

Pew College Society  
Preliminary Address

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“Pope John Paul II, Cultural Change,  
and Christian Scholarship”

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*"Pope John Paul II, Cultural Change, and Christian Scholarship*

### **Pope John Paul II and Cultural Change**

*. . . But there was only one.  
A Century in which everything was part  
Of that Century and of its aspect, a personage,  
A man who was the axis of his time.  
-Wallace Stevens*

Karol Jozef Wojtyla,<sup>1</sup> whom Billy Graham said recently may well indeed be the man of the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> was born on May 18, 1920 in Wadowice, Poland. He is better known around the world as the head of the Roman Catholic Church, the Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II. Graham's sentiment about the Pope is not an isolated one. Others have recognized this man's humble, but powerful role in the Church and world affairs in the century that has just passed. "What in the tumultuous history of the twentieth century," asks Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "could have led anyone to predict that the most visible of its extraordinary galaxy of leaders would be the two-hundred and forty-sixth Bishop of Rome—that amidst the generals, presidents, monarchs, and dictators, a Catholic priest might emerge as the most influential of the century's leaders?"<sup>3</sup> One answer to this pertinent question

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<sup>1</sup> Wojtyla is pronounced "Voy-tee-wa."

<sup>2</sup> In an interview with the Associated Press cited in *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 13 (March 2000): 40, the Reverend Billy Graham said that he thinks the man of the century might very well be Pope John Paul II. The world renown evangelist and evangelical statesman said that the Pope "has brought the greatest impact of any pope in the last 200 years. Graham praised the Pontiff by saying "I admire his courage, determination, intellectual abilities, and his understanding of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox differences, and the attempt at some form of reconciliation."

comes in the form of a compelling and lengthy book on the life of the venerable Pontiff by Roman Catholic theologian George Weigel titled *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, published just last year.<sup>4</sup> In this remarkable account of Wojtyla's life, we learn a variety of important facts about this man's pontificate which he assumed on October 16, 1978, becoming the first Slav ever to hold this office and the first non-Italian pope in 455 years.<sup>5</sup> Here are some of his most notable accomplishments:

- He has traveled to more countries than any pope (ninety-one international trips), and he has spoken to more people than any other person in human history.
- He reshaped the papacy itself, establishing ambassadorial level diplomatic relations with sixty-four countries, and restoring relations with six others.
- He created 159 new cardinals and named 2650 of the Church's more than 4000 bishops.
- He reorganized the Roman Curia (the papal court and its functionaries).
- He published two new codes of canon law and the best-selling *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994).
- He published a number of significant papal encyclicals, the most recent being *Fides et Ratio* on the relationship between faith and reason.
- He published a steady stream of scholarly and popular works, the latter including *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Knopf 1994).
- He implemented the reforms of Vatican II in the daily life of the Church.

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Legacy of John Paul II: Why the bishop of Rome may be the most important figure in this secularist age," *Books and Culture* 6 (January-February 2000): 16.

<sup>4</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999). Much of the following material on John Paul II is taken from Fox-Genovese's review article of this book. Another equally massive volume on Pope John Paul II is Jonathan Kwitny, *Man of the Century: The Life and Times of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, A John Macrae Book, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> George Weigel states that just as many Americans know exactly where they were and what they were doing when Pearl Harbor was attacked, Franklin Roosevelt died, and President Kennedy was assassinated, so most Poles know exactly where they were and what they were doing on October 16, 1978, when Karol Wojtyla was elected to the Papacy. See *Man of the Century*, 15.

- He is credited at least in part with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (we'll see what happens in Cuba).
- He fostered fundamental transformations in Roman Catholicism, making the Church and its faith a vital force to be reckoned with in the modern world.
- He was the victim of an attempted assassination and later forgave his attacker (Mehmet Ali Agca) face to face.

For these and other reasons, Weigel, in his premier biography of this most remarkable man, believes that Wojtyla's papacy has been the most important since the Catholic Reformation of the sixteenth century.

There is another aspect of this leading denizen of the last one hundred years that is particularly intriguing to me, namely his method of cultural change. Wojtyla grew up in Poland and lived his early life in the midst of the horrors and brutality of the Nazi and Communist occupations. But he did virtually nothing. In fact, he was surprisingly non-political during this time, barely keeping abreast, so it seems, of the latest changes in governmental policies and procedures, hideous though they were. For this apparent indifference, highlighted all the more by the active and even sacrificial resistance by many of his ecclesial and political compatriots, Wojtyla has been soundly criticized. How could he so calmly ignore the sufferings of his countrymen, being content to perform quietly his daily duties as doctoral student, parish priest, college chaplain, Catholic bishop, and university professor—of philosophical ethics no less? After all, events in Poland and throughout Europe had introduced him to the humiliation of totalitarian occupation and the degradation of human dignity by brutal ideology. Indeed, his mother country became for him a metaphor for the human condition in the twentieth century: a quest for freedom as a fundamental human aspiration.

The answer to this disturbing question about Karol Wojtyla's alleged quietism during the war years and thereafter is one that gets at the heart of this paper, namely, *he chose the power of resistance through culture*. While he recognized a

place for active resistance against the forces of terror, it seems that for Wojtyla, such efforts dealt only with the symptoms, but not the root causes of the political and cultural disease. The Pope-to-be's position was that the destiny of men and nations, indeed, the very axis upon which the world turns was the human "word," and in Christian terms, "the Word" as the forces which shape culture and form consciousness. Change at the most primordial level, therefore, required a metamorphosis in meaning through words, both human and divine, that conceptualize reality and frame human existence. Anyone, therefore, who questions Wojtyla's *linguistic* strategy of cultural resistance simultaneously questions the power of words to transform the world. Indeed, his writings, his preaching, his ministry all gave verbal expression to a vision of human life that was at total cross purposes with the official Nazi and Communist ideologies. Consequently, Wojtyla, far from being a quietist, was progressively laying a new foundation for culture that one day would contribute dramatically to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe as well as in the Soviet Union. Weigel explains.

His crucial role in the collapse of European communism cannot be understood as the accomplishment of a deft statesman. It can only be grasped "from inside" as the achievement of a courageous pastor, determined to speak truth to power and convinced that the word of truth, spoken clearly and forcefully enough, is the most effective tool against the tyranny of totalitarianism. By inspiring the revolution of conscience that made possible the non-violent Revolution of 1989 against Marxism-Leninism, John Paul helped restore the political freedom of his Slavic brethren behind the iron curtain. At the same time, he challenged the broadly accepted understandings of the dynamics of history. History, he helped demonstrate, is driven by culture, and at the heart of culture is cult, or religion. By lifting up the witness of hundreds of thousands of Christian confessors against communist tyranny, the pontificate of John Paul II demonstrated in action that Christian conviction can be the agent of human liberation.<sup>6</sup>

But Wojtyla's carefully chosen words and his articulation of truth have had a specific theme that unifies his work before and during his pontificate, namely, the

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<sup>6</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 847.

development of a Catholic and Christian humanism to counter the secular humanism of the postwar world. In a letter to Father Henri de Lubac, Wojtyla wrote: “The evil of our time consists in the first place in a kind of degradation, indeed, in a pulverization of the fundamental uniqueness of the human person. This evil is even much more of the metaphysical order than of the moral order.”<sup>7</sup> The only answer to these crimes against humanity, as far as the future Pope was concerned, lay in propounding the sacred mystery and dignity of the human person—considered in relation to God, to himself, to others, and to the whole scheme of things—indeed, the human mystery which only the divine mystery of the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, makes clear.

Wojtyla insisted that the crisis of Western man and the response of Catholic humanism should even be the organizing center of the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), an event in which he participated actively. He argued throughout the three years of discussions that what the world needed from the Church in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was a clear expression of revealed truth, something more than the world already knew about itself. In one important plenary address to the Council on September 28, 1965, Wojtyla expressed his understanding of the core of divine revelation that the world so desperately needed to hear.

The story of creation and redemption is the world’s story, properly understood. Telling the world’s story as that kind of story, and thus bringing the world to conversion, was the greatest service that the Church could do for the world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Fox-Genovese, “The Legacy of John Paul II,” 18, and cited by Weigel from Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 171-2.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Fox-Genovese, “The Legacy of John Paul II,” 18.

Such was the good news that not only those under the icy grip of communist regimes needed to hear, but also those in bondage to the excesses of Western individualism and selfish capitalism. He bemoaned not only the communist stranglehold on religious freedom, but also lamented the tendency of American democracy to dissipate her glorious liberties into shallow license and immorality. Both brutal communism *and* rank individualism embody a betrayal of the nature of man whose true dignity is found only in a free relationship of love and service with God and others. Weigel explains the essence of the Pope's humanizing vision in these terms.

God's love, which gave birth to and sustained the world, could only be encountered in freedom. To be true to its mission, the Church has to be a "guardian" of human freedom. A truly human freedom seeks the truth and is bound by it. Love encountered in freedom and freedom ordered to truth—this is the essence of Christian humanism. The redeeming, all-conquering love of God is the foundation and the inexhaustible message of the Church's mission of genuine liberation.<sup>9</sup>

Articulating this robust Christian understanding of humanity through words and the Word has been at the center of the life and work of Pope John Paul II and his strategy of cultural change.

### **Christian Scholarship and Cultural Change**

*Deliver those who are being taken away to death,*

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<sup>9</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 288. On this same page, Weigel elaborates on this central papal theme: "Here, as throughout his pontificate, the Pope is reminding the Church and the world that the Incarnation tells us something about God and something about ourselves. Satisfying 'the fatherhood of God' and revealing the depths of God's love, the Son of God's birth as a man had also confirmed 'the greatness, dignity, and value' of humanity, for 'man cannot live without love. He remains . . . incomprehensible to himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.' Love is greater than sin, than alienation, than every human frailty at every time and every place, because 'God is love' (1 John 4: 8). That is the amazing good news—the 'Gospel'—that Christianity had to tell the world."

*And those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back!  
If you say, "See, we did not know this,"  
Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts?  
And does He not know it who keeps your soul?  
And will He not render to man according to his works?  
Proverbs 24: 11-12*

Earlier I mentioned that Wojtyla's choice to oppose the degradation of humanity in Europe through a strategy of *linguistic* cultural resistance, especially in the articulation of a Catholic humanism, got at the thesis of this paper. Now I would like to explain why. For I think that the calling and activity of Christian scholarship, as a kind of subversive cultural activity, ought to aim at the same basic goal as well. Christian scholars and students certainly ought to be concerned to glorify God and edify the Church in their teaching and learning. But they ought also to have as one of their targets the long range goal of deep cultural penetration, through words and the Word, particularly in the proclamation of a distinctively *Christian humanism* as an alternative vision of man currently engulfed in a thoroughly secularized and corrupt culture stripped of the presence and power of God.

This disintegrating culture of ours which needs the salt and light of the gospel of the kingdom has been carefully analyzed in an important recent book by Craig M. Gay titled *The way of the (modern) world, Or Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist*.<sup>10</sup> Gay recognizes that ideas have consequences, and the ideas with the most profound consequences are those that largely go unnoticed, "ideas that lie just behind conscious thought, providing a kind of foundation for the deliberations of everyday life."<sup>11</sup> For Gay, one of the most powerful but hidden ideas embedded in contemporary institutions, traditions, and habits of thought is of an atheological cast,

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<sup>10</sup> Craig M. Gay, *The way of the (modern) world, Or Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



namely “the assumption that even if God exists, he is largely irrelevant to the real business of life.” He explains his overall thesis in these terms.

Contemporary society and culture so emphasize human potential and human agency and the immediate practical exigencies of the here and now, that we are for the most part tempted to go about our daily business in this world without giving God much thought. Indeed, we are tempted to live as though God did not exist, or at least as if his existence did not practically matter. In short, one of the most insidious temptations fostered within contemporary secular society and culture, a temptation rendered uniquely plausible by the ideas and assumptions embedded within modern institutional life, is the temptation to *practical atheism*.<sup>12</sup>

This practical atheism, according to Gay, is not so much a personal or individual matter, but is an outlook that dominates all the central spheres of modern social and cultural life. These include politics which relies on non-theistic sources of moral authority and legitimacy, science and technology which are based on a commitment to methodological naturalism, economics which operates without any significant theological considerations, and a thoroughly secularized view of the self which is at the heart of contemporary culture.<sup>13</sup> To summarize it a bit differently, *Christendom* as our dominant cultural ethos is dead. We live in a post-Christian world.

For Gay, two implications follow from his analysis. The first is an alternative definition of what the New Testament means when it refers to the “world,” and to “worldliness,” a definition that is more *metaphysical* than it is *moral*. He asks, “What if the essence of ‘the world’ — and hence of ‘worldliness’ — is not personal immorality and/or social injustice as such, but is instead an *interpretation of reality* that essentially excludes the reality of God from the business of life?” Assuming a positive response to this question, he believes that “the most insidious temptations

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 14. Gay treats each of these areas in lengthy, separate chapters.

to 'worldliness' today do not necessarily come in the form of enticements to sexual dissipation, or even to complicity in socio-political oppression, but rather in the form of the suggestion that it is possible — and indeed 'normal' and expedient — to go about our daily business in the world without giving much thought to God." The conclusion he comes to is this: "Under modern, and now 'postmodern' conditions, . . . 'the world' is an interpretation of human life that is largely void of the *living* God, and 'worldliness' is characterized by practical atheism."<sup>14</sup> The challenge for sincere believers in general and Christian scholars in the academy thus becomes how to think and live "in" this world of practical atheism, but not be "of" it.

A second implication that follows from this definition of worldliness as practical atheism is a pervasive and costly *dehumanization*. The absence of God in the structures of daily life translates directly into the loss of truly human existence, for atheism at the theoretical or practical level strips people of their status as the *imago Dei*, and demotes them to a lesser (even animalic) level of significance. The outworkings of this reductionistic view of man are chilling individually and collectively. Gay explains in these words.

For when we lose sight of God, we also lose sight of ourselves. It is the thought of God, after all, that gives substance to words like "truth," "freedom," "justice," and "persons": words which lend substance and meaning to human life. Without the thought of God such notions are empty or, at best, only convenient fictions. A completely secular society is, therefore, not simply "godless," but impersonal and inhumane as well.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4-5. And furthermore, we can probably expect the new century which is just now dawning to be one in which the West (and the world at large) will likely seek additional ways to unhinge itself from any vestige of its Judeo-Christian moorings.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3.

It is at precisely this point—in the teeth of a corrupting practical atheism and worldliness with its concomitant depersonalization—that Christian scholars equipped with both a theistic interpretation of the universe and a biblical conception of the value and dignity of human persons can make a significant and culturally transformative contribution.

However, another crippling problem still stands in the way, one of those silent but deadly ideas that underlies so much of contemporary cultural experience as well as the life of many in the evangelical church. That crippling problem is *individualism*, which in its purer sense may be one of America's greatest strengths, but in a corrupted form perhaps one of her greatest weaknesses.<sup>16</sup> An individualism "which lies at the very core of American culture," but which "may have grown cancerous" is the object of a most notable study by Robert Bellah and his four co-authors famously titled *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.<sup>17</sup> They assert that essential to our American identity is our belief "in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious."<sup>18</sup> Examined under the headings of utilitarian individualism in which fulfillment is sought vocationally, and expressive individualism in which fulfillment is sought through private life, the net

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<sup>16</sup> The common view that early America was largely individualistic has been challenged recently by Barry Alan Shain in *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). In this book, Shain argues that the core political ideas in the era of the War for Independence were based on Reformed Protestant communalism.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Bellah, et. al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library, 1986). The two quotes already cited are found on pp. 142 and vii respectively.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

result is the same: at the center of liberal American culture “is the autonomous individual, presumed able to choose the roles he will play and the commitments he will make, not on the basis of higher truths but according to the criterion of life-effectiveness as the individual judges it.”<sup>19</sup>

But as the five authors point out, this pivotal American value has the effect of weakening commitment in both private and public life. They analyze the degree to which marriage, family, and other personal relationships, including therapeutic ones, are undermined by this trend. A radical individualism also affects local politics, civic volunteerism, citizenship, and the broader cultural implications of religion. Though as Americans we may speak frequently about community and are concerned about the welfare of others, we are primarily occupied with our individual lives and personal well-being. Thus, in North America and the West in general, such an individualistic approach to life—which in many ways is nothing other than good old-fashioned selfishness—denigrates seriously any left-over concern for culture as a whole and is destroying any residue of genuine communal existence.

This mindset of self-centered individualism certainly wreaks havoc in the life and ministry of the Church, as many Christian cultural critics have pointed out.<sup>20</sup> But it also drastically limits the vision and hamstring the effectiveness of Christian scholarship and Christian higher education in their strategic roles as agents of cultural change.<sup>21</sup> This is certainly true of many Christian students in their

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>20</sup> See especially the trilogy of books by theologian David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993); *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994); *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

undergraduate and graduate studies, where the *telos* (or purpose) of higher education is conceived largely in terms of personal fulfillment and individual success. As one alumna of a Christian university put it recently, “I entered the academy with one primary goal in mind: to land a well-paying job upon graduation.” Rare indeed are collegians today who can see beyond their own noses so as to be gripped by a sense of responsibility for what they know and its ramifications for the common good.

But among the established Christian professoriate as well, there is a strong temptation to privatization and to puny visions for their work. This shows up in a variety of ways. Some believing professors may simply be working out of the tradition of personal Christian pietism, and have never been exposed to the kingdom perspective of the faith with its broader cosmic vision and cultural implications. Others may have been seduced gradually by the siren song of a consumer culture and just don’t want to be disturbed in their comfortable bourgeois lifestyle by the challenges of a culture in crisis. Still others may view the professorate primarily as a ticket to fame and fortune, concentrating mostly on the research, publication, and conferencing process as a means to professional advancement and notoriety. Some

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<sup>21</sup> This notion of the university as a center for cultural change and social renewal has been expressed well by Nathan Hatch, vice-president for graduate studies and research at the University of Notre Dame. In a lecture titled “Christian Thinking in a Time of Academic Turmoil,” he writes: “The university in the West stands in a long tradition as a treasury of the good, the true, the beautiful. From the medieval university to the modern liberal arts college, the academy has enjoyed privileged status as a place characterized by the search for truth, the development of moral character, and the passing on of what is prized as most worthy and noble. Institutions of higher education cling to the belief that they are set apart from self-serving and utilitarian endeavors. They aspire to serve as centers of renewal and vision for society at large. And colleges and universities in general have been accorded a kind of respect and deference not usually enjoyed by other institutions. Integrity and higher purpose are considered a natural fruit of the classroom, but not necessarily of the boardroom, court room, or stock exchange.” Documentation unavailable at this time.

Christian scholars, through the socialization process of their graduate programs, may have jettisoned their biblical commitments, and for the sake of their careers, have adopted the naturalistic assumptions of the mainstream academy, and so blended in with the surrounding culture that they support rather than challenge or change it.

One thing is for sure, and that is that none of us in academic life, whether student, aspiring scholar, or established professor, is exempt from these temptations to individualism and myopic ways of life. We would all do well to examine ourselves carefully to see what attitudes and motivations animate our vocation in scholarship.

But perhaps there are a few remnant Christian scholars (and hopefully you are one of them) who have maintained their doctrinal orthodoxy, recognized the comprehensive implications of biblical faith, escaped the pull of middle-class consumerism, and viewed their scholarly vocation as a calling to selfless service for the renewal of individuals and public life at the deepest possible level. In our social context characterized by rank individualism, practical atheism, and a ruinous dehumanization, the trumpet call for such thoughtful Christian scholars is unmistakable.

But to do this, Christian scholars, taking their cue from the Pope, must remind themselves of the power of the Word and of the alternative vision of Christian humanism as a means of personal and cultural transformation. For indeed, the heavens and the earth and all their hosts, including human beings as the *imago Dei*, were brought into being out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) by nothing other than the omnipotent, world-making word of God. Furthermore, the creation and its human creatures, having become corrupt by sin, have also been newly created by the all-powerful, world-redeeming word of God through the person, words, and work of the

Incarnate Christ. And this self-same word of God, infinitely capable of both creation and redemption, has also governed the cosmos and history providentially, determining the course of nature, men and nations, guiding all things to their appointed fulfillment and eventual end. It is no wonder, then, that the prophet Jeremiah has disclosed God's own confidence in the power of His word, declaring: "Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?" (Jer. 23:29, NASB). Or that the author of Hebrews could exclaim: "For the word of God is alive and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. . ." (Heb. 4: 12, NASB). Or that St. Paul would say of God's inspired word that it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3: 16-17, NASB). Or that St. Peter could say that the living word of God "abides forever" (1 Pet. 1: 23, NASB). And, of course, all human words—spoken in the power of God's Spirit, conveying divine truth, goodness, and beauty, and announcing a message of human redemption, freedom and hope—have their grounding and derive their own effectiveness in the word of the infinite, personal trinitarian God who will reign unto the ages of ages. This is the nature of the divine Word, of human words, and the biblical message that can change the lives of men and women, renew the foundation of human culture, and alter the course of history, to the praise and glory of His grace.

On this platform, I envision a host of well prepared young believers, entering the academy (and other professions)—fortified by an ensemble of intellectual and moral virtues and supported by the strength of Christian community—articulating a robust, comprehensive vision of the faith in theology, interpreting carefully the meaning of the sacred text in biblical studies, arguing for well informed concepts of knowledge and ethics in philosophy, propounding humanizing views of the soul and

society in the social sciences, elucidating the wonder and complexity of the physical universe in the natural sciences, telling the human story with honesty and insight in history, clarifying the human condition in its glory and depravity in literature, expressing the mystery and power of beauty in the fine arts, and so on. And I cannot but help to think that God wants to use many of us here at DBU in the Pew College Society in these and other ways. For this purpose, perhaps this is why God in His grace blessed us with the grant from the Pew Younger Scholars Program at Notre Dame to start the Pew Society here at DBU three years ago. Perhaps this is why God has given me a vision to share with you along these lines. Perhaps this is why so many of you have been such enthusiastic and supportive members of the Pew College Society these many years, and why some of you have returned from long distances to be here this weekend. Perhaps this is also why the people in the Pew College Society ought to keep in touch with each other in the future, to maintain the Pew community in order to reinforce the vision and for the sake of mutual support, both spiritually and professionally, as we are led and used by God in our respective callings. Just perhaps!

### **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude this paper with a story about cultural challenge as well as cultural change, another story about Pope John Paul II and his relationship with Polish composer Henryk Mikolaj Górecki.<sup>22</sup> Apparently the Polish Pope believed that significant social transformation could occur not only through words but also through music. As a world class composer, Górecki was commissioned by Karol Wojtyla in 1977, at the time the Cardinal of Krakow, to write a special composition for the 900th anniversary celebration of the martyrdom of St. Stanislaw,

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<sup>22</sup> Pronounced Goo-rets-kee.



the patron saint of Poland. The dramatic story of the composition of this piece, of Górecki's life and work, and the part he played in one of the twentieth century's defining moments unfolds in the following way:

- Górecki was born in 1933; struggles with family in early musical training.
- National and international success as an accomplished composer.
- Commissioning by Cardinal Karol Wojtyla in 1977 for a special composition honoring the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Stanislaw, patron saint of Poland.
- St. Stanislaw stands as an emblem of the moral authority of the Church and a rebuke to tyrants who have ruled Poland, including the Communists.
- Górecki's opposition to the Communists and his devotion to the Roman Catholic Church and her music.
- The Cardinal of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla, becomes Pope in 1978, a year after commissioning the piece for St. Stanislaw.
- The Pope was scheduled to return to Poland in 1979 to commemorate St. Stanislaw's anniversary; the Communists knew the significance of this event.
- Communist opposition to Górecki and his work as a Catholic composer.
- Communist opposition to the Pope's visit to Poland in June 1979.
- Górecki's special composition was completed, titled *Beatus Vir* (Blessed is the Man), but because of the Communist pressure, no one was available to conduct the performance.
- Górecki himself takes the baton and conducts the performance; its message of the truth about God's salvation and hope.
- The Pope's significant message of truth and freedom.
- Górecki's retreat to private life and his Symphony no. 3; the lesson of his music.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Taken from Charles W. Colson and Nancy Percy, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999): 433-38.

Through the ministry of Pope John Paul II and through the music of Polish composer Henryk Górecki, God indeed raised up champions for the truth. I think He wants and can do the same through us—Christian students, professors, administrators, who are serious about our faith and our learning, about our lives and our callings. Through His word and our words rooted in His truth, we can share a message of faith, hope, and love that can change people and our culture at the deepest level, at their very foundations, where change is needed most. The hope of individuals, the well-being of the Church, the flourishing of our nation, and the future of our civilization depend upon it. We dare not say we did not know.

Deliver those who are being taken away to death,  
And those who are staggering to slaughter,  
O hold them back!  
If you say, "See, we did not know this,"  
Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts?  
And does He not know it who keeps your soul?  
And will He not render to man according to his works?  
Proverbs 24: 11-12, NASB

*Sola Deo Gloria*