Invocation, Observations and Introduction
by
His Eminence
Cardinal Donald Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington

Tuesday, October 1, 2013
5:30 P.M.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, President DeGioia, for those gracious words. I thank you for your leadership and support that has made this exciting new Initiative possible at Georgetown University. It is a pleasure to join you in welcoming so many people to this timely and important public dialogue. I am particularly pleased to greet the leaders, supporters and friends of this new Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life.

I have been asked to do three things this evening: to offer an invocation for this gathering, to offer some brief observations, and then to introduce John Carr.

Please join me now in prayer. Let us place ourselves in the presence of God.

INVOCATION

This evening as we remind ourselves of the richness of our Catholic social teaching and heritage, we ask you to help us to open our hearts always to the ministry of charity and the service of justice that reflect the life of your Church.

We ask you Lord to bless this Initiative and those who lead it, to bless our efforts to share the wisdom and power of Catholic social thought that guide our efforts to reach out to those in public life in this Capitol city, especially young people that they may find in faith and service a path to pursue the common good.

We pray for peace in our world, especially in Syria and in the land we call Holy, for those who face persecution or harm because of their faith, and for the religious freedom of all.

We pray for greater justice in our nation, for families without work, or health care, for the hungry and the homeless,
for protection of all life, from conception to natural death,  
for those without opportunity and hope  
for immigrants and refugees that they may find welcome and a decent life,  
for those wounded by violence and those seeking to make our city, our nation and  
the world more just and peaceful.

Bless all of those who make this Initiative possible,  
especially John Carr, its Director,  
and everyone whose commitment to the care of those in need  
is manifest here this evening.

May we all be strengthened to do your will through Christ our Lord.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

OBSERVATIONS

Long before the curtain parted and Pope Francis stepped onto the balcony, huge crowds  
had already gathered in Saint Peter’s Square in response to the plumes of white smoke. They  
were already chanting, “Viva il Papa! – Long Live the Pope!” even though they did not know  
who he was.

Pope Francis stepped out onto that loggia as the living continuity and authentication of  
the Gospel imperative, that includes “See Christ in one another.”

What we have come to know and love in these rapidly passing six months is not a new  
Gospel, but a new way of doing the Gospel.

By what he does and how he does it, by what he says and how he says it, Pope Francis is  
offering a new moment of grace, outreach and renewal. The Holy Father is the New  
Evangelization in action, calling us to “go out” to people, to build bridges, not walls, and to  
establish a dialogue with all people, even those who do not embrace our faith in its fullness.

In the choice of the name Francis, we learned his priorities: concern for the poor, peace  
and creation. In his outreach to the poor and weak, his visits to the slums and his embrace of  
refugees and migrants, we see his passion for the poor and vulnerable. In his words about the  
global economy, his call for greater fairness and opportunities, even in his tweets, we see his call  
to pursue greater justice. In his prayer for peace and calls for dialogue, we see a global  
peacemaker, seeking to heal wounds and end conflict and violence.

This is not a political program or ideological agenda, but faith in action, the Gospel at  
work. Pope Francis is teaching us not only that we should know the Gospel, but how to “do” the  
Gospel.

Pope Francis puts the person first, not in some abstract concern for all of humanity, but in  
a very real, intensely human way. He does not simply speak about immigration, but asks “who  
weeps” for the immigrants who have been lost, the fathers seeking work, the children living in  
the shadows. He does not simply speak of peace as an ideal, but he calls on leaders to choose  
dialogue over confrontation and asks us to pray, fast and act for peace.
He sees the Church’s defense of human life, family and religious freedom, not as separate agendas, but part of a larger vision of faith in Jesus Christ, hope for a better world and love for the weak and vulnerable. These are not banners to be waved, slogans to be chanted, but an integral part of a faith that reaches out to all, beginning with those on the fringe of society and the edge of life. He calls for a “new balance,” saying “the proposal of the Gospel must be simpler, profound, and radiant. It is from this proposition that the moral consequences then flow.”

Pope Francis is a model of civility and service that a polarized and paralyzed Washington could learn from and follow.

With the leadership of Pope Francis, it is clear that this is the right time to inaugurate this Initiative as it seeks to lift up Catholic social thought and the tradition of our Church in order to share it with others. Our Holy Father has asked us to reach across boundaries of politics, ideology, and sources of division to seek the common good, especially to protect and enhance the lives and dignity of those who are poor and vulnerable.

I join you this evening simply to say it is our turn now, individually and collectively, to accept the fact that we are, as has been so often said, not our brothers and sisters keepers but our brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters. This Initiative exists to help spread that message. It is our turn now!

INTRODUCTION OF JOHN CARR

It is for me a pleasure to be here and I look forward to the dialogue and am pleased to introduce our moderator. John Carr is not only the moderator for this evening, but he is Director and driving force of the Initiative we inaugurate and celebrate tonight.

In every diocese that I have been privileged to serve as the Ordinary, I have invited John Carr to come and speak to gatherings, large and small. Sometimes as small as the Board of Catholic Charities and sometimes as large as a conference of 5,000 participants.

I have known and worked with John for many years as he served our bishops’ Conference faithfully and effectively for more than two decades as leader of our work on issues of justice and peace, human life and dignity. One of the reasons I could always count on John Carr and why this Initiative is blessed to have him directing it, is because he could explain the Church’s social teaching with a depth of knowledge and precision that grows out of decades of service in this field, but he would also always present the teaching with confidence and serenity without the need for abrasion or confrontation.

John Carr is an example not only of articulating Catholic social teaching but doing Catholic social justice. He builds bridges, he makes connections between our defense of human life and our protection of human dignity. John brings unique talents, knowledge and credibility to the work of the Initiative. The reason I support this unique effort and urge you to do the same is because John Carr and the Initiative will provide an affirmative, consistence and faithful voice articulating an application of the Gospel to the issues of our day here in our nation’s Capital. I am pleased to introduce the Director of the Initiative and this evening’s moderator, John Carr.

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