

Introduction (Fr. Thomas Glackin, retired pastor of St John the Evangelist, Naples, FL)

Good afternoon to you all. James Carroll has a formidable task speaking to you at this time of the day because all of us elderly folk at this time of day are usually used to taking our nap so he has to keep us awake and do a tremendous job, which I'm sure he is going to do. And I'm honored to introduce James Carroll this afternoon and this is the second time I have done it. The first time was three winters ago when he spoke at the First Presbyterian Church in beautiful Naples, Florida for the Voice of the Faithful. This year he came to beautiful Naples, Florida to speak in the synagogue and since it cost \$20 to see him and since I bought his latest book I didn't see him but I'm here to see him again this time in beautiful Detroit, Michigan.

I first came acquainted with James when I was walking through a mega mall in Miami and I spied a beautiful bookstore there that looked like an intellectual oasis amid the desert of materialism and there were beautiful books stacked very high and on top of all the books was a book entitled by James Carroll, *Practicing Catholic*, and I said to myself, what kind of a nut would ever write a book about practicing Catholic when all the Catholics are leaving the Catholic Church for the evangelical Church?

As I got closer, I noticed the book was written by an author I had read before, James Carroll, and James Carroll wrote another book which I read which had the fantastic story of how he was ordained a priest and it related to me very well at his first mass he got up and spoke against the Vietnam war. What is wrong with speaking against the Vietnam War at your first mass? The big problem was his father was there, and his father was the general conducting the war in Vietnam.

And from then on I always admired him because, when I got up to give my first sermon at my first mass, my knees were knocking so hard nobody could hear my sermon because they were making so much noise throughout the whole room.

So I would like to go over all the wonderful points that were in James' book *Practicing Catholic* but I was told if I don't get off the stage in three minutes they'll carry me off. So I would like to conclude with the conclusion of James' book which is very appropriate for this meeting this week and James sums it up like this. This is the Church into which I was born. Never has the world needed rational energized fully reformed Catholic Church more than now, yet never has the Catholic Church need for reform been more manifest. The Catholic people have already changed. Catholics came to understand that they themselves, not their priests, bishops and pope, are the Church. We maintain our loyalty to the Church because we cannot live without it. The Church gives us language with which to speak to God. The Church feeds us in the Eucharist that keeps the story of Jesus alive and preaching to the world marks our journey through life with the sacraments and underwrites our participation in the community that transcends time and space. In the Church, we hear the authentic voice of the poor and we have a way of responding.

We're all responding this weekend and I'm sure James Carroll is going to invite us to respond even better, more sincerely and more devotedly to the needs of our Catholic Church. So without further delay, I hope I didn't go over three minutes here is James Carroll.

[applause]

James Carroll:

Good afternoon.

Why am I a Catholic?

Two reasons.

The first very easy and short, the second a longer story.

First, I am a Catholic because of you.

Your being here, your witness, I'm privileged to be an old friend of many of you.

We've made the journey on this winding road together.

I begin, therefore, by thanking each one of you for coming here this weekend, sustaining me and each one of us in the continuance of this journey.

I want to thank Father Tom for his introduction, a privilege to be introduced by you, Tom.

Jeanette and John, special grateful word to you and to your entire committee of planners.

[applause]

Why am I a Catholic?

The longer story.

Shall I begin at the beginning?

Who would have thought that a priest preaching on the Boston Common 60 years ago could set in motion a momentous change that has kept me and perhaps many of you in the Church all this time and that still defines the great argument that Catholicism and other religions are having with themselves.

Who would have thought that we would so well remember that priest whose name, as you know, was Father Leonard Feeney?

And the topic of his sermons, as you know, was no salvation outside the Church.

You recall that, of course, as the long-held dogma dating at least to the 1302 papal bull.

Only those in full communion with the pope in Rome are assured of God's grace.

Everyone else will burn in the eternal lake of fire.

Father Feeney's diatribes were aimed especially at Jews.

Unluckily for him, one of the people who worked in the nearby back bay of Boston and who could regularly hear his preaching during lunch time strolls, was a fellow named Dick Pearlstein who with his brother ran a stylish men's clothing store named for their father, its founder, Louie's, the store is still in Boston and still stylish.

Unluckily for Feeney, Dick's wife, Dolly, was the sister of the Catholic Archbishop of Boston, Richard Cushing.

Dolly was an MTA token taker, a no-nonsense Irish colleen.

Years later, Dick's nephew, Steve, told me that their marriage, Dolly's and Dick's, though condemned by the Church, had been quietly blessed by Dolly's brother.

How the archbishop must have winced to hear of the anti-Semitic slurs that were the staple of the priest's preaching?

That Cushing took in what those slurs meant to his sister's husband is suggested by the fact that he ordered Feeney to stop preaching.

And no matter how consistent the preaching was with the doctrine of the Church, he ordered him, again, to stop it.

The priest refused and refused again.

Cushing excommunicated him, just what Feeney was hoping for.
A confident Father Feeney appealed at once to Rome.
To the astonishment of the whole Catholic world, the Vatican upheld the excommunication.
He was out.

[applause]

It was 1953.
I was 10 years old.
Living in Alexandria, Virginia.
The nuns of St. Mary's school were abuzz, and the monsignor was flustered.
I went to my mother.
Mom, a priest was excommunicated for preaching no salvation outside the Church.
She said, I heard.
But mom, I thought that's what we believed.
My mother answered calmly, it was.

[laughter]

What do we believe now?
We believe, she said serenely, live and let live.
My mother, like countless other American Catholics, had clearly been prepared for this shift by the experience of intimacy with her own versions of the Pearlsteins.
Our next door neighbors were Jewish.
My dad's secretary was Miss Ginsberg.
One of my favorite uncles was Gill Levy.
All doomed, not to us, in the new world, unlike the old, rubbing elbows with those who believe differently was the norm.
When one religious absolute bumps up against another, each one becomes less absolute.
As the Vatican's ruling suggests, this peculiarly American phenomenon had begun, especially in the postwar period, to have its effect everywhere.
The priest story points to the larger question that defines the seismic shift that knocked Catholicism, along with contemporary religion itself, from the blocks of long held dogmatism.
We are gathered here in Detroit as part of what has been for many of us a lifelong reckoning with this new religious condition.
Not just the Roman Catholic Church, but all forms of belief have been upended in our time.
Philosophical paradigms overthrown.
The coming above all of feminism. The end of colonialism.
The arrival of native peoples who had no need to arrive.
Revolution after revolution, the new condition of our ordinary lives.
A revolution in spiritual consciousness has occurred across the planet.
Something comparable to the mutations in human awareness that occurred in the eras of Jeremiah and [unintelligible . . .] -- in any such context, the great question becomes great -- how do humans negotiate the question between continuity and change?
Not a Catholic problem, a human problem.
How do humans negotiate the tension between central authority and the prophetic edge?

Between firmness of identity and innovative spontaneousness.
When these tensions become conflict, you have a crisis.
And surely it is a crisis that has gathered us here this weekend.
So the first thing to be said about this crisis is that it is far larger than Catholicism.
And the second, of course, is that such change is difficult and contentious.
Who among us here has a heart that remains unbroken? Who?
And is it so different from those who disagree with us? No.
Those who disagree with us are distressed and troubled, too. The whole body of Christ is broken.
Were it otherwise, the change confronting us, whether we seek it or not, would not be significant
that this change is so significant is what makes this crisis painful.
But the third and the most important thing to say about what gathers us, we are here out of love
for Jesus Christ and for the tradition and the community that makes Jesus Christ available to us.

[applause]

We are here out of love for the Catholic Church.

[applause]

And I am proud to be here with you.
I repeat, I am a Catholic because of you.
But back to archbishop Cushing.
I wouldn't be a cardinal until Pope John named him in 1958.
Cushing had had a personal experience that weighed more than the doctrine that he was sworn to
uphold.
There is the point.
What one man called the triumph of experience over dogma.

[applause]

Cushing's experience went something like this, one assumes.
If I love Dick Pearlstein as I do, then God must love Dick, too.
Therefore, therefore, no eternal fire for Dick.
An ethical insight.
How Feeney's preaching led to a philosophical change.
A decade later Cushing brought his ecumenical impulse to completion at the Second Vatican
Council as one of the leading figures to make the case for the 1965 Declaration.
It overturned no salvation outside the Church in favor of the idea that every person can attain
salvation who acts according to the dictates of conscience.
It would be over-simple to say that a personal experience like Cushing's should trump dogma in
every case since norms, laws and established ideas aim to enshrine the wisdom and moral
principle that human beings have come to before us.
Conscience is always the primary realm of ethical choice.
But doctrines are measures against which conscience must be tested.
Still, the modern affirmation of the individual of conscience of experience posed a direct
challenge to the authority of doctrine.
How do I know that I exist?
Not because the Church tells me.

Not because even God tells me.

I think, therefore I am.

I know I exist because I know.

Not only awareness of self as the ground of personhood, but self-awareness as the ground of self-respect and dignity. Of every individual.

This idea of the enlightenment took flight in America where these truths were held to be self-evident.

Such emphasis on the individual, together with -- like separation of Church and state.

All of this is what had thrown the Great Catholic Church on the defensive by the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the revolutions of the 19th century, and therefore had caused the Catholic Church to lump such ideas together and label them as, yes, heresy.

The heresy, indeed, of Americanism.

Which the Vatican condemned in 1899.

By then, however, in its war against the modern spirit, Catholic Church teachings had become calcified and doctrine had become doctrinaire.

Some of us remember and if you think there is defensiveness in the Catholic Church today, look, compared to Feeney, Pope Benedict is Dr. Phil.

[laughter]

What Cushing did acting out of the American experience was to help the Church, the whole Church, leave that defensiveness behind.

It is not too much to say that -- the principal author was Father John Courtney Murray -- that it was the Catholic embrace of Americanism.

You embraced it.

And look at you. You are all right.

[laughter]

Anthony Padovano properly acknowledged the European roots of Catholic reform, and we have had in this magnificent invitation from our colleague a wonderful manifestation of those European roots, and who embodies those roots of reform more brilliantly than the great Hans Kung.

But these roots are particularly American, too, and that has special meaning for us.

So also with the prophetic word that we heard from Dr. Jeanette Rodriguez, the fulfillment of the American and Catholic impulse in Latina and Latino experience.

From these multiple sources comes the impulse toward reform.

To be elaborated upon later by Matthew Fox and Joan Chittister.

These roots planted themselves, sprouted, and grew in the experience of the laity.

Archbishop Cushing was influenced, compelled to take his decisive act by Dolly.

Dolly is the Rosa Parks of Catholic reform.

[applause]

Dolly Pearlstein.

It was millions of Dollies and Dicks all over the Catholic world who set in motion the dogmatic revolution of the Council from the mundane experience of sexuality and family life to the new meaning of belief in the age of disbelief.

Lay experience, female and male, was religiously transformative.

This was obviously so in America where lay people were at the forefront of the encounter with those who believe differently or not at all.

Which requires change in everyone's belief.

If I may presume to say so, all of us here in Detroit, including -- this is truly presumptuous of me -- our guests from Europe, are Americanists.

As my mother was with her "live and let live."

And isn't that the point of our gathering?

To say simply the profound religious shift toward pluralism and tolerance and liberty of conscience that defines our national identity and our modern awareness will not be undone by anyone's anathema.

[applause]

From 1899 to 1965 to 2011.

From heresy to hope, isn't that the journey we are on?

This contest between dogmatism may have climaxed in the Feeney affair but since the trial of Galileo.

The case of doctrine being tested against testable experience.

If the earth can be shown to move around the sun, neither unaided eyes nor even the scripture itself can say otherwise.

Galileo was forced by the inquisition to recant, to say the earth does not move.

But as you know, he famously muttered under his breath, even while being forced to his denial, "but it moves."

[laughter]

In 1992, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the Church was wrong to oppose Galileo.

But as we all know too well, the spirit of Catholic rigidity that condemned Galileo is not dead.

The Galileo case repeats itself and repeats itself and repeats itself.

Yet experience, and here is the point, will not be denied.

I am a Catholic because within this tradition I am continually given ways to say out aloud, "it moves."

[applause]

What have we all come to Detroit to say but it moves?

It moves!

Of course, if I were Anthony Padovano, I would tell you to stand up now, and being good Catholics you would obey me.

[laughter]

I want to compliment you on your acts of obedience to Anthony.

I want to compliment Anthony on his benign exercise of authority.

[laughter]

I'm so glad that all he was asking us to do was stand up.

The single most important instance of experience trumping doctrine was the Holocaust.

The murder of six million Jews was perpetrated by Nazis, not by Christianity.

But the genocide would not have occurred if not prepared for by a centuries-long tradition of sanctioned anti-Judaism.

The Holocaust forced Christians to reckon with the real world consequences of that tradition centered in the doctrine that Judaism had been superseded by the Church.

And on the age-old reading of the New Testament that blamed the Jews for the murder of Jesus.

But then, an ethical insight forced a theological change.

In the Catholic Church and then the Christian Churches generally, as you know very well, the Christ killer slander was repudiated in the Vatican II declaration.

And so was the idea that the religion of Jews who rejected Jesus was rejected by God.

Once again, Cushing no doubt thinking of his brother-in-law, played a leading role in getting that approved.

It amounts to the largest doctrinal shift in the history of the Christian Church.

It overturns the gospel of John.

And it occurred because of the inescapable experience that was had in the heart of Europe in the middle of the 20th century.

It is no accident that John XXIII, the pope who summoned the Vatican council and who put -- does this microphone keep electrocuting something?

[laughter]

Do you remember the priest who had trouble with the microphone and he began mass by saying under his breath, there is something wrong with this microphone and the people responded, and also with you.

[laughter]

That should be the text for the next sermon we hear.

It is no accident that John XXIII, the **pope** who summoned the Vatican council and who put the Church's relationship with the Jewish people high on its agenda was one of the only people who had had direct experience of the Holocaust.

You know this about him.

You know that as papal legate in Turkey during the war he helped hundreds, perhaps thousands of Jews escape by providing them with faked baptismal certificates.

In France at the war's end he directly confronted the Church's collaboration with the regime.

He saw -- he saw the Catholic failure up close, and he knew, if only implicitly, that its causes had to be dealt with.

No dogmatic proposition was held with more certitude than the Church's superiority over Judaism and no idea had a firmer grip on the Catholic imagination than that of Jewish culpability for the death of Jesus.

Yet because of undenied experience, both were renounced.

Sometimes it seems that the argument within Catholicism is between those who believe in the possibility of change and those who deny it.

The Church is timeless, bound to a once and for all revelation, and it simply cannot change in anything that really matters.

But Vatican II directly contradicts that.

And Anthony Padovano showed us this morning how.

It is hard to exaggerate the profound shift in moral and cultural awareness in dogma that has already occurred in Catholicism.

Like some of you, I myself, who embraced as a lad the culture of the council of Trent with enthusiasm, am a living witness to that change and to the hope that the new council brought.

As a boy of 17, I was privileged to meet Pope John XXIII in a private audience with my family because, as you heard Tom say, my father was a big shot.

And when the pope pulled my face down close to his, to whisper in my ear, my life changed.

That's all.

I felt his rough whiskers against my skin.

I could smell the aroma on his skin.

You'll be glad to know it was soap.

[laughter]

I didn't understand the words he whispered in my ear.

I wasn't sure even if it was English or Italian or Latin.

All I knew was that in his embrace, I was recruited to the Church forever.

Why am I a Catholic? Angelo Roncalli is why.

[applause]

Well, I have plenty of friends who say that's the dumbest thing I ever heard.

[laughter]

What a strange and shallow reason for a lifetime commitment to Catholicism.

Yet it is exactly through such human mediation that God comes to us in this tradition -- incarnation, sacrament, physical encounter, an embrace, a kiss of peace.

The Holy One, God, how else do we do this?

In the pope's presence, it was not so much fulfillment that I experienced, as it was, well, longing.

Longing to find in the future what I found in his embrace. [unintelligible . . . Feeney . . .]

Longing, I would say now, for what transcends experience.

Longing, yes, for God.

That gets at the core of the Catholic faith for me.

Longing.

I confess that longing is my only absolute.

And though I recognize the true possibility that God is an invention put together by the human imagination to satisfy that longing, but I choose to believe -- choose to believe that longing itself is, as Catholics say, a sacrament, a sign pointing beyond itself to one by whom and for whom we were and are made.

Our hearts are restless, Lord.
And will be restless until they rest in you.
This holy longing is what it means to me that Christianity, and Catholicism especially, is profoundly incarnational.
The Word of God made flesh in creation.
The Word of God made flesh in the community of believers.
Ordinary believers.
Frankly, I see it in you.
Not that you're ordinary.
But the real presence in you, here among us.
I saw it first that day in the whiskers and aroma and kindly voice of John XXIII.
To me the Word of God made flesh.
A lot of flesh.

[laughter]

Which only made it more so.
The freedom to reform and the reform that Pope John began.
And I emphasize this.
It was a post-Holocaust reform that has been stalled, famously so, and even reversed in many ways, as everyone here knows so well.
And oddly enough, the Holocaust has been at the core of that reversal, too.
This is what it means, I would suggest, that the most telling of all of Pope Benedict's decisions was his lifting of the excommunication of the notorious Holocaust denier Bishop Williamson.
It is no accident that Williamson is part of a sect that defines itself by opposition to the reforms of Vatican II.
In order to oppose the Council's momentous doctrinal shift, such reactionary people must deny the experience that made it necessary.
The broad theology that Williamson and his colleagues want to rescue depends absolutely on the restoration of the anti-Jewish replacement theology of the old Church.
Yet if that anti-Judaism can be shown to have contributed even indirectly to the worst crime in history, then obviously it cannot go un-criticized.
The solution to this problem is simply to assert that the crime did not occur.
Denial.
Holocaust denial.
This is the meaning of the ongoing Vatican determination to canonize the pope of the silence, Pius XII.
Benedict's devotion to that cause matches perfectly his clear ambivalence about the Vatican II reforms.
His good intentions are fully on display when he meets cordially with leaders of other faiths but for doctrinal reason Benedict is bringing back insulting old attitudes about non-Catholics decidedly including Jews.
During his 24 year run for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith he was constantly on the lookout for opportunities to reassert pope-centered Catholic supremacy.
His 2000 document said that those outside the Catholic Church live, "in a gravely deficient situation in comparison to those who in the Church have the fullness of the means of salvation."

Feeney lives.

Benedict's insistence on this exclusivist supremacy has astounded people of other faiths. And wounded them.

So maybe I better take it back about Dr. Phil.

But surely Pope Benedict is acting in conscience for the good of the Church as he sees it. He feels morally obligated to defend a hierarchy of truth that alone can withstand what he sees and actually I think what we all might see as the ethical chaos that looms in the present age. An ethical chaos he identifies as the uncritical pluralism that ranks every religion as equally valid.

What he warns of as the dictatorship of relativism.

But Benedict's relativism is, in fact, a straw man since he is an astute enough philosopher to appreciate -- returning to my theme -- that every person's experience is unique, and every point of view is, therefore, somehow relative.

No one is in possession of the absolute, which alone is what makes it absolute.

At a time when many pillars of meaning are shaken, God knows, broad worry about ethical chaos is appropriate.

But pope Benedict's actual concern is narrowly dogmatic.

Not coincidentally, the pinnacle of the hierarchy of truth that he defends so staunchly is occupied by himself as the vicar of Christ.

The content of this doctrine is his own status.

Every religion has its version of this crisis.

Every religion has its version of this contest between dogma and experience.

Jews must test ancient assumptions about the land as the sign of God's covenant against the here and now challenge of war between Israelis and Palestinians.

The worldwide Anglican communion divides between those who give primacy to doctrines about marriage and those who see cruel exclusion of homosexuals as an affront to everything Jesus means.

Islam hears voices of women demanding to have their experience weighed equally in the scales with tradition.

Fundamentalist Christians say no to any experience -- any evidence that contradicts the dogma of biblical inerrancy.

In the Catholic Church, the issue could not be more dramatically joined.

Catholics are being required to say of the Church, it does not move.

But we say it moves.

Did Vatican II change the Church or not?

Oh, obviously it changed some details, altar girls, married deacons, less fish.

[laughter]

But nothing essential.

Really consider just four things almost at random.

The Church's world view changed.

Thomas -- the shift from static metaphysics has implications for everything from evolution to the development of doctrine to the idea of natural law, to the loaded question of when an embryo becomes a human person.

Another the Church's politics changed from the personal example of John XXIII to the definition of the Church as the people of God divine right monarchy was rejected as the model.

It just was.

From Constantine's empire Church to Thomas Jefferson's separation of Church and state.

Not for nothing was John Courtney Murray's master worked called *We Hold These Truths*.

The affirmation of the primacy of conscience is an opening to democracy that will not be shut.

Whether the crimson-robed . . . -- and that is Rome's problem.

Another, the Church's exclusivity changed.

Roman Catholicism no longer understands itself as the only way to God.

That is, of course, the core meaning of the affirmation of the Jewish covenant.

The Council's emphatic hope for Christian unity marked the end of the Reformation.

God is greater than any religion as a rabbi said.

By being present to creation as the creator, God is present to all people.

[applause]

The Church is a sign of that saving presence, not a cause of it.

Finally, the Church's idea of truth changed.

In its affirmation both of contemporary philosophy and contemporary biblical scholarship the Council accepted that all truth involves interpretation.

And that all truth is perceived from a point of view.

This is not relativism but respectivism.

In fact, this opens to a deeper regard for the tradition itself.

A return to the ease with the idea that all religious language is poetic, elusive, because God can be grasped only indirectly.

What the tradition calls the *via negativa*.

The only thing we can know about God is that we can know nothing about God.

And that is knowledge.

The revolutionary council that is serves the profoundly conservative function of restoring the heart of a tradition of religious humility.

These large ideas are embodied in all the arguments from Latin to the current move to restore the arcane language of the Roman Missal, from the dogmatically defined character of an all-male priesthood to the experience of otherwise liberated women.

From gay rights to an end of sexual moralizing.

From narrow exclusivism to the respective pluralism that marks the contemporary world, thank God.

From the doctrine of papal infallibility to the evermore of a spectacle of a pope forced to explain himself.

Will the last medieval structure of authority hold fast against a global move toward democratic liberalism?

Will diehard eurocentrism that took root in the south?

Western spiritualities against eastern mysticism.

Closer to home, will a collapsing priestly ministry remain aloof from the urgent need of Catholics for a revitalized sacramental life.

Will liturgy -- will the scandal of priest abusers and bishop enablers that is rooted in all of this rigidity -- finally be reckoned with by change?

Deep, structural, theological change, with whom does that change begin but us?

[applause]

The argument that is going on within the Christian Church and within Catholicism, our argument is an argument over nothing less than war and peace.

The possibility of justice across national and social barriers.

The Holocaust and Hiroshima are embedded in all of these questions and so is the present catastrophe of environmental degradation.

What we are doing to God's earth.

Will the human species survive?

Or will the human species have come all this way across millions of years of our magnificent, miraculous evolution, to make ourselves extinct?

Are we a species hell-bent on suicide?

My friends, that defines the stakes of the reform that we demand of our Church.

So, I am a Catholic because of my longing and because at the Eucharist my hunger is fed and my loneliness is lifted.

But I am also, and more, a Catholic because the faith matters of an institution that is the great custodian of Western tradition which for all its limits remains precious.

I am a Catholic because the faith matters of an institution that with a billion plus members is a world community that reaches across the divides of affluence and poverty, north and south, information technology and illiteracy, superstition and scientific rationalism.

To be a Catholic is to have a way to be at home on this earth and to argue on behalf of this earth's future.

Against Feeney at last, no salvation outside of human experience, and to be human is to change. Ironically to be a Catholic now is supremely to have a way of proclaiming, not whispering, "it moves."

[applause]

I saw all of this as a boy.

Not knowing it.

As a young man in Cushing, my first boss, in John XXIII, and above all in his great Council.

Change this institution and you can change the world.

Change this institution and you can change history.

Therefore, for the sake of the world, for abused children, for women, for men who worship the false gods of war, for the vast population of poor, separate human beings, rescue the reform of the Catholic Church.

Rescue the reform of the Catholic Church here today, you, us, gathered, as we believe, by the spirit of God, to whom we say therefore:

Blessed are you, holy one. Through your goodness we have this Church and the will to change it, this faith, and the hope to keep it.

Blessed are you.

[applause]