PREFACE

It is, indeed, an honor to have been chosen to give a lecture sponsored by the Newman foundation at Lehigh University. From what I've read, the history of Newman associations began in response to the concerns of "a pre-law student who found himself struggling with intellectual attacks on his identity as a Catholic in a public university." That was in 1883.

Now, in 1999, it's probably safe to say that such attacks do not take place at this public university. In fact, it's very safe to say. For it seems to me that an institutional concern for personal identity may actually be a void in academia these days. And so, I wish to suggest that the role of higher education is somehow to fill that void -- and to do so for all students alike.

To examine this proposal, let me begin by explaining what my talk is not about. In the first place, it is not about morality -- at least not directly. Too many readers of Church teaching, and also too many preachers of it, begin with morality. This may, and often does, lead to the consideration that Church documents are simply a collection of dos and don'ts meant to regulate our freedom. But this is backwards! Morality is not the starting point of Church teaching; it is its consequence. For, as the present pope has repeatedly explained, any proper consideration of morality flows from the right ordering of freedom in relation to truth.
In the second place, I will not be speaking about Catholic higher education. There is, already, a sufficient frenzy surrounding this topic! Unfortunately, the essentials of this discussion are becoming so distorted that the pope and bishops have almost been vilified in their episcopal concern for the true identity of Catholic colleges and universities. Witness the report, published in the *Boston Globe* (4/4/99), which claims that "The dispute centers on a proposal that would transfer control of the 236 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States from their boards of trustees to local bishops, rewriting the schools' charters to put them under Vatican law." That is patently absurd! Besides being factually inaccurate, it represents an alarmist reaction that typically fails to take into account what Newman himself taught long ago, when he wrote that the Church has "an intimate conviction that truth is (its) real ally ... and that knowledge and reason are sure ministers to faith." (3)

With these two caveats in mind, let me now preview for you what the talk is about. I always like to offer my audience an outline at the beginning. That way not only do you have an idea where I'm going, but, perhaps more important, you'll know when I'm getting to the end! My lecture this evening will focus on three interrelated themes. The first is the idea of culture -- a wide-ranging concept, to be sure, but one whose distinctive meaning runs like a thread through all of this pope's major writings. The second is the idea of truth -- another broad concept, but one which serves as the fabric from which the specific teachings of Pope John Paul II take shape. And the third idea has to do with higher education -- whose role, I believe, is to be the meeting place where culture and truth come together.

Admittedly, these topics are rather auspicious for a mere 45-minute lecture. And I realize that, as lectures go, I will be doing all the talking, and you'll be doing the listening. I only hope that we both finish at the same time!

But first, a brief word by way of BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

The significant place given to culture, truth, and higher education in the thought of John Paul II, I believe, most likely derives from his own personal history. Much of his pre-pontifical life was spent in the world of higher education. He began his studies as a drama student; then, after earning doctoral degrees in both theology and philosophy, he concluded his university career with an appointment to a Chair in Ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin.

As a professor of moral philosophy, he was preeminently concerned with the idea of truth, particularly as this applied to the phenomenon of what he calls "the acting person." In his phenomenological view, we are both the subject and object of our actions. What this means is that we become who we are as persons by participating in life, not just by existing; our collective history, then, is the progressive unfolding in time of our embodiment of the ultimate truth of what life is.

Finally, this acting out of our lives takes place within culture. And the pope's understanding of culture is clearly shaped by his own underground experience of life under the totalitarian regime
of communism in his native Poland. It is a profoundly formative experience, and no doubt influences his recurring call to Christian solidarity as a vision for a new future.

What results from this personal story is the pope's insistence on and dedication to the central notion of **human dignity**. This is not merely a politically correct idea for a church statesman. As we shall see, the defense and promotion of human dignity is what gives shape and color to John Paul II's ideas on culture, truth, and higher education.

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So ... let us now consider the idea of **CULTURE**

Admittedly, this is a notion that beggars precise definition. In general, as T.S. Eliot once claimed, "Culture may ... be described as that which makes life worth living."\(^{(4)}\) That's a nice thought, but for academics, it doesn't suffice! We want to know what the "that which makes life worth living" is. And so we have turned "culture" into a special field of study within the humanities. But even here there is no common agreement on what we're dealing with.

Most folks think of culture as a collection of the specific traits or features of a given people, like language, history, customs, and traditions. What makes these things worthy of study is their particularity; that is, elements of culture have a distinctive and determining effect on that people's thought and behavior. Let me give you just one example, from a culture that I became familiar with during my years of study in Rome -- the Italians. There is an oft-repeated phrase there: *Bella Figura*. Literally it means "pretty figure" or "nice appearance." But to an Italian, *bella figura* is really an approach to life because it has to do with how you present yourself and how other people see you (hence, their success in the world of fashion). *Bella figura* is what motivates people to re-paint the outside of their houses every year; the plumbing and electricity on the inside may not work, but that doesn't matter since the neighbors only see the outside! More subconsciously, *bella figura* may also be the reason why you rarely see handicapped people moving about the city -- unfortunately, they don't present a pretty figure.

Now, the notion of *bella figura* probably seems odd to us because we live in a different culture (where our "nice" appearance is usually just jeans, a sweatshirt, and a baseball cap worn backwards!) But how would we define American culture?

To answer this, I decided to do some research ... at Amazon.com, where popular book titles are indicative of current thought. In economics, we are a corporate culture\(^{(5)}\); in politics, an argument culture\(^{(6)}\); in sociology, a divorce culture.\(^{(7)}\) In education, we deal now with Generation X and the culture of postmodernism. In all this, however, I did not come across any book titles that reflect what I think is the most dominant aspect of our lives. We are, for all intents and purposes, a Cartoon culture (or maybe I should call it a culture of animation). Consider that:

- we grow up with *Sesame Street* and *Blues Clues*;
- Disney provides us with a wonderful world;
- we used to learn philosophy from *Calvin and Hobbes*, and now we get human resource management from *Dilbert*;
and on college campuses, I'm told, the current rage is to tune-in to television and learn from the comedy of *Southpark* or the satire of (my personal favorite) *The Simpsons*.

Each of these "cultures," in its own way, influences our thought and behavior, even the make believe world of cartoons. After all, why are they so funny? ... Because they are so real. To give you a sense of the impact our cartoon culture has, consider this report published last summer in the *Sunday Times* in London: "Students who prefer Homer Simpson, the cartoon character, to Homer, the Greek epic poet, are seen as contributing to the much lamented 'dumbing down' of American culture."(8)

Sadly, Pope John Paul II has probably never seen *The Simpsons*! But he does take seriously the idea that culture influences thought and behavior. By now we are all familiar with his reference to a "culture of death." In what sense does this influence us? Consider the progressive stages of understanding associated with the on-going debate about Physician Assisted Suicide:

- **Attempting suicide used to be (and perhaps technically still is) illegal; it was considered a crime against the state/society.**
- **For a host of reasons, we now look upon it, at least in some situations, as understandable and perhaps even an acceptable course of action. (We don't arrest those who attempt suicide; we get them "help.")**
- **The current debate now centers on whether or not it should be legal, assuming it is done under proper medical conditions. This is a far cry from being a crime!**
- **If it is legalized, it will be considered a right that we have.**
- **And once we think it is our right, then it may easily pass into becoming a duty -- people may think, for a host of reasons, that they actually should die.**

But, more than a social or even legal concept, the pope's notion of culture is distinctive because it is a personalistic one. And he teaches that not only does culture affect us, but that we personally contribute to the formation of culture. In other words, for John Paul II, culture is not a field within the humanities; culture *is* humanity. Let me try to highlight for you how the pope's idea here is distinctive.

While we usually consider the particularity of given cultures, the pope emphasizes its universality:

> *There is only one culture: that of man, by man and for man.*(9)

And while we have already noted how culture influences thought and behavior, the pope highlights the reverse dimension:

> *It must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates that there is something in man which transcends those cultures. This "something" is precisely human nature: this nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that man does not become the prisoner of*
any of his cultures, but asserts his personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of his being.\(\text{[10]}\)

For the pope, then, culture is something to be found within. It involves our thoughts, images, and concepts.\(\text{[11]}\) It is a matter not of customs and traditions, but of one's mind and soul. Thus, the first and most important task [with regard to culture] is accomplished within man's heart. The way in which he is involved in building his own future depends on the understanding he has of himself and of his own destiny.\(\text{[12]}\)

If culture is first and foremost an interior reality, it is nevertheless made evident in the concrete actions of our lives. For instance, with regard to economic concerns, the pope claims that

\begin{quote}
A given culture reveals its overall understanding of life through the choices it makes in production and consumption. ... It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed toward "having" rather than "being," and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself.\(\text{[13]}\)
\end{quote}

If culture is understood as this way of looking "out" at life -- at persons, at society, at the world -- and as our acting upon this vision, then its real concern is, as the pope notes,

\begin{quote}
the position man takes toward the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. When this question is eliminated, the culture and moral life of nations are corrupted.\(\text{[14]}\)
\end{quote}

In order that we not eliminate this essentially religious question of our existence, the Church has always taken an interest in culture. In his most recent encyclical, on "Faith and Reason," the pope reminds us that:

\begin{quote}
From the time the Gospel was first preached, the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with cultures. ... With the richness of the salvation wrought by Christ, the walls separating the different cultures collapsed. God's promise in Christ now became a universal offer: no longer limited to one particular people, its language and its customs, but extended to all as a heritage from which each might freely draw: ... When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being's characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent. Therefore they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human.\(\text{[15]}\)
\end{quote}

To summarize this first topic, let me quote once again from \textit{Fides et Ratio}:

\begin{quote}
All people are part of a culture, depend upon it and shape it. Human beings are both child and parent of the culture in which they are immersed. To everything they do, they
bring something which sets them apart from the rest of creation: their unfailing openness
to mystery and their boundless desire for knowledge. Lying deep in every culture, there
appears this impulse toward a fulfillment. We may say, then, that culture itself has an
intrinsic capacity to receive divine Revelation. (16)

Elsewhere the pope refers to this capacity as the "open search for truth" from which the culture
of a nation derives its character. (17) And this brings us to our second theme ... TRUTH

Frankly, I am hesitant to speak about this topic, because I sense that Thomas Sowell was right
when he said that "There are only two ways of telling the complete truth -- anonymously and
posthumously." (18) Since you already know me, that only leaves the latter option ...!

As with the idea of culture, we run up against a difficulty when trying to define what Truth is.
The common perception, I suppose, is to look at truth in terms of knowledge. In this view,
science (scientia) is what offers us truth because it verifies our working knowledge of the world,
in contradistinction to the fictional world of myths. This science, this knowledge, is then
delivered to us in the various schools of a university, where each discipline offers its own truth or
unchanging principles that guide thought in the respective areas of study (e.g., Boolean logic in
computer science).

Yet, despite advances in science -- or maybe because of them -- our culture today struggles with
the notion of truth in terms of meaning: that is, with considerations that are directly personal in
the sense of being concerned with knowledge about and for human beings.

This kind of truth is more abstract, not the stuff of empirical verification. When considering it,
our interest usually shifts from the epistemological to the pragmatic: from the question of
whether or not something is true, to the issue of what we are able to do with it. We no longer
wonder whether something is truly good; we just want to know of what use it is. For example,
Steven Covey has turned "habits" -- which were once treated as moral dispositions good in and
of themselves -- into "tools" of highly effective people.

Truth as meaning also runs into a problem when there are competing personal interests. When
debating these, our interest easily shifts from the objective to the subjective. Truth is what is true
for me (and maybe also, but not necessarily, for you). Truth becomes a feeling, an opinion, or
even a belief that is relative to the one who feels or thinks a certain way. For example, whenever
a news item worthy of social debate appears, it is often accompanied by a quasi-scientific "poll"
telling us what percentage of people are of a certain opinion on the subject; but, despite their
appearance, such percentages do not support or deny the veracity of the subject.

With so many differing, competing, and even contradictory positions, is there any common and
universal truth that answers the question about the meaning of human life? Our postmodern
culture raises this question to the fore -- and answers it with the conclusion that, just maybe,
there really is no truth at all.

In sum, truth understood as personal meaning has undergone a reduction to the particular: to its
pragmatic use, to one's relative opinion, or to a wholesale and radical doubt. Because of this shift
in thought, our present-day culture labors under what Cardinal Ratzinger has called a "dictatorship of appearances," the conglomeration of which spells disaster! Commenting on the papal teaching, the cardinal recently said in San Francisco that:

> If we cannot have common values, common truths, sufficient communication on the essentials of human life -- how to live, how to respond to the great challenges of human life -- then true society becomes impossible. (19)

Faced with this bleak outlook, Pope John Paul II counters with the proposition that truth is really a matter of beauty. He speaks of the "splendor" of truth -- an interesting description that highlights the qualities of brilliance and clarity. It is in this sense that the truth shines as a beacon for the guidance and safety of human living. (20)

Step by step, Pope John Paul II leads us to the realization that truth is a transcendent reality, something above us not within us, something beyond us yet calling to us. Let us now consider the steps he takes to come to this distinctive notion.

The first step in this realization is to see that Truth is necessary for a meaningful life, for becoming who we are to be as human persons. As the pope notes in his most recent encyclical:

> People cannot be genuinely indifferent to the question of whether what they know is true or not. If they discover that it is false, they reject it; but if they can establish its truth, they feel themselves rewarded. It is this that St. Augustine teaches when he writes, "I have met many who wanted to deceive, but none who wanted to be deceived." (and he continues)

> It is essential, therefore, that the values chosen and pursued in one's life be true, because only true values can lead people to realize themselves fully, allowing them to be true to their nature. The truth of these values is to be found not by turning in on oneself, but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels which transcend the person. This is an essential condition for us to become ourselves and to grow as mature, adult persons. (21)

This is why, I think, the university holds such an important place for John Paul II, because the university is the place where we grow, where we tirelessly search for knowledge in all fields. This thirst for knowledge, this quest for truth in various areas of study, reflects a more fundamental yearning that is inherent to human life itself.

But searching for and gaining knowledge is not enough; deeper questions about the meaning of life remain. And so, the second step towards a transcendent awareness of Truth is to see that our educational journey, our personal yearning, is leading somewhere beyond us. As the pope argues:

> The development of science and technology, this splendid testimony of the human capacity for understanding and for perseverance, does not free humanity from the
obligation to ask the ultimate religious questions. Rather, it spurs us on to face the most painful and decisive of struggles, those of the heart and of the moral conscience. (22)

He says this again in another way:

people seek an absolute which might give to all their searching a meaning and an answer something ultimate which might serve as the ground of all things. In other words, they seek a final explanation, a supreme value, which refers to nothing beyond itself and which puts an end to all questioning.

(and, even more to the point, he notes this:)

Hypotheses may fascinate, but they do not satisfy. Whether we admit it or not, there comes for everyone the moment when personal existence must be anchored to a truth recognized as final, a truth which confers a certitude no longer open to doubt. (23)

So ... where is this final truth to be found? How do we know this vital and necessary truth for life?

One way to attain it is through our reasoning ability. But thought alone cannot answer all of life's questions (like why innocent people suffer). Ultimately, the truth that provides us with a comprehensive vision for life and in light of which we act out the story of our own individual lives, (24) that truth is to be found in our encounter with another, through what John Paul II calls "the truth of a person." This involves a

trusting acquiescence to other persons who can guarantee the authenticity and certainty of the truth itself. There is no doubt that the capacity to entrust oneself and one's life to another person and the decision to do so are among the most significant and expressive human acts. (25)

As you might guess, this step toward a transcendent Truth invites us to entrust ourselves to God - - whom we encounter uniquely and definitively in the person of Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

But even this faith relationship is not the last step. If meaning in life is to be found outside of us, above and beyond us, ultimately in God, then our approach to life will reflect the transcendent reality of truth. Interestingly, the pope speaks of certain attitudes not often or usually associated with a discussion of truth.

The first attitude is one of humility -- the recognition that the truth is something greater than us. The truth, then, is something we serve. And we do this, the pope says in his very first encyclical, because it is something we love and aspire to understand

in order to bring it closer to ourselves and others in all its saving power, its splendor and its profundity joined with simplicity. (26)
The second attitude is one of obedience. Truth is something that beckons us to move forward with our lives. It is something we discover, not something we determine. In our age, however, to adhere to an ultimate and religious truth is considered un-democratic. As the pope recognizes, those who do so

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do \text{ not accept that truth is determined by the majority, or that it is subject to variation according to different political trends. It must be observed in this regard that if there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism.}\]

Finally, a truth that is ultimately valuable and personally meaningful calls for a willingness to sacrifice ourselves. In fact, as the pope hastens to acknowledge,

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\text{maintaining a harmony between freedom and truth occasionally demands uncommon sacrifices, and must be won at a high price: it can even involve martyrdom.}\]

Speaking of martyrs ... I'm hoping that you've not yet reached the point in your listening to all of this that you have the desire to make me one! It's time now for the final piece ... on HIGHER EDUCATION.

First, let me recap the essentials of Pope John Paul's "revolutionary" thought -- revolutionary not because it is rebellious but because it inverts our ordinary ways of thinking. On the one hand, culture is not a particular or local context within which we live, but a personalistic notion, a universal concern which reflects the yearning of the human spirit common to all people in all places at all times. And this yearning is satisfied only by Truth, understood not as an idea found within us but as a transcendent reality to which we must learn to acquiesce for our own and the common good.

The architecture of a culture of truth, then, is formed by a two-fold structure, a dual ethic of solidarity among all persons in our human culture, and of intellectuality which acknowledges, by reason and by faith, that only a transcendent truth can provide us with ultimate meaning. At a university historically devoted to engineering, I'd now like to explore the role of higher education in this architecture of a culture of truth.

The university, of course, is that privileged place where we search for, discover, and communicate truth in a variety of fields of knowledge. But with this privilege comes an important responsibility, indeed a challenge, the response to which will have a profound impact not only for the individuals on campus but for the entire culture of which the university is an integral part. That challenge has been voiced by John Paul II from two vantage points.

The first view is pedagogical and concerns the purpose of higher education. In order to be a University, a place of oneness amid diversity, he says that the most needed task of higher education is to
restore ... the conviction that human beings can grasp the truth of things and in grasping that truth can know their duties to God, to themselves, and their neighbors.

In other words, higher education should aim

not only to communicate facts, but also to transmit a coherent, comprehensive vision of life in the conviction that the truths contained in that vision liberate students in the most profound meaning of human freedom.  

The second view is more personal, and concerns the content of higher education. Here the pope suggests that:

Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the corresponding necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. "What is at stake is the very meaning of scientific and technological research, of social life and of culture, but, on an even more profound level, what is at stake is the very meaning of the human person."

So ... with stakes as high as this, what is higher education to do? If, as I am suggesting, the university is the place where culture and truth meet and grow, then we will move toward a culture of truth only when we who work in a university exemplify in ourselves and instill in our students what the pope calls "the courage to adopt a new lifestyle." This new lifestyle

consist(s) in making practical choices -- at the personal, family, social and international level -- on the basis of a correct scale of values: the primacy of being over having, of the person over things. This renewed lifestyle involves a passing from indifference to concern for others, from rejection to acceptance of them.

And just how might the university bring about this new lifestyle? Well ... that's the tricky question! But, since students in my course here on the papal encyclicals often lament what they regard as the pope's lack of practical advice, let me suggest a concrete proposal that will move this culture of truth from theory to practice.

I suppose I could argue for some mandatory course work, perhaps an interdisciplinary study of ethics and values that would be required of all students. But I've sat through enough curriculum and faculty meetings to know better!

Perhaps I could suggest some specific areas of study, like Philosophy and/or Theology. But I don't think engineers would be all that interested, and besides, to limit this concern to these areas would be to relegate the investigation of culture and truth to the Humanities.

So, what I will propose is this: every college and university, regardless of institutional affiliation, should require of its students some form of community service. How will this help?
On the one hand, if culture is of, by and for persons, then involvement in the lives of persons is part and parcel of the educational process. I fear that it is becoming easier for university people today to be more and more isolated -- because of the demand of individual research and study, and because of the emerging educational technologies that facilitate learning at a "distance" from others. But if faculty and students were to become engaged in the lives of other persons outside the university campus -- especially the poor -- then we all might learn more about those universal human concerns that constitute authentic culture, and we might just begin to transform this culture of ours one person at a time.

On the other hand, truth is a major concern of education; indeed, it is the unifying feature of the various fields of knowledge. Now, if truth is transcendent, if it is other than me as an individual, then perhaps it is to be found also by going out to an other -- namely, to those all around us in need. To put to use what we are learning as a way of bettering the life of someone else will no doubt better our own as well.

By thus embodying and inculcating an ethic of service to fellow human beings, our institutions of higher education will begin to build a new civilization. This, ultimately, is the predominant thought of Pope John Paul II. In his 1995 address to the United Nations, he concluded with these thoughts:

> In order to ensure that the new millennium now approaching will witness a new flourishing of the human spirit, mediated through an authentic culture of freedom, men and women must learn to conquer fear. We must learn not to be afraid; we must discover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust. ... In order to recover our hope and our trust at the end of this century of sorrows, we must regain sight of that transcendent horizon of possibility to which the soul of man aspires.\(^{(33)}\)

This aspiration, I have tried to say this evening, leads us toward a culture of truth -- that truth of God in which we live and by which we love.

One final quote -- not from the pope but from Ralph Waldo Emerson, who says:

> God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please -- you can never have both.\(^{(34)}\)

You've heard enough about truth. Now it's time for repose. THANK YOU!

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NOTES

2. As Pope John Paul II said in an address delivered to the United Nations (10/5/95): "Freedom is not simply the absence of tyranny or oppression. Nor is freedom a license to do whatever we like. Freedom has an inner 'logic' which distinguishes it and ennobles it: freedom is order to the truth, and is fulfilled in man's quest for truth and in man's living in the truth. Detached from the truth about the human person, freedom deteriorates into license in the lives of individuals, and, in political life, it becomes the caprice of the most powerful and the arrogance of power. Far from being a limitation upon freedom or a threat to it, reference to the truth about the human person -- a truth universally knowable through the moral law written on the hearts of all -- is, in fact, the guarantor of freedom's future." (Full text available in Vital Speeches of the Day, 11/1/95). Cf. Avery Dulles, "John Paul II and the Truth about Freedom," First Things 55 (August-September 1995), pp. 36-51.


9. Ex corde Ecclesiae, no. 3.

10. Veritatis Splendor, no. 53.

11. Cf. Slavorum Apostoli (no. 11) on the work of Sts. Cyril and Methodius: "In order to translate the truths of the Gospel into a new language, they had to make an effort to gain a good grasp of the interior world of those to whom they intended to proclaim the word of God in images and concepts that would sound familiar to them."

12. Centesimus Annus, no. 51.

13. Centesimus Annus, no. 36.


15. Fides et Ratio, no. 70.


17. Centesimus Annus, no. 50.


20. As in the opening lines of Veritatis Splendor: "The splendor of truth shines forth in the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26). Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord."


23. *Fides et Ratio*, no. 27.


27. *Centesimus Annus*, no. 46.


29. This is Augustine's *gaudium de veritate*, mentioned in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, no. 1.


32. *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 98.

33. see note 2 above.