GARY ADLER: Good afternoon. Jim McCartin says to start, so we have begun. I’m Gary Adler. I’m the Director of Research at the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC. I’ve got to say it’s quite an honor to be here to be able to present this session and then lightly moderate it and get into the sort of conversation that we had in the morning sessions.

Before we go to this session, though — I know it has been said before but I don’t think it has been said enough — thanks to Jim McCartin and also Patricia Bellucci and all of your colleagues who may remain unnamed who have pulled off this terrific event.

From the get-go, the organizers of the conference have held together a great tension, as the title directly says: “Our Inheritance” and “Looking Forward Towards the Next Half Century.” I think of this as something of the pivot session, put here to actually make sure we spend more time talking about the next half century. This is wise because scholarship is, after all, inherently an activity about conserving something, maybe especially so in the Catholic tradition. But of course, Vatican II itself was the culmination of an intellectual mode of looking back in order to move forward, maybe something like [Latin phrase] aggiornamento.
In light of this past, our specific task for this panel, as Jim set it, was as follows: What is the future of Vatican II? What might an agenda for Catholic intellectuals look like as we move forward toward Vatican II’s centenary in 2065? How easy a task!

I can tell you, though, having read their papers, that you are in for a treat in terms of their thinking about the challenges, the issues, the potentials, and the potential tragedies of the next fifty years. They are trying, in the words of Bronwen McShea’s phrase from yesterday, to discern a “maturing Catholicity as it unfolds in the second half century after Vatican II.”

Beginning from that viewpoint, I wanted to offer you just a few tips as the audience as you prepare to listen to these four papers. Having read them, these are some questions that jumped out for me that might help you to hear some of the themes that go across this diverse yet provocative set.

What, not just who, are Catholic intellectuals?

What are Catholic intellectuals for?

Is the category Catholic intellectuals accurately descriptive of who is actually doing the thinking for the Church?

Where do our authors find springboards in Vatican II, and what does this say about Vatican II’s legacy? I can give you a hint there: There is a whole lot of Gaudium et Spes in these papers. You’ll see it coming through.

Then finally, what do our authors propose as the key arenas of change that need to happen in the internal life and external orientation of the Church, and how do they envision these changes actually happening in the next fifty years?

Like with all our other panels, you can find detailed bios in your programs, or even more on their Web sites, and there is lots of white space near those bios for you to write your marginalia because you’re going to want to with this group.

Our presenters in order of appearance this afternoon are: Christiana Peppard of Fordham University, MT Dávila of Andover Newton Theological School, Tricia Bruce of Maryville College, and Stephen R. Grimm of Fordham University.

Let’s welcome Christiana.

**CHRISTIANA PEPPARD:** Thanks, Gary, and thanks to all of you for being here. I see many friendly familiar faces and some new ones too. As perhaps the lone faculty member whose home campus within the Fordham ecosystem is Lincoln Center, I welcome you all in a special way to this fine building where, as you know, the main gathering place is the elevators.

Catholic intellectual life, whatever that is, as Gary has suggested, does have many facets, as the panels and presentations within them today and yesterday have pointed out. My focus today, and my charge really, has been to discuss the role of science in theology and in Catholic Church institutions and thinking. That is a fairly broad directive, so I am going to attempt to do it justice by talking about the past, present, and the future in the next twelve minutes. What I am going to do is give a few introductory framing remarks and then second, third, and fourth, respectively, I am going to talk about the past, the
Does truth change or does it stay the same? Is scientific truth the same as theological truth? These questions have been considered in various ways in Catholic intellectual life and certainly within the long conversations that have gone on between natural philosophy and theology for the past several millennia. But they have reached a particular inflection point after the scientific and industrial revolutions, when empirical science became distinguishable in important ways from its predecessor of natural philosophy and when questions of authority and interpretation rose to the forefront of institutional and theological debates.

Theology, of course, as a way of knowing, as a discourse of meaning, and as a set of organizing principles for an institutional body, is not separate from epistemology — that is, how we know. And I think it is important to say, though it is probably obvious, in terms of both tradition and content, theology is not science and science is not theology. But they relate, for better and for worse, and they are not static, nor are they necessarily opposed.

This brings us to the second point, which is the past, which I am understanding primarily as modern history, modern in the sense of the rise of empirical science, but also in the sense of modernity. So we are talking about Galileo and after.

If you watch Fox News — some of you may; many of you may not — if you pay attention to conversations about religion and science in the media, whether it's through the likes of Sam Harris or the likes of Fox News and climate change denials, you would be forgiven for having the impression that science and religion necessarily conflict.

While I can't go into the courses that I teach in this limited time period, I'll simply say that's wrong and there's a lot more to be explored at the intersections of these ways of knowing. I'll give a couple examples.

In this modern past we have seen a range of advances in content and method with regard to knowledge acquisition, and sometimes these advances rub up against the process of theology as well as the people doing the espousing of theology from magisterial contexts. Sometimes that creates friction against biblically informed modes of natural philosophy.

So Galileo, everybody's famous go-to Church guy — not really a Church guy, but someone who interacted in a protoscientific way with the Catholic Church — he was a meticulous observer of the night skies. In this he had much in common with Darwin and he has much in common with today's scientists. He also had access to and contributed to developing a range of new forms of technology, telescopes and so forth, that helped to see material reality, in this case of astronomy, in ways that had previously not been possible.

Many scholars, however, agree that the Church's response to Galileo was not so much because Galileo's view of the world solely challenged the geocentric model that had been espoused, but also because he aspired to an authoritative interpretation of the way the world worked. Now, I recognize that those two threads are often entangled. But the question becomes for Galileo's time: Who has the authority to interpret Scripture or to suggest that the ways that we have been interpreting the Bible might need to change? This will come back into our conversation in the fourth section of the talk.

And of course, what Galileo revealed is that our frames of knowledge — our measurements, our empirical understandings of reality — can in fact change the hermeneutics with which we regard the Bible, our ways of reading the Bible, Scripture,
and so forth.

So it raises questions: What forms of knowledge are best, most accurate, more true? Can Scripture be wrong? Can Church authorities be wrong? How do we describe the world that we inhabit being true on the one hand to tradition as well as to the facets of empirical knowledge?

And indeed, in 1992 — it took a while, but we all know the Church doesn’t move quickly — John Paul II issued a correction regarding the condemnation of Galileo, and in 2000 there was an apology.

Darwin: Did he upend the Catholic Church, did he upend theological teachings? Yes and no. It depends on what case study you are looking at and what sorts of questions you are asking of those frames.

But the rise of Darwin and the idea of evolutionary theory is linked indelibly to the rise of other sciences, physical sciences, like geology, and with them their following up on Galilean, Copernican sorts of observations about processes that far exceed human understanding or humans’ presence on this planet. So the suggestion in Darwin’s iterations that perhaps God didn’t create all species in a special creation kind of way has been a challenge to Catholic theology and to many other forms of Christian theology.

What the Church currently cleaves to is the idea that human bodies as natural, as parts of the physical world, have evolved and are the results of evolutionary processes. But still to the present day the Church resists the idea that the human soul itself evolves. The Imago Dei must be the result of divine processes, not human ones.

Sometimes when I teach my freshmen especially, I refer to the modernist condemnation in the early 1900s. This was when the Church got a little cranky at expectations of incorporating empirical science and political science and other rising disciplines and just said, “No, we’re not going to do it.” I refer to that as a kind of hangover of epistemology, that “there’s just too much, so let’s say no.”

What I think is important, at least for me as a teacher, is to draw out how some of these questions percolate through the modernist condemnation as well as subsequent developments, particularly of Vatican II, about which more momentarily.

So does truth change or does it stay the same? If our articulations of truth change, does that mean someone was wrong, or does it mean that we’re just more right now? And again, is scientific truth the same as theological truth?

This brings us, in our quick-and-dirty tour of the history of religion and science in the West, to the present, which I am considering to be 1962 to now.

Now, I think that Vatican II did usher in something new, and John XXIII did something both chronologically and epistemologically refreshing when he convened Vatican II and granted both permission and an imperative for the Church to turn towards the world, as famously expressed in Gaudium et Spes.

This has proven to be momentous for relations between science and religion as well as social ethics. Full disclosure: In my work I habit the intersection of those, particularly with regard to ecology and the environment.

There is a litany of developments in the last half century between the Catholic Church and
the domain and explorations of science that we might choose to talk about in the Q&A. I’ll just bracket those for now in the interest of time and focus in particular on the rise of environmental science and thinking about what this means for humans on a finite planet.

It’s very interesting to note that the Catholic Church has since the year 1990 had on its Pontifical Academy of Sciences an atmospheric chemist who goes by the name of Paul Crutzen. Paul Crutzen is a Nobel Laureate as well, who is known for many things, including coining the term anthropocene. This is a term we can also talk about more in the Q&A. It is a very useful term, a term rooted fundamentally in geology. *Anthropos* is of course the human and the suffix *cene* refers to geological epochs. So the idea here is that humans are the ones who have been changing the earth with geological-scale impacts and whose impacts far outweigh the proportion of our inhabitation of this planet.

Just last week, on March 5, Cardinal Turkson gave an address at Maynooth University in Ireland in which he said a number of things that are very interesting and which I think prefigure the much-anticipated encyclical on ecology that will be coming this summer from the Vatican, one of which was, simply, that climate change is happening. The scientists tell us that. So what we need to do is think through virtues, vices, patterns of justice, and relation and behavior in response to these realities.

I am going to quote Dennis Gonzalez. He is a Filipino social ethicist. He is also a contributor to a book I just finished coediting, which actually comes out today, which is great. It’s called *Just Sustainability: Ecology, Technology, and Resource Extraction*.

He writes in a very post-Vatican II spirit, which is why I quote him: “As a teacher and learner, the Church as both institution and people must listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times, including nonreligious voices from the fields of politics, public and business management, economics, ecology, and the natural sciences. It is in the intersection of social justice, particularly social injustice — legacies of colonialism, neocolonialism, resource extraction, and environmental degradation — that we see fierce knots of extractive mentalities and iniquities and questions about the proper relations of humans and the planet.”

I suggest that we will see a great deal more of that, particularly after the encyclical comes out. I haven’t seen it, but I look forward to doing so.

This brings us, I think, to the final point of this brief tour, which is the future of religion and science. It is, of course, a bit hubristic to stand here and paint the future of something as vast as religion on the one hand and science on the other, so you’ll forgive me the infelicities in those enormous terms. You’ll also forgive me the fact that what I think will be the future of religion and science in a Vatican II inflection also derives directly from what interests me. So be that as it may.

I will stake my best set of grading pens that ecological and environmental science will come to a center of discussion of religion and science, where for a number of decades prior there has been a lot of interest in seeing whether quantum physics and divine providence are compatible. That’s very important and interesting. Not my work.

I think that environmental science, planetary patterns of degradation, and intersections with social justice will come to the fore. That means that religion and science, or theology and science, will come to look a lot more or increasingly look like science and ethics.

In that inflection I think we will see a lot more thinking about the anthropocene, the time of outsized human impact, intersections of scientific cosmology and anthropology and
ecclesiology as a mediating institution for responsibility. And of course, in an extraplanetary kind of way, if there are multiverses or life in other galaxies, there will be even more revolutions, both hermeneutical and ethical, that follow from those discoveries. What would it mean for theology and ethics to integrate those sciences?

Again, I think we will see a lot more about social ethics and focus on poverty and global poverty. Reading the signs of the times in social and natural sciences to see how particular arrangements of political economy, and in some cases multinational corporate externalizing of costs onto future generations or impoverished communities, how does the Church speak in an enduring way for the poor? This wasn’t evidently a question for religion and science in previous centuries. It will be in the 21st.

I think we will see a lot of questions coming up about synthetic biology, emerging technologies, and transhumanism, because not only do humans no longer stand as stewards or dominators of life but also as creators of new forms of life, including forms of our own modification. Not only does this challenge the idea of playing God and whether humans ought to do that, but it can also destabilize our self-understandings as centers of the world, particularly with the rise of artificial intelligence.

I ought to say that avoiding any of these questions will not make them go away. This is one of the legacies of Vatican II that gives me the most heart, whether or not it is embraced by disaffected, disaffiliated Catholics. As a legacy, the capacity to engage a range of sciences and social-scientific discourses in order to chart and better understand the shape of the world is an important epistemic and methodological legacy that we inherit. I think that is extremely important because, frankly, there is very little more vital than inhabiting the slippery terrain where facts and values intersect on the ground. We might not always get it right, but if we don’t try, we surely never will.

Thanks.

MARIA TERESA DÁVILA: Good afternoon. My name is MT Dávila. I am here from Andover Newton Theological School, which is a United Church of Christ and American Baptist USA-affiliated seminary, with a large Unitarian-Universalist population of students, and on the same hill and in covenant with Hebrew College, a rabbinical School. I just wanted you to get a little bit of the context of where I practice my skill of sorts, and maybe you will hear some of that in my presentation.

So we are at the church of the poor. Two related but juxtaposed images helped frame my thoughts on Vatican II at 100, and you are going to remember these as I mention them. Both of these images took place on the U.S.-Mexico border, one about a year ago and the other one this summer.

[Slide] The first was the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Mass at the border on April 1, 2014. Images from this Mass were circulated widely. I know of few who would admit to not being touched by the witness of solidarity and communion, except for those who felt that the act politicized the Mass in ways they found irrelevant to the task of being a Church, and also signified the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ full-court press for advocating for humane immigration reform and a call to mercy and hospitality to the migrants.

[Slide] A related image, of course, echoes Pope Francis at Lampedusa, which was mentioned earlier today, becoming present and ministering to those who come to Europe from Africa, make a very perilous journey of life and death, much like the journey that is crossing the U.S.-Mexico border as well.
The second image took place a few weeks after the Mass at the border. That was when media picked up on the crisis of children, young families, and miners crossing the border, fleeing gang violence and gender violence in their home country, and then being received in different places, but especially along the border, with vociferous calls to be returned home and for them not to be taken in.

Two elements are key to these images.

First, location, a cartography for discipleship that indicates that presence, being in the place where there is suffering, is central to the task of being the Church.

Second, ideological fissure. Often places of deep suffering, both actual location and metaphorical space, are marked by the ideological battles of the so-called culture wars, which have been mentioned a lot today, that dominate the U.S. media and represent one of the biggest obstacles to truly living into the project initiated with Vatican II.

In its emphasis on the church of the poor, Vatican II laid the foundation of what would become the preferential option for the poor, as Latin American bishops and theologians returned from the Council with the charge to be the Church in those places where the suffering of the people clamored for a witness of solidarity, virtual poverty, and prophetic denunciation of injustice and oppression, along with proclamation of liberation. In a way, the phrase “the preferential option for the poor” is both a culmination of and the ongoing challenge of Vatican II. It encompasses the theological drive of a Church that seeks to reach beyond itself to proclaim integral liberation and mercy for the human family in concert with others in the global religious family who also offer a message of liberation and hope.

And yet, in the U.S. context this remains but a challenge, articulated in certain pockets of Catholic life but effectively interrupted in its ability to truly shape the ethos of the Church in the United States.

I am going to review just very quickly some of the places in the documents of Vatican II where the church of the poor was expressed and voiced.

The first quote is obviously from paragraph one of Gaudium et Spes: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”

I think I may have missed a page. I did and I apologize.

In thinking about Vatican II at 100, I hope first to briefly present the call to be the church of the poor, originally presented at Vatican II and laid as a charge to the global church within a framework that is meant to be ecumenical and interfaith in its practice. This charge presents a project of “how to be church,” which includes cartographic, epistemic, hermeneutic, and praxeological dimensions — just really fancy words for discussing the rubric of see/judge/act so central to Catholic social thought in the second half of the 20th century.

This afternoon I will focus only on the first two, the cartographic and epistemic tasks of this four-fold endeavor. Second, I will lay out some of the challenges facing the church of the poor and a proper understanding of the option for the poor in the United States, specifically the current reality of ideological fissures that control political and religious
public discourse. Finally, I propose tasks for the decades ahead, specifically in the context of a new migrant church in the United States, but one that will have to continue to forge its way through the ideological battles of the culture wars, and do this while more fully acknowledging the need for renewed ecumenical and interfaith collaborations.

[Slide] So now we can go to places in the documents of Vatican II where the church of the poor was articulated.

I already covered part of the first paragraph of Gaudium et Spes. These famous opening lines speak to the special place that becoming the church of the poor had during the proceedings of Vatican II. At the disappointment of some of those present, especially Latin American bishops, but others as well, the proceeding did not generate a specific document on the poor. That was part of the hope that a number of bishops went into the Vatican thinking, that there would be a specific document on the church of the poor, the life of the poor. Rather, emphasis on Jesus’s own poverty and outreach to the poor as key to the tasks of the Church and of the ministry of its leaders is sprinkled throughout the documents of the Council in various ways.

In speaking of the hierarchy and the episcopate, Lumen Gentium asks that bishops lead in instructing the membership of the Church to love “the whole mystical body of Christ,” especially and poor and sorrowing members and “those suffering persecution for justice’s sake.” In Ad Gentes, the Church is to be “one with all people,” but especially with the poor and the afflicted, for whom she gladly spends and is spent, sharing in their joys and sorrows, knowing of their longings and problems, suffering with them in death’s anxieties.”

As the final example, Presbyterorum Ordinis calls on priests as especially obligated to the poor, in imitation of Christ’s ministry to and unity with the poor.

The task of becoming the church of the poor — indeed, to be a church in the modern world — presented the Council with the challenge of a plurireligious and diverse world. Dignitatis Humanae and Nostra Aetate frame this new way of being Church in the world in the context of a special opening to other Christian traditions, emphasizing the human right to religious freedom and establishing a collaborative charter for human flourishing in which the world’s religious traditions contribute to a deeper understanding of our collective destiny.

It behooves us to note the way in which the Council recognized that a full understanding of human flourishing in a world marked by the poverty, oppression, and marginalization of so many requires acknowledgement and appreciation for multiple expressions of faith and recognition of the wisdom of other world religions.

Upon their return to Latin America, emboldened by the Council to be pastors of their flock in their particular context of oppression and persecution of the majority of its people, the bishops and theologians articulated the preferential option for the poor, with all its theological, ecclesial, and ethical weight. Both at Medellin and at Puebla, the bishops offered the three-part understanding of poverty — poverty as material, as spiritual poverty, and as poverty of solidarity — in the option for the poor and the architecture of how the Church is to live out what was to become a central concept of Catholic social teaching in the works of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and now in Francis.

[Slide] Let me speak specifically to what I call the cartographic and epistemic tasks that mark the church of the poor and that challenge the Church in the United States today in particular ways.
This fancy nomenclature to articulate the rubric of see/judge/act has one particular addition that is rooted in the church of the poor of Vatican II and subsequently developed in liberation theology. At its core, the legacy of Vatican II is its Jesuitic turn. This particular term from Jon Sobrino serves to describe the return to the Jesus of the Gospels in Vatican II and, specifically, the historical Jesus who is God With Us in a specific place, in a specific history marked by imperial domination and dynamics of political and cultural conflict.

In other words, there is an incarnational principle to the church of the poor, and I have called the preferential option for the poor the “incarnational principle of divine love.” In other words, there is a place, a location, in which we become the church of the poor, a cartographic task to being a church that demands that we place ourselves with the suffering and that establishing where we stand is a prior task to being able to see in rubric see/judge/act.

The challenges to the Church in the United States: Immediately after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, then-President George W. Bush told us to go shopping and to fly to Disney World, and that that would be a way that we would win over our attackers. These comments were tapping deeper ideological and philosophical commitments about prevalent definitions of the “good life” in the United States that have developed in this nation over the past century.

If the cartographic task of the church of the poor demands that we shift our location — physical preferably, but just as importantly spiritually and politically — to be with those who suffer, then this key project and challenge of Vatican II falls entirely flat on the shores of the United States.

Recall the picture from earlier in the presentation of the U.S. Bishops placing themselves at the border and the way this was problematized, and even vilified, by those faithful and others who view it as a violation of a key tenet of U.S. civil religion, the separation of church and state, or really what is a misconstrued interpretation of what this principle of our government entails.

Francis’s denunciation of a throwaway culture where even humanity itself becomes disposable, and John Paul II’s description of a “culture of death” before that, brings to light the ways in which the U.S. economy begins to run counter to the project of the church of the poor.

Other issues — let me just bring up an example, especially following up on Christiana — other issues at the ideological fissures of the culture wars present evidence for our cultural, economic, and philosophical inability to perform the cartographic tasks and then follow through with the epistemic tasks of the option for the poor.

The case of climate change and environmental crisis offers a particularly poignant and comprehensive example. Many of us are eager, as she stated, for the promised Papal Encyclical on the environment. But already in the United States a conversation similar to the one that occurred immediately after the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letter, Economic Justice for All, and John Paul II’s Centesimus Annus is taking place. This conversation is marked by the ill-labeled left/right dichotomy of being Christian in the United States, where an issue such as climate change is viewed as a moral challenge by some but not others.

Deeper than whether we view this as a moral challenge is a direct link between the
question of climate change, its causes, and how to address it, with dominant notions of the good life, private property, and industry, personal freedom, and the proper role of government and consumerism and other elements of the U.S. civil religion.

[Slide] Let me just present to you where will be the church of the poor in the next fifty years.

The next fifty years of the church of the poor, initiated at Vatican II, begins in the United States with Pope Francis’s speech to the Joint Sessions of Congress and the discussion that will surely ensue. If I may predict, most likely Francis will witness to the cartographic task of the Church in some way, whether visiting a migrant detention center or an inner-city clinic or a prison.

Essentially stealing my thunder, John Gehring spoke to the church of the poor and the cultural wars in America last week. In this piece he points out the battle that ensues over the purity of the Church, the Church’s charitable arm — Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities, and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development — and those groups that would like to critique the way these organizations relate on the ground to groups that don’t necessarily follow all of Catholic teaching. He labeled his comments “what is needed is a church for the poor, not a pure church.”

The task of this panel is to specifically examine what shall be the challenge to Catholic theologians in the second half of 100 years of Vatican II. In my estimation, there is no more important task than to tend to these ideological fissures and rearrange the cartography that lets us see the realities of the poor and suffering, including the environment, in ways that radically transform our ways of seeing.

Seeking partners from other religious traditions for this task, and being able to communicate to the broader Christian and religious audiences the principles and practices of the church of the poor will be key. When we engage and realize the cartographic and epistemic tasks of the church of the poor, we enable the birthing of a transformed Church, one for whom the culture wars reveal themselves to be the idols of a comfortable and selfish understanding of the good life, and therefore violent to the humanity of all who participate. We will also gain deeper understanding of where the churches and traditions in the United States are already being part of the church of the poor.

We can spend more time talking, and hopefully disagreeing, about how theologians are to approach this task. For me, part of this will be honesty in conversations among theologians about our own journey in living into the church of the poor. Will we be able to speak about how we are living into this promise? And we will be able to speak about how we are failing the church of the poor.

I want to leave you again with a quote. Why am I here talking to you when Francis said it all in his letter to the Catholic University of Argentina on its 100th anniversary?

[Slide] This is his quote, and you may have seen it already in a few venues. He tells the theologians: “Do not settle for a theology of the desk. Let your place for reflection be the boundaries. And do not fall into the temptation to paint over them” — the old arch-theological[?] products — “perfume them, adjust them a bit, and tame them. The good theologians, like the good shepherds, smell of the people and of the streets and, with their reflection, pour balm and wine on the wounds of humanity.”

On December 17, 2005, Father Marek Bożek arrived to his desk at the politically embroiled St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Catholic Parish in St. Louis and found a letter notifying him of his excommunication. “It felt like betrayal,” Father Bożek later shared with me. In the midst of struggle over parish ownership, finances, and cultural maintenance in a post-scandal U.S. church, the historic St. Louis Polish parish pastor and board were censured, the parish suppressed, and a community of self-avowed Catholics upended.

I tell this story to introduce the question: How much does, or will, authority matter in a Vatican II Church, in 100 years from a Vatican II Church?

As lay Catholics increasingly navigate their own paths in terms of membership, compliance with core tenets of the faith, and connection to Church leaders, does a centralized hierarchical notion of authority now wane more than wax? Does it diffuse amid a context of critical thought, individual conscience, subsidiarity, and religious freedom?

Now, I’m a sociologist, and sociologists are no strangers to the study of authority. Even a cursory scan of the founding documents of our discipline will encounter Max Weber’s classic works on bureaucracy, types of authority, Karl Marx’s harsh critique of a system that inherently privileges the haves and exploits the have-nots. In the study of religion, more specifically, sociologists have noted now religion affords a unique legitimacy to public norms and roles. Scholars of religious organizations nearly always include a metric or measure of authority in assessing how religion operates in any given context. In short, you can’t study society without asking or imputing who is in charge.

So how does authority matter for the Catholic Church fifty years after Vatican II and thinking ahead fifty years into the future?

I would like to propose two simple yet contradictory responses to this question: Authority doesn’t, and won’t, matter in the post-Vatican II Church of the future; and — you guessed it — authority is everything in the future post-Vatican II Church. Let’s look at a few indicators on each side.

First, authority doesn’t matter. Vatican II, it would seem, brought the Church into an era where individual conscience rivals institutional compliance. As Bill D’Antonio et al. remind us in their regular series of surveys of American Catholics, the vast majority of American Catholics articulate a view of what it means to be a good Catholic that is largely independent of the Church hierarchy’s teaching. One must subscribe to Jesus’s resurrection, transubstantiation; birth control and weekly Mass attendance not so much. This is even more true for today’s young adult Catholics, many of whom exhibit intermittent allegiance to the institutional Church at best. Apparently, Catholic guilt doesn’t carry the same weight that it once did.

Playing this out communally, Vatican II contended that a parish is a community of the faithful, comprised of people of God. The laity’s influence, indeed, has expanded dramatically since the Council. Vatican II introduced consultative bodies, such as pastoral councils, finance councils, thereby distributing administrative responsibility and accountability beyond the hands of the pastor.
States Lumen Gentium, “By reason of the knowledge, competence, or preeminence which they have, the laity are empowered, indeed sometimes obliged, to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church.”

And so they do. An increasing number of lay Catholics, including women, hold key administrative positions as lay pastoral ministers, religious educators, chancellors — the list goes on — filling the gaps created, in particular, by declining numbers of priests and religious.

Wielding this newfound control, parishes began to look less uniform, more congregational even, drawing members voluntarily rather than merely geographically. Catholics church-hop and —shop until they find the right choir, the right preacher, the preferred language, the best time, the best nursery.

Indeed, among the principles set forth by Pope John XXIII in guiding revisions to Canon Law —looking ahead to that, though they happened much later — were that the principle of subsidiarity would reign. “Where unity of discipline is not required, decentralization should prevail,” summarized Canon lawyer James Coriden. Authoritarianism, in other words, yielded to localism.

While the prior Code of Canon Law of 1917 has been described as bringing the Church into a crippling uniformity, the new Code, which came out in 1983 — again, the Church moves slowly — emphasized decentralization. It empowered local dioceses and bishops to respond to their own needs. It was, in a sense, a loosening of authority from above.

Among the new freedoms that this change introduced was the opportunity for structural innovation around parishes. These include something that I have spent a lot of time thinking about, which are personal parishes, which lack in most cases territorial boundaries; instead, officially, formally, canonically dedicated to serving niche purposes or populations. They would have been called national parishes in days of old. It has been broadened a bit here.

Consequently, after a half-century drought of sorts, urged by assimilationist practices in Church leadership, personal parishes have begun to reemerge in service of a variety of niche needs, populations, and purposes. While the prior 1917 Code had mandated approval from the Vatican for these to begin, now the Code put authority in the hands of the local ordinary, again assessing needs from there. This has enabled enculturation in new ways and subsidiarity to drive diocesan innovation. Gone is the homogenizing uniformity imposed by distant authoritative control.

But lest we conclude that authority has gone entirely by the wayside in a Vatican II church, may I remind you that I did pose an alternative response to this question. In fact, authority is everything in a post-Vatican II and a future church.

While the Council may have abolished the intransigent model of “pay, pray, and obey” devotional Catholicism, it could be argued, it nonetheless elevated the centrality of lay input and shared community, meaning that authority did not disappear as a constitutional element of Catholicism, but shifted from few hands to many, from centralized to localized leaders.

The fact is that the Catholic Church remains deeply undergirded by webs of connection and accountability and authority. Let’s look back at parish affiliation, for example.
Even while Catholics increasingly select parishes based upon preference rather than territorial assignment, this fact does not diminish the canonical reality of parish boundaries. This means that a given pastor and church carry the authority by canon law, the responsibility to all those in a given specified geographic territory. This is a key area of difference between Catholic parishes and other types of congregations.

Serving an elected community, Protestant congregations may very well pick up and move if or when the community moves. As Mark Mulder shows in his new book *Shades of White Flight*, he studied evangelicals who picked up their populations, which were largely white, in Chicago moving out to the suburbs.

By contrast, as shown by scholars including Gerald Graham, and also John McGreevy has written some of this, the Catholic Church remained embedded in changing cities because its encoded authority requires it to do so. Authority here begets urban resilience.

Moreover, the authority vested in bishops and pastors to care for everyone within changed ecologies has added urgency to respond to ever more divergent needs — culturally, linguistically, liturgically.

The face of the United States has changed dramatically since 1965, in particular due to the Immigration Act passed in that same year, co-terminus with the conclusion of Vatican II. American Catholics are increasingly less white, less old, less New Englander by many metrics. So even if we argue that the diminished relevance of authority explains what we might perceive as laissez-faire attitudes exhibited by some American Catholics, it hardly explains all of it.

Authority acts to legitimate, or in some cases marginalize, this changed Catholic population. For example, who gets a parish? Personal parishes, again driven by principles of subsidiarity and local needs but nonetheless decided by a local bishop, exemplify this tension between Catholic mobilization and persistent authoritarian control.

Adherents of the traditional Latin Mass have been able to secure a number of personal parishes. Some communities of Vietnamese and Korean Catholics, worshiping without parish status for decades, have found new welcome under the rubric of the personal parish. But there are no parishes that formally welcome, by way of example, gay and lesbian Catholics. And there are far more petitions for personal parishes than there are personal parishes.

Parish status signals approval, acceptance, acknowledgement, empowerment. A parish is a point of pride and the status is not readily available.

With the local bishop as the final adjudicator in parish establishment and closure, the process is often fraught with controversy and mourning. Catholics do not get to democratically decide when or whether or for whom to start or close a parish. That’s not to say that they don’t influence the process, but ultimately the authority is not theirs alone.

As such, canonically designated parishes proudly belong to the Catholic Church. They do not proudly stand autonomously from it. Their empowerment results from, in fact, being affirmed by the formal authority vested in the unified Church.

As we imagine an agenda for the next half century, we would be naïve to presume that authority is no longer a constitutional element of that future. To deny the structural
relevance of authority in the Catholic Church would be like denying the importance of race in the United States now that we have elected a black president, or denying climate change every time it snows. Our subdued narratives do not subdue the realities that they convey.

Nor can we presume that Catholics act wholly in lockstep with tradition and hierarchical pronouncements. The Church is evolving. Who am I to judge? We must search for tensions and contradictions following the lines of decision-making and asking questions from above and from below.

Back at St. Stanislaus Kostka Polish Parish, where parishioners now legally own their church’s property but no longer the right to affiliate with the Roman Catholic Church, the community looks for a home. The parish wants a diocese and the pastor wants a bishop. They are in talks with the Episcopal Church and the Polish National Catholic Church. They are taking their time. Father Bożek says that he will let his people decide.

But their lack of connective fabric, the absence of authority, has left them feeling empowered, resilient, autonomous, and alone. It might well be that what fuels the very freedom felt by Catholics in the post-Vatican II era, so poignantly in the American context, is in fact the feeling that something will catch them if they fall.

Thank you.

**STEPHEN GRIMM:** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for coming to our session.

I am a philosophy professor at Fordham University in the Bronx. I am delighted to be here. Thank you to Jim for this session, to my co-panelists for their very interesting comments.

As you have heard, our panel was charged with thinking about an agenda for Catholic intellectuals for the next fifty years, so out to 2065.

One way to think about that, the way it struck me, was: What are the interesting or pressing questions that will preoccupy Catholic scholars, Catholic intellectuals, for the next fifty years?

There you are really spoiled for choice. As Christiana said, we could have had a whole session on the relevance of the environment, or we could be talking about global justice, or the relationship between Christianity and Islam, or the changing face of the family, or science and religion, etc.

So, maybe because I am a philosopher, maybe because I’m a parent now with three little kids — I don’t know why — I have been thinking about the nature of technology and the relation of technology to being fully human, as the Vatican II documents would say.

What’s going to be the relationship between the changes in technology and their relationship between being fully or properly human over the next fifty years? What opportunities will technology open up for us? What goods will it take away or will it close? That’s the question I am going to be addressing here.

I am going to try to focus it in a particular way because, of course, in thinking about the nature of technology, that itself is vast.
I’d love to talk about issues related to, as Christiana said, biotechnology. There are going to be changes involving genetic enhancement, cloning, which are not science fiction at all and twenty years from now will just remarkably change the way we think about what it means to be human at all.

But I am not going to go in that direction. I am going to focus on some more specific questions which I think are relevant to us and the way we live now, maybe the way we deal with technology five to ten years from now.

I am going to focus my talk around two questions: How do developments in modern technology impact the Catholic sacramental imagination? I am going to consider the view that the complaint that technology erodes the Catholic sacramental imagination, that it inhibits it or somehow deprives us of the Catholic sacramental imagination.

The second question I am going to consider is whether technology erodes our ability to love one another. I don’t know how many of you read an op-ed piece that the novelist Jonathan Franzen had in *The New York Times* I think in 2011. It was called “Liking Is for Cowards. Have the Courage to Hurt,” about having the courage to love or go beyond the courage to like.” Franzen’s thesis is that something about modern technology is inhibiting our ability to love. I’d like to examine that question too.

On the first question, the first concern I want to consider is that modern technology inhibits the Catholic sacramental imagination that is so crucial to Catholics’ common life. By the sacramental imagination I mean the idea, or perhaps better the sense, that God is not distant from us but is instead present in the tangible realities of our world — the water of baptism, the bread and wine of the Eucharist, the oil of last rites, and so on. In all these forms, Catholics believe God is with us in the most direct way possible.

The basic worry, however, is that as technology increasingly lures us away from the everyday substances such as bread and water, things we can touch and taste and feel, and instead lures us into a virtual world, a world where we spend more and more time looking at screens, rather than the substantial reality around us, that the sacramental imagination will be lost.

I’m sure I’m not the only one who has noticed how this screen culture has impacted the way we live. Some of you might be Tweeting now, in fact. Think of the increasing number of people, young or old, student or commuters on the train, who spend their time head bent down rather than taking in the world around them. Although just five or ten years ago they would likely have taken those few spare minutes walking across campus, waiting on the train platform, to notice their environment — the clouds, the sky, the leaves turning color — now that world is instead the unattended background, the unnoticed background, for their screens.

If the sacramental imagination requires taking a long, loving look at the real, as the Jesuit Walter Burghardt has claimed, then we seem instead to be a culture learning to live with scattered, distracted looks at the unreal or the virtual.

So how should Catholic intellectuals respond to this concern, or is it a deep concern at all? On the second question, whether it is a deep concern, I am not so sure.

Just reflect a little bit. After all, prior to the proliferation of cell phones, weren’t there a variety of other ways in which one could immerse oneself in the virtual rather than the real? Think about a child in the 1910s, or my own childhood, your own childhood. Think about a child during those periods becoming completely absorbed in a book, to the point
where she tunes out the world around her. Instead of looking at the real water and light in her environment, she focuses her attention instead on the lifeless marks of a printed page. Isn’t this being absorbed by the virtual rather than the real? And yet, I take it that few if any of us would find this scene alarming. If you saw your child absorbed in a book, you’d be delighted I’m sure. But one thing we want to ask is what it is about the screen that’s so different from the book.

I can also think back to my own childhood, watching more TV than I can possibly recount. *The Brady Bunch, The Love Boat* — I watched it all. I’m sure my parents noticed the Zombie-like way I sat in front of the TV and were often concerned. But, I am tempted to say, it’s not as if the virtual and the real began to blur in my mind or that I lost an appreciation for the special sacred power of real tangible things — at least I don’t think I did. Or, maybe better, at least I don’t think it was my immersion in TV that did it, as opposed to my own sinfulness. So more age-old problems not owing to technology per se.

Although the influence of screens on the sacramental imagination is unclear — something I’d love to talk about more in the Q&A — I think we can see an important opportunity for the Church in this digital culture. So I wanted to ask about, not just challenges, but opportunities.

In particular, although some seem to thrive in being constantly on call, constantly having the screen in front of them — or, again, it’s not too distant in the future when the Google glasses will be here or we are going to have some more direct cognitive interface even than that — many more seem burnt out, exhausted by trying to keep up with things.

The fastest-growing segment of luxury hotels, I am told — I have read this — are of the sort which offer the opportunity for the ultra-wealthy to get off the grid, away from emails and texts and screens and back in touch with the world. Likewise, calls to mindfulness and being present have to my mind never been stronger. There is an imminent revolt, it seems, against the virtual and the unreflective, a sense that, as David Foster Wallace has put it, “the alternative to stepping back is unconsciousness, the default setting, the rat race, the constant, gnawing sense of having had and lost some infinite thing.”

The Church has a special opportunity in this culture to my mind, because practices such as Sunday Mass or daily prayer offer a space to disconnect from the grid and take a step back. More than that, they of course offer space to listen, to sing, to reflect, and to rededicate oneself on a regular basis to living a fully or properly human life. And needless to say, these opportunities are also available not just to the ultra-wealthy who can afford these ultra-luxury hotels, but to everyone.

So that’s my rumination about the Catholic sacramental imagination.

The second question I want to ask — and, again, it’s kind of inconclusive, but I just think that the questions are so rich we just need to start to think about them. My second question — this will be the thing I will end with — is the objection that modern technology takes away our ability to love, or erodes our ability to love. The novelist Jonathan Franzen, who wrote *The Corrections* and *Freedom*, offers two interesting arguments for thinking that modern technology erodes our ability to love and, hence, should be treated with great caution.

The first is that the pressure to upgrade modern technology is so intense now that it breeds the vice of inconstancy into our very bones. Although we might be satisfied with a new phone, laptop, tablet, plasma TV, whatever, for a month or two, soon enough the new
model comes along and makes our current technology look entirely unglamorous, clunky, and outmoded. We then can hardly wait to trade in our old model for the new one that more perfectly satisfies our desires. According to Franzen, however, since love requires commitment and fidelity, and since it is about much more than simply satisfying our desires, in his view the habits we acquire as modern consumers of technology make us less able to love than before.

Franzen’s second reason is that social media platforms, such as Facebook, encourage habits of liking others that are inimical to actually loving them. With each update we post, for those who post, we encourage others to give a thumbs-up to a certain idealized and partial vision of ourselves, and we make it harder for people to love the difficult, imperfect, whole selves that we actually are. If true, Franzen’s critique would of course be an enormous challenge to the Christian way of life, where love of neighbor and love of God are of central importance. What, then, should we make of them?

Let me first note that when I have discussed Franzen’s arguments with my students at Fordham, they have been less than impressed. For one thing, they point out that the disposability of technology has been around for a long time. But our craving for new products that makes our lives easier—from vacuum cleaners, to dishwashers, to indoor plumbing—has not, it seems, completely corrupted us or turned us into a race of narcissists.

Similarly, they note that although Facebook allows us to present an idealized self to the world, it is hardly as if this is the first generation to try to idealize itself. Inevitably, human beings show each other only glimpses of themselves to begin with, trying to forefront the good and obscure the bad. As we grow in love for others, we gradually learn to accept the whole.

For most of my students, therefore, technology simply provides an outlet for faults or vices we might already have. It does not create them in the first place. I think that’s a very interesting question, by the way. I think we can agree that technology doesn’t create narcissism—there have been narcissists prior to technology—but one question is whether it gives them special encouragement, let’s say.

Instead, also, they seem vaguely insulted by the insinuation that they are such helpless puppets of technology or of seductive marketing campaigns. As one of my students astutely wrote, and this is from a paper for which I asked her permission—I don’t think she is here, but I invited her—“As someone whose Facebook use peaked at age fifteen, I do not feel as though my conceptions of love are affected in any way by social media. I think that the way we form opinions about real love and connect with others is through face-to-face interaction for the most part. Franzen is undoubtedly right that love is empathy, but I learned that from observing my parents as a child and in no way was corrupted by liking things on Facebook or feeling obsessed with making myself a perfectly likeable individual.”

Now, perhaps this student is the exception—most of us are, after all, affected by the pressures of advertising and social media in some way—but her basic thought is plausible, namely that we are usually more deeply influenced by the examples of our parents and those close to us than by images from technology or the media.

But of course, this too can have its dark side. Sometimes our parents present bad examples for us or poor models of love. Or again, the face-to-face influence of people born into war, people who don’t have parents, or severe poverty, might be wholly lacking in empathy or generosity. What, then, can the Church do in these circumstances or to fill
the vacuum?

It is natural to think that the best way for the Church to inspire love is to actually model it, and, oddly enough, to model it in ways that can be communicated through the media or by technology. In this respect, the recent widely publicized photos of Pope Francis embracing the handicapped or severely disfigured are arguably a greater inducement to love than all the documents of Vatican II combined.

Thank you very much.

**GARY ADLER:** We are all joining Stephen’s panel now, to flesh it out. [Laughter]

One nugget he gave us is this is no longer the post-conciliar generation; it is the *Love Boat* generation up here.

**CHRISTIANA PEPPARD:** I prefer to think of it as the *Reading Rainbow* generation. [Laughter]

**GARY ADLER:** So as we go forward, panel, let’s start off by questions you all have for each other on the panel, points of clarification or places that you saw some dovetailing and issues that you were struggling with or trying to articulate.

**CHRISTIANA PEPPARD:** I’ll go for it. I loved all of these papers. It’s really fun to think with you and see how each of us on the panel thinks differently but in critical and complementary ways.

I am heartened by the notions of embrace and relationality and ways that those images may be disseminated via technology, the very human longing for connection in parishes and face-to-face.

I find myself thinking so often, in terms of loving and acting justly, there can be an impetus towards embrace. But in a lot of my work there is a very strong critical stance, that sometimes taking “a long, loving look at the real,” to quote Burghardt, means actually saying no. I just put that out there as something that when we begin to embrace insights from below, as it were, from the social sciences, voices from the sexual abuse crisis, people who have been excluded, there can be kinds of structural no’s that need to happen as part of love. I guess that’s not a question but just something I have been mulling over, particularly in terms of structural realities.

**STEPHEN GRIMM:** What kind of no’s did you have in mind, Christiana?

**CHRISTIANA PEPPARD:** Well, you know.

**MARIA TERESA DÁVILA:** He is asking for clarification because I think it flows who is the authority in that structure that are saying the “no,” considering Tricia’s comments.

**CHRISTIANA PEPPARD:** Exactly.

So who is doing the no-saying, and who has the authority to do so, and to what? So, okay, I’m just going to bring it back to the environment, because why not.

Some of you may have seen those images of Pope Francis when he was visiting — no, wait; was he visiting South America or were the filmmakers visiting him? — anyway, he posed with two filmmakers who were making a Spanish-language documentary about
fracking. The shirt that he held up said “No Al Fracking.” Now, how you render fracking in Latin in an Encyclical I don’t know. But I think that that kind of image on social media conveys a lot.

One of the questions we get when looking at how the Church engages the modern world, etc., is: Are there particular forms of political, economic, and extractive relations that Church leaders, like Pope Francis — you know, popular Twitter handle at @Pontifex — could or should say no to? And are there things that, say, the laity whose lives are being affected by — again we’ll just use the fracking example — that their subsidiarity needs to be listened to by the people who have the magisterial authority?

TRICIA BRUCE: One of the things that, if we look again back to the canon on sociology, someone like Karl Marx, of course who has a bad rap, for many good reasons — but one of the insights we glean from Karl Marx is that those who control the resources control the story.

That was one of the threads I heard in each of the papers, who has the authority to say no? Is there a consultative body around them? To what extent is this a shared “no” or “yes” or whatever it might be? Whose voice is represented? And then, of course, we hear here, and also in the earlier panels, there is the contrast of there’s not only who’s in but who’s out. We hear, especially from MT’s paper, what about the voices of the marginalized, the poor, other voices that may not be heard, may be excluded? So who is controlling the story.

And then also, to bring in Stephen’s paper as well, how does that story get told? We can bring in the communications scholars for that too, even to think about somehow in the Telephone game even the conveying of the “no” may sound different once it comes out.

MARIA TERESA DÁVILA: Then I would add, how is it reacted to? So that particular image of the shirt, “Say No on Fracking,” was highly criticized, and immediately people pushed back, saying, look, the Pope doesn’t now diddly squat about environmental science, he doesn’t know what goes into fracking or what the consequences are, and that is something that is highly contested. Then you get the fallback of these ideological fissures that take that image and sort of completely dismantle it and make it again another point of a culture war or another point of this sort of left/right dichotomy that sacrifices love and encounter and mercy and welcome and hospitality to wanting to take a position on that question.

CHRISTIANA PEPPARD: Just for full disclosure, there is a chapter in my book, “Just Water,” on fracking. So if you want the really authoritative view, you should go there. It’s Chapter 8.

Stephen, do you let your kids have cell phones?

STEPHEN GRIMM: Yes.

GARY ADLER: What ages are they? Can you tell us that? That might tell us something about what that answer means.

STEPHEN GRIMM: The norm where we live is when they go into junior high. So you can look at me and judge me how you will. But no screen cell phones.

Fortunately, my daughter is very responsible with it. But I think one of the difficulties with technology too is not just that they are ever present, but that we become kind of compulsively linked to them, and any kind of compulsion brings with it a lack of freedom
that is, again, contrary to the spirit of Vatican II.

I don’t know if we could learn to live with them in a healthy way. Maybe kids are learning to live with them in a healthy, noncompulsive way. But I think for many adults it’s a kind of compulsion, you can’t live without it, which is not a good thing.

GARY ADLER: One of the things I wanted to pick up from on what you just said goes back somewhat to what Tricia was talking about with authority. It was in the background of all the presentations. I had a hopeful sense that all of you had a commitment that the Church had something in some way authoritative to say about the different conditions or issues you talked about.

But from what we know about just how much authority has shifted, in what you talked about, what do you think a public, particularly a Catholic public, will actually hear as being authoritatively said from you? So we hear the reaction to Pope Francis’s Twitter, and maybe skeptical minds would think some of that reaction might have been coordinated by interests behind fracking, not just a reaction to being engaged in an issue.

Could you maybe talk about the tension between the hopefulness behind what you are saying — “Here I am giving my life to thinking through the Church about these issues,” but that in conversation with the challenge of what is actually heard as authoritative in, for example, the American Catholic Church today?

MARIA TERESA DÁVILA: I’ll take a stab at it, which follows from Stephen’s comments. You know, you asked him the ages of his children. He talked about his ethos in the neighborhood and in the culture about when phones come in. When would a conversation about our children ever be part, even in the early decades of Vatican II, of what shapes the Church and what informs what we do as theologians and as thinkers and as Catholic intellectuals? That is huge, and that is a huge source of hope.

So we are talking about our lived realities, we are talking about our children. The Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church met in 2010 in Trento, Italy, and we gathered at the central church in the square. Jim Keenan from Boston College told the congregation — it was a regular Mass — “Look around you. There’s theologians here with children, with babies. The men are carrying their children. The women are giving the papers. This is not the church that you knew from before, and these are the voices of authority.”

So part of it is, to what extent will we become legitimate agents in the public square of the public of the Church? That’s one point.

The second related point is — I get to preach a lot. I’m not sure what other Catholic woman here has gotten to preach. As part of a Protestant seminary, I preach a lot. It’s incredible. I mourn when I don’t hear women preaching in Catholic churches. That has been a big discussion. I think that is a step we can take. That is a place where, again, our lived realities, our children, that we gain now a different sense of what is a voice of authority. It’s someone who is trying to walk this walk and discipleship.

CHRISTIANA PEPPARD: I think that the point about shifting forms of authority, not necessarily within the magisterium but, as came up on a previous panel, university context. MT, your Andover Newton Seminary context is one example. But I’m a professor in the Theology Department at Fordham University, and our students have to take two theology classes. They usually don’t get to choose me; they just get me. We have
a conversation as we talk about a number of topics.

But in order to evoke how much the world has changed — it is a world that they take for granted; we all, of course, grow up taking the world for granted, and then at some point realize, “Oh, wait. So much of this is historical accident and context-specific, and oh my goodness, there is a lot of diversity and a lot of ways of being human in this world.”

One of the small ways that I do that is to say, “Look, people, fifty years ago there’s no way that I would be teaching in a theology department as a lay woman who studies environmental ethics teaching in a core curriculum required intro theology class. What?”

So the world changes. One of the unexpected aspects of teaching at Fordham is that I get to be the face of the conversation that begins to shape them. Now, whether they like that or whether they take that consciously as a call to who or what constitutes authority is another kind of question. But even if it’s not conscious, it’s twice a week for seventy-five minutes, and you can’t get around it.

TRICIA BRUCE: I like the optimism and the shifting views of how we envision both authority and our role and legitimacy in it vis-à-vis the Church. I think we just also have to balance that in terms of — you know, let’s not kid ourselves, there’s a very homogenous Church leadership that we currently have for a lot of big structural reasons that we have to think about.

I’m hoping to lead a project that has been commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which is a really important and needed project related to Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics. So I went to Baltimore when the Bishops all met in November and was able to present to the steering committee.

Being at the Mass, it was really neat to be with all the Bishops and to see. But I was on the side, and I looked nothing like them and they looked nothing like me. Then, when it was my turn to present, I waited in the hall until it was my turn. Then the doors opened and I went in and I did my song and dance and I left.

Was I heard? Was it legitimated? Yes. But there are very clear lines that I think we also have to recognize in how power works, how authority works, and how we think about the future of the Church.

STEPHEN GRIMM: I can say I guess I’m very uncomfortable speaking with any authority about the Church because I am Catholic, but I think I am too aware of my own limitations and faults. I think philosophy kind of gives you a distance to think about questions from 2000 feet up. So this is my first foray into these kinds of discussions. It’s hard for me to speak about these issues.

GARY ADLER: You’re in good company. There was a fellow a couple of years ago who introduced himself in an interview as a sinner. You might remember that.

CHRISTIANA PEPPARD: One of the things that really struck me from the combination of these presentations is what a wide variety of things there are to pay attention to in a post-Vatican II world, and, if you take it as such, an epistemic and moral imperative to pay attention to those things.

But that creates a problem of overwhelmingness, in a sense. How do we discern what is most important to pay attention to? In a sense, it is easier if you are just thinking about, say, the Trinity and how many angels can fit on the head of a pin. It constrains the frame.
So, in a sense, the invitation to encounter the world and bring it into theologizing and bring it into practice is also difficult psychologically, because how do you know that what you are choosing is the right thing? And you have to make judgments about what is worthy of your attention and what is not.

Stephen, you used the phrase “the intention of attention,” how we have to be intentional with what it is we choose to attend to. That is something we see particularly in the rise of mindfulness conversations and vacations from technology and so forth. But I think that is a really interesting way to think about some of these questions: How can we be intentional about what it is that we attend to?

**GARY ADLER:** I’ll ask one more question as moderator and then we’ll open it for lots of time to talk. I warned them yesterday. I emailed them all and I said, “I was struck as a sociologist to read these four papers about the next fifty years and to not hear the term ‘inequality’ mentioned at all.”

Now, when I first thought about it, I think I thought, “Oh, is there a missed opportunity or something there?” But, listening today, it’s very clear that what Christiana said about sorting, about finding the niche and the issue of urgency that people can talk to, is an important part of that.

But I’m wondering if some of it has to do too with that actually all of you were talking about inequality in some form — authoritative inequality, interaction with devices, and who gets to the poor and whose voice represents, or how their voice is represented, and the environment certainly and in environmental degradation.

This week, I think, Robert Putnam’s next book comes out. It is going to be a terrific book from the reviews. It is all about the question of inequality. The town he grew up in — I believe in Ohio or Minnesota — he goes back and visits and finds people he went to high school with. Fifty years ago, they would have not ended up so far apart fifty years later, but now, because of the changes in our economy, some are barely making ends meet and he is a tenured professor at Harvard.

So do you see a connection point with what seems to be something of a zeitgeist, at least in the American political community, with this topic, or not?

**MARIA TERESA DÁVILA:** What comes to my mind in some of the work I did on the Christian U.S. middle-class ethos — and I used some of Robert Putnam’s work and Robert Bellah’s and a lot of these thinkers, and some of it is needed. But one of the interesting things that I looked at in terms of what is the obstacle in the U.S. Church or the U.S. ethos to the preferential option for the poor is in civil religion a trust of capitalism that is religious, and it’s idolatrous in a way. We may not all agree on this.

To give an example, some of the research was done on families who lost everything during the Great Depression. They were interviewed about what they thought was at the source of their economic despair. A lot of them would respond that it was individual capitalists that faltered and that caused the Great Depression, not capitalism as it was being practiced in the United States as a whole. So they had great faith in capitalism to restore the nation. This was before even some of the great programs for restoration were put into place, social welfare programs were put into place, and works, etc. These were people who were affected, who had lost everything due to the Great Depression, who still expressed deep confidence that U.S. capitalism would bring the nation back.
I think that we still have that, even after the crash of 2008. You know, we have the Occupy movement that came and in many ways died down. So I think we need to look at those idols that prevent us from being able to see in the see/judge/act that epistemic task of looking at the situation and being able to critique it and judge it according to our Catholic values.

TRICIA BRUCE: I think that part of that also comes — and again this connects to earlier panels — from the “big sort” effect in the country, which is that if we are able to parcel ourselves into niche communities of others just like us, then we will see our own problems and our own issues and not those of others. So to the extent that there is an opportunity in the Church to create structures that in fact put us face-to-face with varied forms of inequality, socioeconomic and otherwise, then that creates a space for true conversation, true love — which as a sociologist I’m not going to comment on — but at least structures that would enable networking and relationship support.

GARY ADLER: Should we open it up? There’s the person with the microphone.

QUESTION: Maggie Jarry. I just wanted to say how much I appreciated your comment, MT Dávila. As a student of theology, as a Catholic student, I have been forced to preach. I was really uncomfortable with it as a woman. It was actually one of the more challenging aspects of my curriculum.

I’ve noticed that all of you — and it is very difficult because of so much of the internalized gender issues that I have coming out of being a Roman Catholic and also a woman who wanted to be a Catholic priest and was looking for a way of participating in my Church. But I didn’t have a route. So there is a lot about my own journey. At lunch I was talking with a number of people who were saying that, because women didn’t have a route in the clergy, that more of us went into academia.

As I’m listening to you, though, I’m also thinking about the sacramental imagination and what I’ve been learning as a student in a divinity school. That is that how we worship in many ways communicates to people in the community what the kingdom of God looks like, how the worship is structured.

The use of technology is coming up in the actual worship service. I’m not sure where we are at with that in the Catholic Church, but I have certainly seen it used in some really innovative ways to engage young people, even through their telephone, with prayer requests.

Seeing women on the pulpit preaching will make a significant difference. These will be baby steps towards the world that we know we should have.

The thing that really strikes me is, have we as Catholics of laity in some way given up on the clerical? Are we just simply dismissing it? Six years from now will we have priests? When I go into a church and I see “pray for the priests,” but I know that there aren’t routes for me and for other people like me, I’m a little confused. And yet, as a Catholic, I feel that Catholic social teaching is at the core of my being.

So what you’re speaking to to me is this kind of really strong laity and a vision for that. But I’m not hearing a lot about what’s the vision for the clerical system and for the worship service. I don’t know if there’s anything you have to say about that.

MARIA TERESA DÁVILA: I think that part of the challenge is both navigating changes and resources that you identify. Whether or not the theology or the canon law —
or the rules, we'll just call them — might change in the Church, there is a structural reality that says, “Hey, we have fewer priests now,” which has created new avenues for lay people, including women, to take on roles that they didn't previously take on.

There are also groups and ways, including movements, including new ways of interacting, as Stephen was describing, where the Church can take ownership and create accountability in more visible ways, where previously there was none. So progress, but clearly there is a larger conversation to be had.

**STEPHEN GRIMM:** It's an interesting point you made about technology and the Church, just texting prayer requests. I never heard of that, but it doesn’t seem crazy. Yes, I can see the benefits.

I was obviously painting the time of Mass as a haven, as kind of a step away. Maybe that’s just what I need. Maybe that’s not what everyone needs. I can imagine it being used for good, but I’m skeptical.

**QUESTION [off-mic]** — those things are going around now in two ways. The important thing for us is Eucharist. That’s the place where we come. The altar is the important place. It’s what draws people to the altar. It’s there that the word is broken.

When it comes to the question of priests, people should go back and read Kung’s *Why Priests?* a little tiny thing that he did a long, long time ago. It might open us up, and maybe the present Pope will read it and he might change his position or whatever position he might have.

But I think we get mixed up sometimes. I find in my own experience right now — I’m part of the older clergy in New York — that all these devices are bringing people to church in different ways.

I was mentioning at lunch to some people that we have a young adult group in the parish I am in now, which is actually the next parish here but far better than the one that’s here — don’t tell anyone I said that. We have a young adults group. We have an enormous number of young couples with children. We have one Mass where you can’t get down the aisle without tripping over a baby carriage.

But the young adults group broke up. We still have the young adults group, but now we have families with children. Then they have a mom support group that grew out of that, then a dad support group. I was just saying that two couples came in to see me to talk about the idea of forming a group of couples without kids.

They communicate back and forth, and all of a sudden I am meeting new couples that are coming into church who have been distant. But it’s the same kind of thing that brings people back to church sometimes. It’s not just baptism, but it’s a different way of ministering, and it is going to take in a lot of people.

On the question of the role of women, I have six sisters. I escaped by joining the Church. You don’t know what it’s like. [Laughter] But they have a whole different way of looking at things, I think.

That’s what I find the social media is creating. When it comes to Twittering, I have a guy who helps me with things. He tells me I’m supposed to start Twittering. I’m afraid. I don’t want to get caught into something else. That’s enough.
CHRISTIANA PEPPARD: MT, do you want to comment on Facebook and its potentialities as a connective device, or would you rather not?

MARIA TERESA DÁVILA: As a microcosm of the culture wars? It is connective, and it is connective in many ways.

A number of you may be familiar with a page I manage on Facebook called Catholic Social Thought, Politics, and the Public Square. It has about 2,800 members. Some just look, a few participate all the time, and that includes about 100 trained theologians and ethicists. It got started at the election of 2012, when we had two vice presidential candidates who were Catholic but had radically distinct visions of what subsidiarity, solidarity, and the economy should look like. I felt at the time — a few of us felt — that the Catholic Bishops were not offering any distinct interpretation that would help orient the Catholic faithful to distinguish between these two candidates with respect to those terms and Catholic social thought.

So the page is there. The issues get heated, and they get heated around pelvic issues mostly.

CHRISTIANA PEPPARD: And climate change.

MARIA TERESA DÁVILA: And climate change, and poverty, and what to do to address inequality, and what does inequality look like, and whether we can trust or put our faith in the economy’s assets running or what the proper role of government should be.

There have been some interesting conversations there. There have been some book projects that have come out of the conversations strictly on Facebook. There have been friendships that have been established. And there are people for whom maybe that’s the only face of Catholicism that they see.

So one of the things is I try to enact a preferential option for LGBTQ youth. While people sometimes want to post what they feel is the official line of the Catholic Church on LGBTQ issues, I will immediately post something that is an alternative narrative, that is welcoming and hospitable and is about encounter and mercy.

It has been an interesting experience. Check it out if you want to.

GARY ADLER: Do you have a question?

QUESTION: Jeannine Hill Fletcher. I’ve been working on [microphone malfunction] Fordham Theology Department. I just want to pose to the panel the question of the imaginative Catholic place and [inaudible] Catholic place. [microphone malfunction] Do these imaginary places of where Catholicism actually will be in fifty years match with the [inaudible].

I was struck by the conversation this morning in the panel and Michelle’s experience of having to face the reality of women’s exclusion in the Church. That’s a reality. Fifty years from now, if that is not going to change, I don’t want my daughter in that Church.

I was thinking about the generational differences. I’m from the Love Boat generation. But I also am the generation of the 1970s, where the boys in my parish were being abused. The parish that I’m in low, lo and behold, forty years ago boys in that parish were being
abused. How do I bring my son to this tradition?

As a Catholic theologian, I love the elements of the tradition that I want to right this [inaudible]. The transformative possibilities of really being [inaudible] each other. But unfortunately, that’s not the Church I feel like I live in.

I would like to have some sense of the pessimism written into our optimism. So the question that I really want to formulate is, do you actually see this Church that you might hope for fifty years from now happening? Give me some [inaudible] grounded in some reality.

CHRISTIANA PEPPARD: Jeannine, I’m so glad I’m your colleague. This for me is part of the radical “No” — “No, that’s not okay, that’s not just, that’s abusive, that’s erroneous, that’s informational subterfuge, this is gender-based discrimination” — the kinds of radical “No’s” that come from embodied experience.

I don’t know what the Church will look like, I don’t have an eye into the future, but I feel like, as an ethicist, there are ways to critique what has gone on and articulate perhaps forward that it might be better, without putting too much hope, frankly, in flawed human institutions. If you want to parse whether it’s a divine institution or a human institution, fine. But humans are at the helm in terms of decisions that are made in the nitty-gritty, in the day to day.

This is part of, I think, what is circulating around a lot of questions about the parish and about community life and about face-to-face interactions. It matters a lot who is interacting with whom and in what ways. So insofar as I have hope for the future, it is hope in the microcosms facilitated by perhaps charismatic leaders, such as the one presently that we have in the role of Pope. But it comes down to integrity and accountability and leadership on individual levels.

I personally have been very lucky to have been able to select which parishes I go to. Father Duffell was the parish priest at Ascension for a number of years, where my husband and daughter and I attend. But I recognize that cartographic or geographic choice is not a feature of many Catholics.

So I don’t know. Sometimes with Catholic social teaching I sing a cheery tune. But who knows? The future is what we create, and what we, however you understand that, can create is constrained by very real structures and forces of power.

TRICIA BRUCE: The work that informs my book, Voice of the Faithful, involved scores of conversations with Catholics who were extremely angry at the abuse that had happened in the Church, yet loved their Church so much and wanted to remain Catholic. I think I know from them telling me again and again that part of the reason was because of Vatican II. For many of them, again given the generational effect that they exhibit, they saw that change. They saw the Church change. So they felt like, “Here’s a moment, now it’s our turn, we leave a legacy, and we know how to help, we have risen to new levels of resource and power in terms of our own positionality, let’s use that to change the Church.”

So your question, looking forward, leaves me thinking: Will this generation have a similar moment? I’m not sure if they do yet. Maybe Pope Francis, but I’m not sure. But is there a similar moment where they see the Church as not so intransigent, as able to change? And, if so, then when you raise critical questions that might need change, then
there might be more hope and optimism for that change.

The only other thing I’ll add to that is, in light of that, even if the Catholic Church changes slowly, Catholics have changed immensely. We’ve heard that over and over again in terms of the global center of the Church, the changing demographics of the Church, who Catholics are. So Catholics have changed.

I suppose we could pose the question: Where are we going to look for that change? If we say the Church is the people of God, in fact we are seeing change right now, all the time. If we are looking at the Church as an institution, that’s going to be something we may not want to hold our breath for.

MARIA TERESA DÁVILA: I grew up in Puerto Rico and my parents were the directors of [inaudible] in Puerto Rico. So I grew up with an empowered laity. When I came to the United States, the concept of a disempowered laity was completely alien to me because I grew up in a lay movement that empowered my parents to be leaders in so many dimensions.

I feel like we need to retrieve the empowerment. I think [inaudible] did a lot at a critical time. I think Call to Action is doing a lot, but it is very white, so it too needs to be called to its own marginalization of particular groups. I think presence will be a key thing. I don’t know. I want to hear. I want to see where we are.

Like I said in my presentation, I hope that Francis when he comes will become present, will become incarnate, in particular places that we tend to ignore. Through that, then we imitate and become present and learn and relearn and shift our way of seeing the world.

But I think presence and an empowered laity are going to be the big things, because you’ve got to find a place for hope even when — and a few of us have been talking about this — not just for Catholicism, but for mainline liberal Protestantism, which is what I am very familiar with, the church is no longer the sanctuary. It’s just Sunday mornings in the sanctuary. That is not going to be the place for the Church in the next fifty years.

Maybe Catholicism with the Eucharist can keep hold of the sanctuary a little bit more, but even that needs to migrate to the places where we need to be and become present where we need to be. So sort of the abolition of the sanctuary in some ways. There is probably some Hebrew Scripture about damnation of whoever called for the abolition of the sanctuary.

Empowered laity and present.

GARY ADLER: Stephen, did you want to add to that one at all?

STEPHEN GRIMM: Maybe. It’s a good question.

One of the main reasons why I am Catholic is because of the holy men and women who I met in my life. I wanted to be like them. I thought they were living rich and flourishing lives. So to the extent that the Church is still producing holy men and women forty or fifty years from now, I think that, despite our sinfulness, hopefully will still be there.

QUESTION [Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado]: I have two unrelated questions. I am going to go with the first one, which connects to some of your comments that you just made.
One thing that I really struggle with is, if we talk about the empowerment of the laity or we talk about the Church as the people of God, the people of God that I study in Latin America and the Caribbean and among certain groups in the Latino/Latina community, they are becoming overwhelmingly more and more conservative.

So for me, I have over the years — when I first started writing and publishing, everyone was like, “Oh, she’s Latina, she can speak for all Hispanics,” and I used to do that a lot. I don’t do that anymore because I realized (a) it was a fraud to try to pretend to speak for all Hispanics; but (b) that I was speaking about the Hispanics that I agreed with and liked and were progressive Catholics or progressive Christians. Increasingly, the numbers show me that this is not the community that I am often put out there to represent.

This is something that has made me shy more away from theology over the years because I find a problem with that, particularly in the current climate, where the theologian is somehow — you know, what you write about is what you in a sense believe, or what you are optimistic about. But if you are talking about groups of people and they don’t agree with you, then what happens? So that’s one thing that I struggle with a lot.

With your comments about the screen and the book, one thing I think that is very distinctive about the Millennials — and I think about this with my children — they live their lives publicly. This to me is a radically different thing than just reading a book.

My dog has an Instagram account. I’m not going to get into why. [Laughter] But a ton of my students follow my dog on Instagram. Then my husband went and had me follow all of them, because apparently that’s the etiquette. I didn’t know that. The things I see that my students put on Instagram — I can’t believe it. I’m not on Facebook because I don’t want to be public. I feel like doing this kind of stuff is about as public as I want to get.

I also was wondering — I know this is a wholly unrelated question on a different topic — but I do think about the growing public nature of [microphone malfunction] college-age students. Everything is out there really, everything that they do. I don’t need to see your sandwich, but they need to share.

I’ll stop.

**MARIA TERESA DÁVILA:** My response to the first part of your question is very quick, which is that question of presence. For me, where I have decided to be present is in the fissure. So, for me, having those discussions with people who are diametrically opposed on a particular question, be it women’s rights or reproduction or the environment, that is where I practice my option for the poor. I am writing a book on it for Westminster, on the option for the poor being something that could move us through the ideological fissures. But yes, that has to be an option that we make for presence.

**STEPHEN GRIMM:** Obviously, in a sense, the new generation lives more publicly than before. Even then, I think of my thirteen-year-old daughter who doesn’t have a Facebook account yet, but I’m imagining she will in a few years. But she is texting. She’s got one group of like seven friends she texts with and another group of ten friends. They seem to have just really warm, funny conversations. So she’s not totally public. Just like we did growing up, I presume, we had groups of little friends with whom we shared our confidences and secrets. I can’t imagine that being stripped from the human condition. Even in a way they seem to have it all pit there, I don’t think they really do. I think they are keeping a lot back.
On the screen versus the book thing, there are of course differences. With the book, you are living wherever, on the moors with Heathcote, you’re imagining worlds. On the screen you’re just clicking, whatever you are doing. So there are differences. But I just want to know more about the differences. I would like people to think more about it.

CHRISTIANA PEPPARD: Your neurons fire differently, for one thing.

STEPHEN GRIMM: I believe it.

CHRISTINA PEPPARD: This is science and religion a la Stephen Grimm’s question about technology. One difference between screens and books is that different centers of the brain are activated. One of the centers of the brain activated when you are frequently on devices is an addictive kind of center — your brain sees the light and wants to go to it, and it’s a much stronger impulse.

I get a lot of brain activity from looking at a book, but generally it’s very different. That’s kind of a joke. I haven’t imaged my own brain on this.

But I think there are those kinds of questions to be asked in terms of screens versus books, and whether there are insights we may take from neuroscience and then translate into neuropsychoLOGY and then translate into mindfulness or liturgical de-tech times — it’s interesting.

I am also, as a professor, very compelled by some of the research coming out on what is now called second-hand tech, namely that even if a student has a laptop open and is taking notes in my class, it’s distracting and has negative effects on memory formation and retention of a student sitting next to or two students away from that other student. So there is second-hand tech being akin to second-hand smoke.

There are distal effects that are not necessarily intended but are nonetheless actual. That I think is an interesting question for our patterns of relating.

Your first question is harder. I think that there is a temptation to — there is a draw. There is always a draw to people who think like us. I don’t know that that’s particular to people who traffic in theological kinds of notions. But I think that being human in the world today requires, on the one hand, the capacity for a strong voice and an ability to articulate certain kinds of moral concepts. How you get those is a different conversation.

But I think also being human in the world today requires a kind of radical humility and a willingness to listen and to dialogue. I have very strong opinions, for example, on fracking. At the same time, I think it is really important to listen to a range of voices and take those into consideration and come back and say, “Okay, well if that’s true, then this would be how my position changes. I hadn’t thought of that or I didn’t know.” How to hold internal conviction and a reasoned or intuitive sense of right and wrong with a listening humility is complicated and one of the real challenges of our age.

GARY ADLER: Thanks to our panel here. I think the judgment is out on the difference in how books and screens fire neurons. But this panel certainly got a lot of Catholic neurons going in the room, which is much appreciated.

We will begin again at 4:15.

[Break: 4:00 p.m.]