphasized the role of women in the laity as essential for building a just Church and world.

Such a triple dialogue of the Church with religions, cultures, and the poor emphasis the role of the local Church in understanding and responding to the diverse realities of Asia.

Theologically, priority must be on the local Church, because the church universal is a communion of local churches. Practically and pastorally, local churches are simply better equipped to understand and respond to the teaching and pastoral needs of the people.

While clericalism can indeed be a real problem in Asia, the professed emphasis on locality has meant a groundswell of participation and theological education of the laity and women religious. It has also led to the empowerment of Asian Catholics to speak back to Western Catholics on what issues, theological and otherwise, are of primary concern to them.

Thus, for example, while Asian Catholic feminist theologians may or may not support women’s ordination, many have insisted that this is of a distant concern far outweighed by immediate life issues, like women’s migration for work, domestic violence, pollution from coal- and wood-burning stoves, deforestation, human trafficking, sex-selective abortion, rape, child exploitation, and sexual abuse and harassment within and without the Church.

If dialogue is the mode of the Asian Church’s mission and a communion of local churches is the structure of the Asian Church’s mission, proclaiming and building the kingdom of God forms the content of the Church’s mission. As the FABC’s fifth Plenary Assembly states, “Our challenge is to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, to promote justice, peace, love, compassion, equality, and brotherhood in these Asian realities. In short, it is to work to make the kingdom of God a reality.”

The task of announcing the kingdom of God hearkens back to Jesus’s own proclamation of his father’s kingdom, as well as emphasizes the communal task of building a just world. For the bishops, a kingdom-centric mission is more appropriate to Asian religious and cultural plurality and maintains focus on the joint cultural/social/spiritual needs of Asian Catholics.

There was well-known and significant pushback from the Vatican during Pope John Paul II’s and Pope Benedict XVI’s papacies. The shift from a bounded Christocentric mission to a more fluid, open, kingdom-centric mission seemed to some a dilution of Catholic
faith. But attentiveness to local situations and needs does not mean that the Asian bishops deny the truth of Jesus as unique and universal savior. The Asian bishops have not questioned the unique salvific role of Jesus. But they have not emphasized it either.

Indeed, many have noted that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ in the Church, otherwise known as Dominus Iesus, promulgated in 2000, has as one of its underlying concerns Asian theologians, among others, whose Christologies did not sufficiently espouse the unique and universal salvific nature of Christ.

The concern for orthodoxy is understandable from a Roman perspective. From this perspective, Asian theologians and bishops could be seen as compromising the center of faith. Even the move from a Christocentric mission to something as biblical as a kingdom-centric mission could seem problematic.

But the return to a more ancient mission that proclaims and builds the kingdom and then does this thorough dialogue and communion of local churches is more than a mere sensitivity to religious pluralism, a bland valuing of enculturation, and a simple concern for the poor.

An apologetic, aggressive, defensive stance can be downright deadly in Asia. It is not only Christians in communist countries under threat. Growing militant fundamentalism, anti-Western and anti-Christian sentiment, and the unfair association of Catholics with other Christians who practice aggressive proselytization further threaten Catholic populations across Asia. The bishops are acutely aware that an exclusivist Christology can exacerbate delicate, and even dangerous, situations for Asian Catholics.

While an apologetic Christological stance of Jesus as unique universal savior may be doctrinally sound, it is not always pastorally prudent. The Asian bishops emphasize the kingdom as its mission, then, not just because it is both theologically and culturally more appropriate to the Asian context; they do so also because an apologetic and Christocentric approach, even when it comes from far away, can endanger minority-population Catholics in Asia. And sometimes the blood of the martyrs is just that — blood, fear, oppression, and death. Let us not romanticize this.

In response to the killing of twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya by Islamic State militants, Pope Francis talked of an ecumenism of blood: “The blood of our Christian brothers and sisters is a testimony which cries out to be heard. It makes no difference whether they be Catholics, Orthodox, Copts, or Protestants. They are Christians. Their blood is one and the same. Their blood confesses Christ.”

Far from glorifying death, the Pope calls us to listen to their suffering and see our deeper unity. Like the Asian bishops, Pope Francis does not deny any doctrinal issues that may divide us. But he also sees a deeper unity, recognizes the complexities of a real-life situation, and calls us to live our faith in ways that meet those situations. The Pope is very much in line with the Asian bishops, and here we can see them both with and moving beyond Vatican II.

Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio, and Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate, set the stage for the following fifty years of interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. While noting doctrinal concerns and boundaries, both documents take a more open approach to interreligious and ecumenical relations than in the past. The documents take care to articulate the
spiritual depth of others and call for dialogue, collaboration, deeper knowledge, love, and respect.

The Decree on Ecumenism highlights the significance of the Church’s continual renewal, even reformation and change of heart.

Nostra Aetate famously declares: “The Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ ‘the way, the truth, and the life.’”

Here we can see the delicate balancing act between holding on to the unique universal nature of Christ and honoring the truth and holiness in other religions.

I have participated in a number of Hindu-Catholic dialogues over the last three years that have celebrated the anniversary of Vatican II and discussed Nostra Aetate.

Some of my Hindu friends have rightfully, yet respectfully, noted concerns with the document’s sense of spiritual privilege, somewhat thin articulation of the world’s religions, and presumption of a human unity with a decidedly Christian bent. They deeply appreciated Nostra Aetate for its historical significance, but to them it was an outdated approach to interreligious relations that couldn’t really work as a framework for true dialogue today.

It doesn’t help that Nostra Aetate is now, and perhaps inevitably, read through the lens of Dominus Iesus, a document that almost destroyed the Los Angeles Hindu-Catholic dialogue, along with any number of dialogues across the United States, and still serves to justify suspicion of Catholics in interreligious dialogue today.

We may also see the limits of the Council’s articulation of ecumenical and interreligious issues. Even so, I would like to suggest that we not shut the door on Vatican II so soon.

First, we in dialogue circles tend to want to smooth out the differences between religions. This makes sense given our context. But that the Council is more hesitant to do this is not necessarily bad. Our differences define us as much as our similarities do, and to underplay places of incommensurability is a disservice to the uniqueness of each religion, not just our own. Of course, how one does this in the Internet age, when every document is broadcast globally across all kinds of intended and unintended audiences, and what tone is appropriate, were precisely the questions raised when Dominus Iesus was promulgated.

Second, the Council emphasizes the importance of collaboration and justice. Nostra Aetate says in its section on Islam that “the sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding, and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all social justice and moral welfare as well as peace and freedom.” Doctrines may divide, but suffering, injustice, and the search for peace unite.

I would argue that the concern for social justice in the dialogue of everyday life and interreligious and ecumenical relationships is central to the ongoing relevance of Vatican II. Indeed, Pope Francis has been explicit in his interreligious and ecumenical messages that daily life and the shared task of building a just world are essential. In this regard, the Pope and the Asian bishops very much carry on the Council when they emphasize our
contemporary context, our shared goals, and our social justice commitments.

Incidentally, this also speaks very much to the interests of Western Millennials. Formal dialogues tend to be skewing over. At forty, I am the youngest in our Archdiocesan dialogues by at least a decade. The real energy among younger people today is in interfaith cooperation and activism, such as is exemplified by Eboo Patel’s Interfaith Youth Core.

At the same time, we cannot forget the Western Christian privilege my Hindu friends had noticed in their reading of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. They would say that it is much easier to forget the past when you are the one in the position of power. Here Western privilege has led many of us to forget that being a Catholic Christian minority in a growing secular West is far different from being a non-Christian minority in the West or a Christian minority in the East.

If I am to be flip, what I think Pope Francis and the Asian bishops invite us to do is to check our privilege. By re-situating the Church’s interreligious and ecumenical work in the complex and fraught realities of our time, they do carry on Vatican II’s call to read the signs of the times. But precisely in doing so, they decenter our own Western preoccupations and move us beyond Vatican II to see perspectives beyond us and for the benefit of the whole Church.

Thank you.

NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE: Thank you very much to the panel. I thought that the three papers really interacted very well together.

Just to kick us off, I’d like to highlight some of the things that I heard and then ask a couple of questions.

I think what we’re talking about is moving from what Rahne rh r called a European or Euro-American Church to the World Church. Rahner located this right at Vatican II. I think that that takes a really long time to work. What we are seeing in these three panelists’ work is sort of the growing pains of that shift from a European/Eurocentric/Euro-American paradigm to a world paradigm.

For Maryann, I loved your rosy picture of Catholicism’s involvement in peace. I don’t know that I see it the same way, particularly in two respects: number one, the legacy of colonialism and the very real complicity of states — I’m trying to keep nations and states straight — in perpetrating violence against nations and the Church’s complicity in that; and secondly, what is the relationship between war, which as you note is on the wane, and violence, which does not seem to be on the wane?

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE: Maybe I’ll take the last question first. There is actually a lot of research that shows the waning of violence in all spheres. But again, we have to be able to think more nimbly about this. So just because you are seeing declining levels of violence, whether it is in actually declining levels of rape, of murder, of other factors — again, remember this is per capita. You have an increasing world population, and so as the world population is increasing, you would expect to be seeing these markers increase, and you are actually seeing them decrease.

But that’s not unilateral. So there are places of horrific violence. And there is a real disjuncture between our media, which focuses on violence, so it’s all conflict all the time.
in any media you look at. So the story of peace breaking out around the world, while empirically true and verified by many, many, many studies and lots of different benchmarks, seems suspicious to most people because it’s just not what you see in the media, etc.

So it is happening, but it is not happening uniformly. There are still lots of areas of great violence, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa today, in many areas where the state is failing and cannot provide law and order.

So when you talk about the rosy picture, it is really looking at structures. It is not saying that this unilaterally a rosy moment. There are lots of areas where there is lots of friction and conflict.

I work, for example, with the State Department and the U.S. government to try to help them “get” religion and engage with religious actors and factors in foreign policy. The structures of governments are only set up to deal with the structures of other states, of other countries’ governments. That’s how they were built. That’s the machine they were built with.

So they are struggling to retrofit their machinery. How can we interact with civil society? Who are these religious actors? How might we get ahold of them? So they are trying to build what we have.

For me it’s looking at the structures. We have these structures that are very rich, they’re very old. Do they work perfectly? No. Are there lots of conflicts within them? Yes. But we have these structures in place that others are trying to build in an ad hoc way. It is really hard to do that in the middle of a war. It’s much better to try to activate those structures when you are not in a period of hot conflict.

NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE: Thanks.

The next question is for Marcello and Tracy. As the Church is moving to marginality — I think we are seeing that globally and also sort of ad extra in the Church, but also ad intra in the Church, this move toward marginality — how do you see Francis playing a role in this?

I was so curious, Marcello, when you said that the European press is having a hard time moving from Benedict’s papacy to Francis’s. What do you think that’s about? I think it’s racism.

MARCELLO NERI: No. I used a European magazine as an example in order to explain how European Catholicism is still working with categories that fitted modernity but not post-modernity. In my opinion, Ratzinger was the last representative and the last Pope of the modern time. He tried to organize the Catholic Church in the present time as if modernity would be still working at the political, social, and cultural levels. He failed. I think his resignation is the result of his consciousness that you cannot use anymore a mordant instrument in order to deal with a contemporary time within and outside the Church.

I would say this is paradoxical, because the most influential Catholic magazines in Europe, I would say they all grew up in the spirit of Vatican II, and I would say they should feel comfortable with Francis. But they are not able to grasp the change of paradigm, what is happening now. In this way I used the magazine as an example.

My point is European Catholicism incarnated in this magazine is still thinking of
Catholicism only at the structural and institutional levels. They question if there will there be a reform of the Roman Curia. There will be some structural changes. But religion and the sacred is not working anymore at this institutional modern level, but at a completely different level.

**NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE:** What do you think, Tracy, about Francis’s marginality and how that is affecting your work?

**TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEI:R:** One of the noticeable things that you can see, at least if you are just focusing on the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, is a sense of freedom to do its work. There have been some hiccups along the way, some cultural confusions. But for the most part you can see a marked difference between the FABC documents coming out in the last two years. They just obviously feel like they can breathe.

It’s interesting because certainly there is a kind of excitement about him generally. But I think, at least from the bishops’ standpoint, what is the biggest difference is that they simply feel like they can do their work.

Now, I’m sure you noticed that I didn’t talk very much about the Middle East. There is a big difference — well, I would say there is no difference, because these are bishops who were in war and they are in war now and they are in survival-and-protection mode, and it remains the same. So in that sense at a Vatican level the concern for minority Christians was there before Francis too. In that sense I don’t know that there’s a huge difference.

But at least from the standpoint of the FABC, and also the Asian theologians, many of whom had very thick files about them, feel much freer to just simply do their work.

I’ll say too on the ad/extra thing, I heard recently the staggering number — but haven’t fact-checked, so just believe what I say — that 90 percent of health care in India is by Catholic women religious. So the first person most Indians meet is a Catholic. They do a lot of the deliveries; that is the health care system in India. There is a difference from the parish level to the FABC. Clericalism absolutely is a big issue.

That being said, the dialogue is about survival. You have to dialogue when you are in the minority like that: “What is the Christian thing? I’m angry at whatever, the great imperialist Christian nation. What do you think?” This is part of the challenge, is that minority Christians are held responsible for what we say in the media and what our politicians do, so not just our religious figures but our political ones as well.

We get a lot of junk in our media. Just imagine the media and how Christians are portrayed in minority countries and how America is portrayed. So there is a lot of conflation of the West and the East and that is pushed onto Eastern Christians.

**NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE:** Does any of the panel want to comment laterally or should we open it up?

**TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEI:R:** I just want to make a comment about globalization. Natalia talked a little bit about the legacy of colonialism. We can’t forget that globalization began, at least the way that we think about it, as a kind of colonial process. Now, I totally agree with you that we need to think historically and think back in terms of the history of Christianity. But economic factors, cultural factors, have meant globalization outside of the West is a very ambiguous reality. You know the gap between
rich and poor has gotten bigger.

So we want to remember that globalization is also a process of power and that the specter of colonialism remains. This is something we can’t lose sight of, that there are political and power dimensions in what’s going on.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE: I have a question for you. One of the intriguing things you were talking about was there being too much Christianity in the secular space and the European churches having difficulty knowing what to do with Christian permanence outside the traditional walls of Christianity and the spiritualness outside. I wonder if you could just give us some examples and say a bit more about that provocative statement.

MARCELLO NERI: That is a very long question. I just wanted to say one thing. European secularity is not a farewell from Christianity or a religious stance. I would say inside European secularity there are a lot of aspects of Christian belief and tradition encrypted within.

For example, I would say today the most important European philosophers are using Christian or even Catholic concepts in order to develop their philosophy. I don’t know if you are familiar with Jean-Luc Nancy. His last book is about adoration. It’s just an example. He developed all his last philosophy based on the category of adoration. He finds this category outside there as externality of the faith, and he used this category as a way to save post-modern reason from failure. He is using all this Christian conceptuality and he is accepting all but the faith. That is for me a sign of how much Christianity there is out there.

Also, in European figurative art there is a lot of confrontation with Christian tradition and spirituality.

Now, the problem for European Catholicism is that European Catholicism doesn’t have the understanding tools in order to deal with this presence of Catholic tradition out there. So the secular space is not empty of Christianity. There is too much Christianity. And there is a question of power. There is too much Christianity that is no more under the power and the control of the institution of faith. For that reason they have a problem to deal with that.

NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE: Okay. So should we open it up to a larger conversation? We have about thirty minutes.

QUESTION: Robert Armbruster, Saint Peter’s University in Jersey City.

I would like to ask Tracy, to what extent do you think the Philippines’ Bishops Conference is having on the Asian Bishops Conference and to what extent do you think that Philippines’ Catholicism will have on world Catholicism?

TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER: In response to the first part of your question, do you mean is there tension between them?

QUESTIONER [Robert Armbruster]: [Inaudible, off-microphone].

TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER: What’s interesting about the Philippines is that there are many similar challenges that Asian Catholic communities face more broadly. For example, in terms of interreligious dialogue, there is a large indigenous population in the
Philippines as well as a Muslim population in the Philippines. It is easier to not bump into Muslims in the Philippines than, say, in other parts of Asia. But it is also a religious diverse context.

But setting that aside, one of the things that I think Filipino theologians offer in particular, and have offered in particular, is the facility in border crossing. Because of the strong sense of what you might call a mixed cultural identity, a sense of oneself as an indigenous Filipino but also with a Spanish heritage, and also as a Westerner in the East, that there is kind of a natural border crossing that happens.

They have been particularly effective at moving within Asia and also beyond Asia. They have been at the forefront of some very particular issues that we need to face in our globalizing world, such as migration for work. Because border crossing is simply a fact of life, the Filipino theologians have been able to be at the forefront of this.

What I'll also say is that there can be some challenges between, as I mentioned before, the Church parish level and the bishops level that Filipino theologians have also helped to negotiate, not just within the Philippines but also in interfacing with FABC.

But, on the downside of that, some class issues have arisen. For example, there are some very distinct challenges that outcast Indian Christians have faced in India — widespread discrimination within the Church, forced reconversions back to Hinduism — that require a different kind of response and that especially require a sense among theologians of class consciousness and a recognition that there are limits to what one can do as a kind of ambassador for Asia.

But I would say I am always struck by the amount of cooperation between theologians and bishops in Asia, speaking myself as an Asian-American who has seen some of the tensions. But I think one of the big challenges is at the parish level.

**QUESTION:** I claim a very strong Catholic identity in the particular and the universal sense. I am speaking as a black Catholic. I remember Vatican II in our community. I’m kind of in the older generation. I grew up in the 1960s. But I remember the time, that vigor in our community and our parish, because it was a recognition of the dignity of difference and an invitation to bring that difference to our church and it would be honored.

I think when we are talking about a European church and an American Church, I find a missing link when we are talking about the world, this wonderful colorful world. But here, in our American Church, the conversation regarding black Catholics is not held. So when we show up does it matter?

**MARCELLO NERI:** I think generally I see one internal problem. During modernity Catholicism had been more and more institutionalized, so the only voice on the public scene that has some value is the voice of the institution. That is typical for modernity.

Vatican II tried to resolve this question also inside the Catholic Church and tried to give the faithful’s voice public relevance. But the problem is that after Vatican II, at least in Europe, the Catholic Church remained closed in a modern paradigm, in a modern imagination. So the everyday life of the faithful doesn’t have any public relevance. This is the first problem.

The second is in Europe I would say there is a very important presence of the Catholic
word at the social level with poor people, marginalized, and so on. At such a level, at least in Europe, but I think perhaps also here in the United States — Catholicism and a personal position of faith is public knowledge.

A third level is the public discussion, media and so on. I agree with what has been said, that scholars of theology are usually not able to communicate to a broader public and so on. If I used my technical words, I wouldn’t reach anyone, this is sure.

Within the Church there is a structural problem. At the social level in public society, there is in Europe an acknowledgement for the activity and the meaning of the Catholic Church and of Catholic life. In public communication, I would say that European theologians are not the best communicators. But it is possible. So I write usually in a magazine or a newspaper or a blog. I don’t have any problem to find hospitality also in secular media. I don’t have any problem. There is no bias.

TRAY SAKI TIEMEIER: I want to thank you for your question. It is very important. I think I first need to clarify that I use these terms “West” and “East” knowing that they are problematic terms. Both terms refer to groups of people and cultures that are very, very diverse, although they are terms that are employed very commonly across Asia because there is a sense of a Western hegemony.

But to get back to your question, I grew up in an all-white parish in St. Louis. I don’t know if Vatican II hit then. Some people had heard of it and other people hadn’t. The nuns very clearly told me that my Buddhist family was going to hell, that I wasn’t a good Catholic because I was named after my ancestors. My middle name is a combination of my great-grandmothers’ Japanese names. Every year at May crowning it was a beautiful, gorgeous, blonde, white girl who was chosen. It was clear to me that I was not a part of the Church. So I take your point. You are absolutely right.

I think that we do need to problematize our own discussions about American Catholicism, because it isn’t just that there are diverse colors of faces in the pews, but structural racism is here still, and it still is embedded within the Church.

It’s not simply about acknowledging in some sort of neutral way that the Church is not racist. That’s not good enough. We as a Church need to be anti-racist. We need to step up and acknowledge — when I was talking about checking our own privilege — we need to acknowledge our own location and we need to create the space for conversations to happen about the diverse Catholic experiences.

Again I am going to bring up this question of power. It’s not just honoring that we each all have our own experiences, but these experiences are part of very complicated power dynamics.

I just want to thank you and affirm that it’s not just — I agree with you, we haven’t been great communicators. But there is also a sense in which we need to own up and take our own responsibility not just for the past but for the future.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE: If I might, I want to thank you for your comments. I think it was really important to say we were invited to bring our differences to the Church and they would be honored, that that was the feeling of the kind of joy after the Second Vatican Council.

I think what we are hearing is both in some ways there was some penetration and in a lot of ways there wasn’t. So what tangible ways did the Second Vatican Council make a
difference on the racist patterns of the U.S. Catholic Church? Well, there are some very specific ways.

If you look at Alabama and the role of the local Catholic Church at the time the civil rights movement was going on, the local bishop in the diocese where Selma was gave explicit directions to the clergy under his authority not to participate in the civil rights movement. They felt Catholics were a minority, they would be caught up in these tumultuous times. So it seemed to be part racist but part also concern for the physical wellbeing of his personnel at times when people were being killed. So that was what he said prior to Vatican II.

Vatican II happens and that bishop changes absolutely the instructions he gives to his clergy. He says, “If anyone in my diocese refuses communion to an African American they will be excommunicated.” That’s a pretty fast change that you can document.

But the other changes have not been as readily apparent. Partly, I think — I don’t know if it was Massimo or others who were saying that with Francis we really have the first Vatican II pope. We had two popes who were pushing back against Vatican II, who were re-debating, who were trying to put a different emphasis, who were not fully on board with these ideas that difference is okay and should be celebrated. That’s a long time to wait for implementation, from 1965 to Francis. Now, that’s a bit unfair, but just to put it that way in terms of race.

While on the one hand there is no institutional blessing on racism, saying “the clergy may refuse communion to African Americans” — those most stark forms — is not also enough pushback to the types of reification of racism along class lines in the ways that we see the suburbanization of churches that are all white and that are all African-American in certain neighborhoods and the two don’t meet. And there’s not enough courageous leadership around that, around bringing us together as one Church at one table.

So I would agree with what you had to say.

NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE: If I could just add, I think you are drawing attention to something that I was hoping we would talk about, which is the violence that goes on not, just ad extra by the Church, but the violence ad intra, the violence that the Church perpetuates among itself, in itself.

One of the more, I think, egregious forms of that violence that I think many kinds of Latino Catholics and black Catholics share is the violence of erasure, the violence of having your story never told, or someone who looks like you never do the May crowning, or someone whose experience of Catholicism will never be the story but always be the asterisk, when it’s lucky enough to be the asterisk.

We see this in Hispanic Catholics. I was just reading Tim Matovina’s book on Latino Catholicism. It really sort of shook me. He talked about the immigrant hypothesis of, especially, the North American Church, this idea that all the Catholics who came here came from somewhere else, starting right around here, in Maryland, and then spreading west and south, as if there were no Catholics here before, or as if there wasn’t this sort of violent legacy of the way we got to have Catholics here before, and not really acknowledging that, acknowledging it sort of as the city-on-a-hill phenomenon, that the Catholics sort of rode into the United States. That’s a really problematic narrative that erases legitimate diversity that has always existed, even in the sort of microcosm that is U.S. Catholicism.
When I think about the kind of power dynamics that are working in the Church and the privilege that works in the Church, I think very much about that erasure and the violence of being erased. So I thank you for bring that up as well.

Who’s next?

**QUESTION:** I’m Patrick Ryan. I teach here at Fordham.

I would like to ask about something you mentioned, about the problems of the Church being a bit homogenized. It’s interesting to see where churches are being closed down. They are being closed down in the places where the Church had various ethnic groups in the 19th century who are no longer there, various Czech and Hungarian churches for instance on the East Side. But it is not as if there aren’t other people living on the East Side. What I find strange is the lack of any evangelization of the people who actually live there now. I’m worried about that particular phenomenon, especially when it affects areas that are simply poor and are racially or ethnically different from the English-speaking majority who dominate the Church.

I think some of the things you are talking about speak to that very much. There is a problem of what choices we are making. We want to build more churches in the suburbs because that’s where more white Catholics have gone. But where potential Catholics are, people who are perhaps not in the Catholic Church, or even in any church, in the inner-city is being neglected.

**QUESTION:** My name is MT Dávila. I teach at Andover Newton Theological School.

My question for all three from the context where you’re speaking — and maybe it goes to the previous question — is speak to me about your vision of the role of the Catholic university in the different modalities that you are speaking from, particularly in terms of the Catholic university having a mission to fulfill as a result of Vatican II and the insights that are our inheritance from that.

**TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER:** I have things to say about that. [Laughter]

I’ll speak more specifically to Loyola Marymount University and kind of think more broadly from there. At a Jesuit school we are very interested in internationalization. We have an internationalization, interdisciplinary — we have lots of inter.

I’ll say this as a personal note. It never fails when we have a search open in our department, that someone looks around the room and says, “We don’t have enough theologians. We need somebody who does real systematic theology.” I teach that class at the graduate level, but somehow I don’t quite do it right.

We have a responsibility at our universities to reimagine, like Marian was saying, what does it mean to be Catholic in the 21st century, what does it mean to be a Catholic university in the 21st century? We are opening this new Academy on Catholic Intellectual Thought. What does the Catholic intellectual tradition mean today in Los Angeles, among a huge Catholic population that is very ethnically diverse? We have a responsibility to reimagine the Catholic intellectual tradition from within our own context.

I think that there are a lot of Catholic universities doing this. But somehow there is a fear that we are letting go of something as we are doing it, that we still need someone who does “proper” systematic theology.
I wonder, if we are losing something — and maybe we are — or what are we saying if we’re saying that I can’t teach Rahner or I can’t teach Thomas, which I do in my classes?

So I think it’s a great question, and it’s a great question for us to think more broadly. I think we do a great job at Catholic universities talking about stuff, but we need to really think seriously about how to reorient ourselves.

**MARCELLO NERI:** I’m the wrong person for this question because I work in a public university. There is a big difference between the United States and some countries in Europe. In Germany, theology belongs to the public university, the state university. So if what we are thinking about is not the identity or the mission of a Catholic university, but instead what meaning has theology inside the public university, what role has Catholic theology inside the public academic world?

I work at a very small university, at a very small institute. We can discuss about this topic every day. But we understand theology as a cultural mediation of faith in the contemporary European context, as a form of public presence of Catholic reflection and thought within the public space of the university. We must find ways in order to be acknowledged in this function.

**TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER:** If I could jump in on that, too, we do at Catholic universities a great job of teaching our students about service, but not about justice. There are far too many students who go on our service learning trips and their privilege is reinforced. They go in thinking they are going to save the world and they come out thinking that they can save the world. This sort of sense of ourselves of the white Western heroes going in to save the world is something that we at Catholic universities should know better about.

The dismantling privilege, or at least awareness of our privilege and then dismantling that sense of entitlement to serve others, is something we really have to do because we are just reinforcing their privilege — not all of us; I know Jeannine does a better job than I do.

**MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE:** I just want to weigh in a little bit on this question of reimagining what does it mean to be a Catholic university in the 21st century. Within the U.S./North American context, these universities began as places for the immigrant Catholics to go when Catholics were excluded from other universities. Now Catholics are not excluded from other universities.

But we are not reimagining what it means to be that service to the generation of immigrants. The high price tag of our universities, the exclusionary process that that high price tag entails, has not led, I think, because of the business aspect of it — these are businesses that have to find enough students to pay enough tuition to keep the doors open in difficult times in higher education.

How do you keep the doors open for the poor? There are some that are doing just heroic efforts in this regard, that are still educating the poor and are still educating the first in their families to get a college degree. That is transformative work.

There is very little in social science that we can point to that’s a magic wand, very few things that really improve life across all indicators, all metrics, all benchmarks. Education is one of those very, very few things, that everything gets better with education. Prosperity, longevity, social relationships, lack of sickness, happiness — I mean you name it. Anything you can measure improves with improving education.
If we are taking Vatican II seriously about its commitment to human rights and human dignity, we have to take that great commission very seriously of educating the poor, and we have to support those institutions among us that are still doing it.

I was just at Mount St. Mary’s graduation in Los Angeles. There were very few white faces that crossed the stage, reaching their baccalaureate degrees. Ninety-some percent of them were on tuition assistance and were first in their families to get a degree. That’s transformative for their whole family and for everyone that comes after.

Georgian Court in New Jersey — I mean there are others that are doing it. And it’s hard work. But I think we have to look front and center at the class bias that has crept into some of our universities and ask, are we still addressing the needs of the poor, as Francis is asking us to do, in our educational mission?

NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE: I think we have time for one more question.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Maggie Jarry. I go to Union Theological Seminary, but I’m a lone Catholic in that environment.

Thematically, I think all three of you have spoken to something that kind of is in the theme you were presenting, Tracy, about the kingdom-of-God concept in Asia. I recently had a chance to travel to El Salvador, where that was a term that was used as though it were widely understood. But it certainly is not a term I hear at Union Theological Seminary, where I hear a lot about liberation theology, for example. Here I think we have terms that start to become the norm of our theological environments.

On the one hand, I’m curious about whether Asia — and that’s such a broad category — whether this concept of kingdom of God is similar to that which is discussed in Latin America. Are there differences? It can sound hierarchical, but I found it to be very much about being at the ground level, even at a pedagogy level. So as you’re talking about universities, I’m also thinking about how are we reaching people with education. Does it have to be in the higher education realm, or are we training people in higher education to be out in the world, working with people who don’t necessarily access these institutions but who are clearly theologians in their own right, by their lives? Then also, to what extent are we discussing the kingdom of God in Europe or the United States?

I just thought it was a really interesting concept, and I wondered if you could speak a little bit more in detail, what does that mean in the Asian context?

TRACY SAYUKI TIEMEIER: That’s a great question.

I should first point out that “the kingdom of God” is not a term that the Middle Eastern bishops employ, for obvious reasons, or maybe not obvious reasons. But many Middle Eastern Christians are crusaders, they are being associated with the past, and kingdom language is not helpful.

In terms of how the bishops talk about kingdom of God and then how it is actually deployed at the parish level is a great question. It’s something that a lot of educators use in their conferences when they come together to talk about things. And again, I’ve talked about this kind of disjunction between the parish level and the magisterial level.

And you’re right, it is so diverse. I can only speak in terms of my own personal experiences and how I’ve heard it being used or not being used. It’s sometimes used and
sometimes not used, and not always used in the same way.

But for some communities, it is a very empowering term that doesn’t at all signify hierarchy, because for some communities it is kind of a foreign concept. So to them it evokes the home churches of the Bible. They’re thinking very biblically and they are not thinking hierarchically.

I think you have raised a very good point. The short answer is it is understood differently and applied differently in different contexts.

NATALIA IMPERATORI-LEE: Please join me in thanking our wonderful panel.

JAMES McCARTIN: Thank you. It’s lunchtime. I want to make two announcements.

The first is for those who are in our audience today, if you are interested in finding a place nearby for lunch, there is a sheet outside our door that is available to you that offers some suggestions.

The second thing I want to say is we are starting at 2 o’clock. Be in your seats at 2 o’clock.

Thanks.

[Lunch Break: 12:32 p.m.]