Our lecture series in the name of Frank L. Marcon has had as its focus the worlds of Business and Communications. Notwithstanding the prevalence of Roman collars on stage, tonight's lecture is indeed about "business" -- not in an economic sense but one of another sort, namely, the enterprise of higher education. And we are honored to have as our lecturer a premier Communicator, who this evening will bring to its culmination our year-long effort at Allentown College to promote an increased awareness of the vision and values of Catholic higher education.

As you can see by reading tonight's program, we've chosen the right man for the task: head of a public policy institute, leader of diverse social affairs organizations, presidential appointee, papal honoree, author and editor -- these descriptions surely substantiate his national recognition as one of the "most influential intellectuals in America" (U.S. News & World Report).

But beyond this printed reputation, the real strength of our speaker's communication lies in the quality of his thought, a thought well-equipped intellectually and well-versed publicly. And that thought has consistently suggested that Catholicism and education, in their togetherness, are a powerful force in shaping public policy. In fact, if I may quote his own words, the "Catholic
Church is, intellectually and institutionally, the world's most influential champion of human freedom" (foreword to Catholicism, Liberalism, and Communitarianism).

But, at the risk of usurping any more of his speech, let me offer you instead one final, borrowed image. Our guest speaker is not merely a policy-maker or a thought-provoker. This evening, we hope, he may also be a bona fide fashion-designer (even in black!). For in today's society, we find ourselves dwelling in what he has called a "naked public square" -- where moral vision is all too often excluded from serious public discourse. And so, to design for us a bit of public fashion in the intellectual dress of Catholic higher education, it is now my privilege to welcome and introduce to you ... the Rev. Richard John Neuhaus.

The "Catholic Moment" in Higher Education

President Gambet and Father Dailey, brothers and sisters, wasn't that a nice introduction? I could have listened to that, really, for quite a while longer! It put in mind, I think, it was Hubert Humphrey. Whenever he would receive a particularly generous introduction, he would always begin by saying that he wished his parents had been there to hear it -- because his father would have so enjoyed it, and his mother would have believed it! But in any event I am very pleased to be here at Allentown College. I have over the years -- for my sins, 20-30 longer years doing lectures around -- been circling Allentown College. I've been at Lehigh, Lafayette, Muhlenberg and so forth, and all this time I didn't realize that I was really spending my time circling the intellectual center of the Lehigh Valley! And it's a splendid feeling to know that you have finally hit pay-dirt, so to speak.

I understand that you had Monsignor George Kelly here a while back, a dear friend of mine and a feisty fellow if ever there was one. I understand -- well, I don't understand because actually you kindly sent me the text of his speech and I read it for myself -- he repeatedly said that despite claims by myself and others, the Catholic moment has been missed. There is no Catholic moment in American life or in world history. Now, as some of you know, I wrote a book, in 1988 I think it was published, called The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World, and I, in all friendly feeling, dissent from Monsignor Kelly on this. I think that it is still very much an open question whether we are living the Catholic moment. But my whole bent is to think that indeed we are if we have the nerve for it, if we have the wit for it, if we have the faith for it. When the book came out, about the same time, a then commentator who has gained some notoriety for his political propensities, Patrick Buchanan, wrote a book -- I think it was called Right from the Start or something like that -- and it was all about his boyhood, his Catholic boyhood in Georgetown and being raised in an intact Irish-Catholic culture and the glories of that. Pat Buchanan sent me a copy of his book, and he said, "Dear Pastor Neuhaus [I was still a Lutheran pastor then], I have read your book with great interest. I want you to know that I, too, believe in the Catholic moment. It was 50 years ago and is not likely to happen again." Thank you, Pat Buchanan.

Well, I understand what Monsignor Kelly is saying, and I think I understand what Mr. Buchanan is saying and what many other people are saying when they look back upon the last thirty-plus
years -- we can roughly describe them as the years since the Second Vatican Council -- and they look at where Catholicism in America was and now where Catholicism in America is. And there are different ways of telling that story, of course. You can tell that story in terms of almost unmitigated decline and confusion and discombobulation. You can tell that story in terms of the Catholic Church's loss of confidence, in terms of dissent, in terms of the diffusion of any clarity with respect to what it means to be a Catholic. We all know the ways in which that story can be told to lead to an absolutely doleful, indeed, despairing conclusion.

Certainly part of that conclusion would be that there is not a Catholic moment. In fact, I listen to many of my conservative and traditionalist friends. (Almost all my friends are conservative, to tell you the truth.) As Philip Lawler, who is an editor of Catholic World Report, once told me: "you know, Father Richard, all my friends are conservatives. My closer friends are right-wingers, but my real friends are real-wingers." I have some real-winger friends as well. I understand that telling of the Catholic story in the period since the Council, and there is much truth to it. But it is only part of the truth. If one really wants to get doleful and lead to an inescapable conclusion of despair, one can go far beyond all the usual things that are discussed, such as the decline in vocations, the collapse of religious orders, the pervasiveness of dissent, etc. You can go much further and read, for example, Evangelium Vitae, the great encyclical of the Holy Father, John Paul II, in which, far beyond any institutional confusions or collapses or losses of confidence in the Catholic Church, you look at the global perspective. He speaks in such compelling, sobering terms about a conflict between the culture of life and the culture of death. And one can ask, at times, which is it that is winning?

One can make a very persuasive case; you can accumulate an awful lot of empirical evidence to suggest that indeed the culture of death has the upper hand. But, we have not the right to despair. And finally, we have not the reason to despair. This is the Catholic moment. It is the Catholic moment in a number of important respects. It is the Catholic moment in the most elementary sense in that if the Catholic Church is what the Catholic Church claims to be, if it is that community within which subsists the church of Jesus Christ, if that is true, then every moment since Pentecost has been the Catholic moment, and every moment until our Lord Jesus returns in glory to judge the living and the dead will be the Catholic moment. That is the most elementary sense of speaking about the Catholic moment. That is the sense in which I meant the title of my book, The Catholic Moment.

But then there is another sense, more chronologically specific, more timed, in which one can say that this moment at the end of the 20th century, at the edge of the third millennium, this moment in some particular sense, in some singular way, is the Catholic moment. Certainly that's what the Holy Father calls us to act upon, to entertain the intuition, his intuition, perhaps the Holy Spirit's intuition, that there is something monumental afoot in world history. He speaks about it regularly and most particularly in his letter, Tertio Mellelnio Adveniente, the Coming of the Third Millennium. He speaks about the Third Millennium in terms that some people describe as mystical, other people describe as obsessive. Who knows what it is, but he is persistent about it! He keeps coming back to it like a trip hammer -- that we should be on our tiptoes, that we should be on full alert, that the church and the world should be on full alert in terms of what this moment, in biblical language this kairos, this moment of crisis and opportunity, this fullness of time, might mean for all of us. He speaks of the Third Millennium as a possible "springtime" --
as a springtime for Christian unity, as a springtime for Christian evangelization, as a springtime for the re-Christianization of cultures that once understood themselves to be formed and shaped and accountable to the reality of God and Christ. He doesn't know, I don't know, nobody knows - - God knows what kind of moment this is, whether it is that kind of *kairos*, pregnant with possibilities beyond our imagination, or whether indeed we are living in the final winding-down of the dissolution of the community of the church that bears the hope of the world. Who knows?

I, for a number of complicated reasons, have had opportunity to spend time with the Holy Father and to have dinner with him privately and talk with him about many things. (You ordinarily are not to say anything about a private conversation with the Holy Father, but I've told him and I asked for his permission to say this and he said yes, say it because it is a wonderful story.) One time I was talking with him, and we were talking about what precisely Father Dailey mentioned in that quote, that the Catholic Church is the greatest institutional and intellectual force in the world today for the defense of freedom. And I'm saying, Holy Father, you know if Voltaire and Diderot and the other philosophers of the secular enlightenment of the 18th century who believed that the greatest obstacle to human progress and to an understanding of human dignity was religion and most specifically the Catholic Church, if they were living today, what astonishment it would be to them to see that the enemy, the arch enemy of everything that they considered to be human progress is today the champion of the human project, is today the bearer of an authentic humanism that lifts up the hope, not only for Catholics, not only for Christians, but for the whole world. And that, of course, is what the Holy Father has been doing right from the beginning of his pontificate up to the present. Again like a trip-hammer, the phrase from his very first sermon in October of 1978, you recall, is "be not afraid." He keeps saying to the whole world, "be not afraid" -- God has invested himself in this whole human project, and God has a stake in it, and God will not let it fail. And so I was saying to the Holy Father, if Voltaire and the others were alive today and they saw what you are doing, they would have no way of understanding this. I said, "Holy Father, you are ahead of the curve of history." "Ooh," he had been listening all this time. "ahead of the curve of history." He turned to his secretary, Monsignor Geivish, and said, "Vas is da curve of history?" So we had this back and forth discussion about the right translation of the curve of history, and the Holy Father says, "Oh yes, I am ahead of the curve of history. I was going so fast I broke my leg! But I will continue to go fast!"

This is what I mean when I speak about a Catholic moment. It is a key part of what I mean when I speak about the Catholic moment. I have no doubt that fifty years from now, a hundred years from now, that in a taken-for-granted, un-selfconscious way, just as today we speak about Pope Leo the Great and Pope Gregory the Great, that our children and children's children will speak about Pope John II the Great and will recognize that in this pontificate, indeed, is the bringing together in a coherent and compelling and comprehensive way the Catholic fullness of teaching for the whole of humanity. For an authentically prophetic humanism -- and I think the word "prophetic humanism" is exactly what is best -- typifies what this pontificate is about.

And so I listen to my friends -- dear friends like Monsignor Kelly -- and many, many others, and I know what they are talking about when they talk about the loss of these last thirty years. I was not a cradle-Catholic. I did not live through their period, but I can understand it. I watched it at the time, and I studied it, and I know what it must have been. I know what the sense of loss must
be, the sense of decline, the sense of diffusion of purpose and identity. But in the midst of all this, there is in a manner that ought not to panic us at all, a natural time of congestion, a time of gestation, a time of digesting the Spirit's movement of the Second Vatican Council, which has only been thirty years, thirty years last December that the Council concluded. Thirty years is not a long time when one considers the massive move that the Council made. To be an authentic, orthodox, faithful Catholic, to be a Catholic that is truly one who lives in a mindset of sentire cum ecclesia, of thinking with the church is to understand the providential moment that was the Second Vatican Council and to understand that this pope, this John Paul the Great, is a pope of the Second Vatican Council. Most of the writers and pundits and intellectuals and academic theologians in Catholic America over these last thirty years and in Western Europe, particularly in the so-called First World, have completely missed, it seems to me, the excitement and the adventure and the genius of this pontificate. They are still depicting it as being an essentially reactive phenomenon, trying to put the lid back down, trying to clamp down again, trying to impose old strictures, trying to turn back the clock. This is nonsense! This is a visionary pope, as visionary as 2,000 years of the Church's history has ever witnessed, who is looking to the future and bringing together in a coherent manner the full resources of the church to see the Third Millennium as the millennium of greatest missionary expansion and of greatest culture-forming influence in the two millennia past of Catholic history. Tertio Millennio Adveniente, the coming of the Third Millennium, is a prophetic, adventuresome statement. And it is all about the Catholic moment, if we have the wit for it, if we have the nerve for it, if we have the faith for it.

But in the academy and in Catholic education in this country and in Western Europe, and especially in theology and all of its departments, it seems to me that the sadness is that the best and the brightest minds of Catholic America, of the Catholic West, have largely wasted their energies, invested whole lifetimes, in fighting the essentially trivial and uninteresting question of ecclesiastical authority, the question of how little do I need to believe and how little must I do in order to be a Catholic in good standing. It's a dumb question! Why would one want to spend one's time asking that question? It's a self-limiting question. It is an inherently dead-ended question. It is a question that shrivels the mind and shrivels the soul when we are called to live in splendor, to live in the Veritatis Splendor, the splendor of the truth of the fullness of Catholic faith and life.

This pontificate, one has to hope, is now at last perhaps being received, being genuinely listened to, internalized also here in the United States. There have been so many remarkable moments: 1) the much neglected extraordinary Synod of 1985 which pulled together, twenty years after the Council, the authentic teaching of the Council; 2) the Catechism of the Catholic Church, of course, which for generations to come will be recognized as a moment of extraordinary grace in which once again was established at least a point of reference by which all Catholics, not simply the experts, not simply the credentialed theologians, not simply the official catechists who then feed out in their manner to the laity, but all Catholics can find readily accessible a window to the fullness of the Veritatis Splendor of the Catholic faith; 3) the response to Crossing the Threshold of Hope -- an astonishing thing, a sign of the reception of this pontificate, at last; the encyclicals, the great encyclicals, especially the last four. Centesimus annus -- there is not in the whole world an encyclical or a statement, a development of an argument with regard to the nature of a free and virtuous society that can hold a candle to Centesimus annus, the encyclical issued on the 100th anniversary of Rerum Novarum. Veritatis Splendor -- to which I have already alluded.
Evangelium Vitae (the Gospel of Life) -- where else in the world is a message brought together so comprehensive, so compelling, so inclusive as this, so filled with hope for the future despite all there is in the world that defies hope and leads reasonably to despair. Ut unim sint -- the encyclical of last year "that they may all be one" -- on Christian unity and how the unity of Christians is to be a portent, a sign, a signal of the promised unity of humankind setting the Catholic Church not simply as being the center of the ecumenical movement, but really being the ecumenical movement in which all Christians may be caught up in the hope of the fulfillment of our Lord Jesus' prayer in John 17 that they may all be one as he and the Father are one. This is prophetic humanism. This is a visionary laying forth to the world the reasons behind the admonition, "Be not afraid."

Be not afraid. I've heard some people say, why is the Pope such an optimist? He's not an optimist. He's not an optimist at all. Optimism is a shallow and superficial thing. Optimism is a matter of disposition. Optimism is a matter of optics. It's a matter of seeing just what you want to see and not seeing what you don't want to see. This pope is an embodiment of hope, and hope is the opposite of optimism. Hope is looking clear-eyed, with eyes wide open, unblinkingly into all the reasons not to hope and, nonetheless, to always say that, nonetheless, "be not afraid." This is a pope who has been through the worst that history has to dish out in terms of this, the bloodiest century in all of human history, who has lived under Nazism, who has lived under Communism, who has lost family, who has himself been almost killed in an assassination attempt. He knows more than anybody in the whole world all there is in this suffering, tormented, pitiable human condition that leads one reasonably to despair. And it is in this context that he says, "be not afraid." The only simplicity to be trusted, the great Anglo-American philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, once said, "The only simplicity to be trusted is the simplicity that is on the far side of complexity." So the only hope that is to be trusted is the hope that is on the far side of all the reasons for despair, which is another way of saying that the only hope to be trusted is the hope on the far side of the Cross. And this is a pope of the Resurrection, calling us to be a church of the Resurrection.

And yet I know that we have to deal seriously with so much that has happened, so much that has happened also in Catholic higher education that, indeed, is discouraging. In 1967, as most of you know, a number of key Catholic leaders in the United States, leaders of some of our more prominent Catholic universities and colleges, gathered together in Land O' Lakes, Wisconsin and declared in the name of academic freedom and the pursuit of academic excellence what amounts to their liberation from the control, or what they perceived as, the control and the confines and the limits of church authority. And as many people have pointed out, an astonishing thing about that led by Father Ted Hesburgh of Notre Dame, an astonishing thing about that effort is how readily and indeed apparently self-consciously they were willing to accept the control, the confines, the limits imposed by the government and by major philanthropies, all of which would open their sluices of support financially if these institutions could demonstrate that they were not seriously Catholic, or as the language of then and now has it, that they were not sectarian. "Sectarian" is the dirty way of referring to schools that are seriously religious: Sectarian, partisan, limited, confining, marginal.

And so, Catholic institutions of higher education one after another, for many reasons not simply for the dollars from government and philanthropy, although goodness knows that was a powerful
reason, but also because of certain notions of what it meant to be academically excellent, to be in the big time, to leave the ghetto of a marginalized Catholic past, for all these reasons and because they had a notion of academic freedom that required a disengagement, not simply from authoritative traditions in general, but more specifically from authoritative religious traditions and most specifically of all from authoritative Catholic tradition -- for all these reasons, many Catholic colleges and universities in the United States of America have in the last thirty years become very tenuously, in a manner so fragile, still Catholic. They speak not about being "Catholic," but they'll say "education in the Jesuit tradition." That's a phrase that's much favored. You wouldn't really put right out that you are Catholic, but Jesuit. Well, it's like when we had a conference, an institute in New York some years back. We had a number of university heads, and of course what Catholics have been doing in these last thirty years is simply to imitate, simply to follow along in the path, the dismal path, of what happened to church-related Protestant schools in this country over the last hundred years. (For we recall that all the great universities of America almost without exception were once strongly Christian schools. Harvard and Yale and Princeton and you can go on and on.) But in any event, when people talk about education in the Jesuit tradition, I am reminded of the president of a very major institution in this country, a university that I will not name, but which technically was still connected with the United Methodist Church. And you'd be surprised, there are a number of big universities around (you would never know it) that are technically connected with the United Methodist Church, as indeed are others that are technically connected with the Lutheran Church or the Presbyterian Church or whatever, at least historically. But in any case, this president said as we were talking, and this is a big university, he said: "well, this is interesting, with all these scholars around talking about this history. You know, I've been thinking as I've been listening. I think that I could get away with saying that Emory (oh, I named the university, I'm sorry!) is a Methodist university, but they'd kill me if I said it was a Christian university! So schools can get away with saying that they are in this tradition or that. "The Jesuit tradition." I've always thought [some of my best friends are Jesuits, I need to quickly add, and any Jesuits here should know that] but I've thought about my Jesuit friend, Avery Dulles, and he does not think that this is particularly humorous. I don't know, but with the Catholic Church's capacious ecumenical reach, with its reach out to everybody -- we have Catholic-Lutheran dialogues, we've got Catholic-Baptist dialogues, we've got Catholic-Anglican dialogues -- I think it's time for us to brace ourselves and to really get ecumenical and launch a Catholic-Jesuit dialogue! Now having said that, I am sorry that I said it. I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry Avery, I didn't mean it. I promised him that I wouldn't say that again.

It may well be of the 200-280 historically associated Catholic institutions of higher education in America, it may be that the devastations of these last thirty years, means that some of them are simply, in a formal sense, going to stop being Catholic. Maybe many of them are already lost and that, perhaps, should simply be accepted. But I think it should be of great interest that in the last couple of years the tone among at least Catholic educators with whom I'm in conversation has changed very dramatically, and that some schools like Allentown College, which as I understand it (and I accept the President's assurances on this) have always had a solid and unquestioned and unquestionable Catholic identity. But there are many, many other schools of whom that cannot be said. It is interesting that in the last couple of years that criticism of the direction launched by the Land O' Lakes movement of 1967 is today very, very widespread--very, very widespread --
and most, maybe not most but it seems almost like most, Catholic colleges and universities today are very actively involved in an internal conversation about what does it mean to be Catholic.

Now it may well be, and the cynics among us would say this, that that's because they are feeling the pressure of possibly losing their niche in the market in terms of recruiting students and such. After *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the letter of the Holy Father with respect to Catholic higher education, it may well be that they're alarmed by the prospect that ecclesiastical authority, whether the local bishop or someone else, would simply say to schools that are only nominally Catholic that you can no longer use the word "Catholic," and this might have a devastating impact upon their recruitment and other aspects of their well-being and that may have something to do with it. I would not put it above even Catholics that self-interest is operative also institutionally; the prospect of losing your market, as Dr. Johnson said, might wondrously concentrate the mind of even the most dissident dean. However, I would also hope that what more interestingly and more encouragingly is happening is that people have come to realize that that secular model of so-called academic freedom and academic excellence is not all that appealing. And people have come to realize that there is something demeaning, belittling, embarrassing, painfully awkward about having the institutions that bear the name Catholic -- the richest and fullest and most varied intellectual tradition in all of human history -- bending over hat-in-hand, begging to be acknowledged as being truly a college, truly a university, by the likes of Harvard or Yale or Princeton or whomever. Catholicism should not be in a posture, and particularly intellectual Catholicism, should not be in a posture of pulling on its forelock with hat in hand begging for recognition from the real world and the big world that presumably defines excellence.

We need, rather, as Catholic institutions to be genuinely contributing to pluralism in higher education. And contributing to pluralism in higher education, contrary to the arguments of some, does not mean that Catholic schools should become like every other kind of school. That does not contribute to pluralism. That contributes to homogeneity, to uniformity, to an uninteresting tapioca pudding of American higher education. We make our greatest contribution to pluralism by being different, by being unapologetically different, not necessarily abrasively in-your-face different, but intelligently, and engagingly, and persuasively and winsomely able to make the case for why the difference of being a Catholic college or Catholic university is a contribution not only to the church but indeed to the entirety of our public and intellectual discourse in this society. Catholics have an understanding of academic freedom that is a different understanding based upon the clear perception that freedom is only possible in relation to truth. *Veritatis Splendor*, the argument worked out there by the Holy Father with such nuance, with such philosophical depth and richness, this is an argument to be made in the public square, in the public arena and to be made in the arena of higher education across the board. It is a more exciting understanding of truth, a more challenging understanding of truth than anything that Harvard University has had in the last 150 years when it dropped its original motto [although the Dean's office denies this]. The original motto was "Truth for Christ and his Church," and of course they dropped "for Christ and his Church" and now they have simply "veritas," simply truth, naked truth, neutral truth. But naked and neutral truth that is grounded in and directed toward nothing other than to boast that one possesses the truth is, in fact, unsustainable. We know it is unsustainable. We live in a time, a most astonishing time, which we as Catholics and we as Christians of all stripes and denominations ought to see as a time of splendid opportunity for those who have the audacity for it. We live in the time in which it is the received wisdom, the
conventional wisdom of the brightest and best of our elite culture, that there is no such thing as truth! What a time to be able to make the argument of *Veritatis Splendor*, to be able to redefine academic freedom, not in terms of personal willfulness, or in terms of self-indulgence, or in terms of license, but in terms of disciplined service to the truth.

Catholic academic institutions have an enormous opportunity also to lift up the confidence that the storyline of history, which is the story of Christ and his Church, provides a more plausible account of reality than any other going story at the end of the 20th century, at the edge of the Third Millennium. It's an astonishing thing. We ought to have much more confidence, much more excitement about this, if you look at this at the end of the bloodiest of all centuries in which the other storylines, ideologies have in their politicized form heaped up mountains of corpses and loosed rivers of blood. National Socialism and Marxist Leninism at the end of the 20th century they're finished. Oh, there are some in the backwaters of our elite academic institutions who do not know that Communism is dead, but do not disturb them. Let them sleep on; they're finished. The world historical stage has been cleared. And on the world historical stage at the end of the 20th century, at the beginning of the Third Millennium, there is only one cosmic story being proposed and that is the Christian Gospel. And clearly its most powerful and persuasive proposer is "Peter among us" -- John Paul II.

This is an astonishing moment. One looks at why it is that among young people there is the remarkable response to this pontificate. Recall the "World Youth Day" in Denver. Do you remember that? Back in '93? Do you remember how the media went out there, baited for bear? They were really going to have a terrific time, all the networks and all the prestige media, and they were going to have a terrific time because here comes this, then 73-year old Polish priest, this fearful authoritarian central European who is going to encounter the American Church in its youthful vitality and diversity and dissent. And this was going to be fun to watch this complete missing of connections, this complete passing of one another, this failure of communication, as cool-hand Luke would say. And so they went out there. And then, you recall, in the first couple of days in Denver, you remember the media, they were stunned. You could see it. You could see it on television. You could read it in their accounts. They didn't know what was going on. Here were hundreds of thousands of young people hanging on the words, every word, of this old man and responding with a kind of electrically-charged force. And you ask yourself, what's the secret of this? What was going on there? We saw that much of the media learned from that and we saw much, much better coverage, the many, many times better coverage of the last visit in New York and Baltimore last Fall. But what's the reason for this, for this attractiveness? What's the reason for the four to five million in Manila? You realize it is the largest single gathering for an event in the whole history of planet earth, that Mass in Manila with the Holy Father? Never in the whole history of planet earth had so many people been gathered for any one event. What's happening there? What's happening here?

There's an old friend of Karol Wojytola who goes way on back to when he was a boy, before he was a priest. He's known him all these years, and he calls him Charlie [the Polish equivalent]. And he says, "I'll tell you what it is with him. I've been listening to him for these 50+ years now and there is really only one thing that he says, and he just says it in a thousand different ways, and that is he says to everybody he meets that you are capable of ever so much more than you ever dreamed of." I think there is a lot of truth in that. I think that captures a great deal of what is
the so-called charism of John Paul the Great. He was saying to those kids in Denver, and he is saying to the world, and he is saying to us: "You were meant for moral and spiritual grandeur. Don't settle for anything less." And when Catholic education has again the understanding of the grandeur, the moral and spiritual grandeur, of what it means to live in Veritatis Splendor, to live in the splendor of humanity fulfilled -- the great phrase of Iranaeus, the old Church father that John Paul uses frequently is gloria Dei vivens homo ("the glory of God is man the human being fully alive") -- this is Christian humanism in all of its vibrancy and all of its adventure, and it's what the world is waiting to hear. And there is nothing else like it. There is no message like it. There is no community bearing a message like it anywhere in the world.

Oh, there will be awful new things, or old things coming in new forms, on that world historical stage that has been cleared of some of the ideological madmesses of the past: the impulse to utopianism, the impulse to try to rush the kingdom of God through all kinds of mad schemes, whether it be racism and tribalism as with Hitler, whether it be blood and soil, whether it be class struggle. These things will reappear, but at the moment on the world stage is "be not afraid," in the name of Christ spoken by the Vicar of Christ. There is another religious movement, Islam, which will write a large part of the history of the new millennium, which is why the Holy Father has been so careful in cultivating and trying to build bridges and some level of understanding with the forces of Islam. It's very important that we do that, or else we are headed perhaps conceivably into a new period of religious warfare (God forbid). But on the stage now are these comprehensive statements with regard to the human future. Andre Moreau, the great French intellectual who died in 1986, shortly before he died said that the 21st century will be religious or it will not be at all. I think that's right. It is another one of those grand statements that you don't know exactly what it means, but my hunch is that it is right. If you were looking at the world today, if you were looking around and the so-called legendary man or woman from Mars came along and said, "what's the most important thing that is happening on planet earth today?," I think I would use a big sweeping statement and say that what is happening is the de-secularization of world history. What's happening is the collapse of the hegemony of the secular enlightenment. What is happening is the collapse of the confidence that there is any alternative to understanding the human project as the creation of God, drawn from and directed to the absolute. Christianity, and the Catholic form of Christianity, provides the most comprehensive, the most coherent and the most compelling understanding of what that means.

And Catholic higher education has to convey that, the excitement of it, the intellectual excitement of it. It has to say that the Catholic Church can provide institutions of higher education that are not cramped and stifled and closed in by all the little fetishes and power plays of politically correct games that have overtaken so much of the academy. We do not need to play power games with each other because we recognize in each other, each one, the bearer of the possibility of infinite response to the infinite. To engage the truth means to engage all truths, knowing that all truths are finally one because God is one and there is no truth of which we need be afraid -- none whatsoever! Indeed we ought to be, in our understanding of academic freedom, we ought to be lifting up a whole new possibility of the excitement of freedom that is beyond license, that is beyond doing just whatever you want to do, but rather the discipline of doing what we ought to do, a true freedom that is directed toward the truth! In Catholic higher education, whether this understanding will succeed the period of confusion and disillusion and to a large extent collapse that many people talk about, who knows whether that's going to happen.
But I think it's really worth lifting it up as a possibility, as indeed the Holy Father lifts it up as a possibility.

The alternative to the present confusion and pervasive demoralization of so much of society has been set forth with good Catholicism. What an astonishing achievement! What heroism! What devotion! What self-sacrifice of religious and priests and lay people beyond numbering to build the Catholic institutions of this society, not least of all in higher education. Let that be honored. Let that be spoken of indeed in tones of reverence and respect and gratitude. But that is not our future. Our future is to move out, to move out confidently, with a message that is prepared to take on all comers lovingly, persuasively, winsomely. The future lies not, as some would have us believe, in immigrant Catholics now becoming American Catholics, which means that their being American defines the way in which they are Catholic. That is what so many who wear the buttons of progressivism and liberalism in Catholicism, that is what they have told us over the years, that the great success story of Catholicism is that now Catholics are like everybody else. That is not a success story. The challenge is not to be an American Catholic. It's easy to be an American Catholic. It's easy to let our being American define what it means to be Catholic. The great challenge is to be Catholic Americans, is to let our being Catholic define what it means to be American.

And we are moving into a time in which, as Evangelium Vitae most powerfully reminds us, to be a Catholic is to be recruited on the side of the contest between the culture of death and the culture of life. We have seen just in recent weeks the imperial courts -- the Ninth Circuit in California, the Second Circuit in New York -- once again taking a giant step further into the abyss, perhaps even to the bottom, in defining at the end of life what they had previously defined at the beginning of life, that those who do not have rights that they can effectively assert in fact do not possess rights that we are morally obliged to respect. The so-called "doctor assisted suicide" unfolds with a kind of an inexorable logic. It unfolds that the right to death will become the duty to die, especially among the poor, especially among those who so many people have so many reasons to want to be rid of. So the encroaching shadows of the culture of death appear all around us.

To be Catholic Americans, Catholic higher education and our parishes and our work and all of our associations need to know that this is the Catholic moment. Whatever it is in world history, this is the moment requiring, calling for, challenging Catholic courage, Catholic intelligence, Catholic persuasiveness in reaching out to our neighbors and saying there is a better way. There is a better way. If the Catholic Church doesn't do it, it will not be done, it will not get done. There is no other institution around that can do it. As much as we ought to be grateful for all of our Protestant brothers and sisters, and as much as I have worked over the years in cultivating the Evangelical-Catholic connection, the fact is that when it comes to the crunch point, it is the Catholic Church that bears the bulk of responsibility for bearing witness to the culture of life, to the Evangelium Vitae as, indeed, has been the case in the past. It is well for us, when we listen to people who tell the Catholic story of the last thirty years as one of unmitigated disaster and decline, it is well to remember that there are things that the Catholic Church has done. If there were no Catholic Church in America, there would be no pro-life movement in America, there would be no pro-life movement in the world. On January 23, 1973 -- the day after the infamous Roe v. Wade decision came down from the Supreme Court -- the New York Times headline
declared: "Supreme Court settles abortion dispute." Every newspaper in the country and all the network news carried that message. It was settled. And here we are twenty-six years later, and there is no more unsettled question in American life. And at that time in January of 1973, our Evangelical brothers, Protestant brothers and sisters, were not with us. Only a few months before the infamous Roe v. Wade decision, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Evangelical-Protestant association in the country, went on record in favor of liberalized abortion, as it was then called. Every institution in this country, all of the major universities, all of the main-line liberal churches, all of the philanthropies, all of the media across the board, every institution in this country applauded Roe v. Wade as a great step toward liberation and progress. There was but one institution in America that stood up, and that was the bishops of the Catholic Church, and said: "No. Wait a minute. Is this the way we want to go? Is this the kind of people that we are? What's entailed in this decision? Please wait a minute." And the bishops have not always been as persistent, they have not always been as strong, and they've not always been as articulate as all of us would wish, and the Catholic people have not always been. But it is the Catholic Church that in the midst of this great battle which John Paul II says rightly defines our moment at the edge of the Third Millennium, the battle between the culture of life and the culture of death, it is the Catholic Church that most vibrantly -- in terms of its size, in terms of its tradition, in terms of its Spirit-given charisms -- is able to lift up the possibility of a more excellent way, of the way of life.

And every Catholic college, and Allentown College, has a part to play in this Catholic moment. Whether we are up to this, who knows? Only God knows. I tell myself everyday, sometimes several times a day, those wonderful lines of T.S. Eliot. You'll recall where he says, "For us there is only the trying, the rest is not our business." For us there is only the trying, the rest is not our business -- I take that not as a statement of resignation or shrugging the shoulders and saying what can you do. No, I take it as a statement of gratitude. I take it as a statement of faith. The rest is not our business -- the rest is God's business. And we're not God. God is God. Thank God!