



New York Cultural Center

**Iraq, the Middle East, the War on Terror:
A different approach to US Foreign Policy**

Reflections on The Good Fight by Peter Beinart

Speakers:

Mr. Peter Beinart—Editor-at-large at *The New Republic*, author of The Good Fight

Mr. Paul Berman—Journalist, writer, expert in American foreign policy

Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete—Theologian, author, columnist

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**transcript not reviewed by the speakers*

Simmonds: Good evening. I would like to welcome all of you on behalf of Crossroads New York Cultural Center as well as two other organizations which helped organize and sponsor this event, namely the Columbia Catholic Ministry, and The Association of Volunteers in International Service USA, otherwise known as AVSI USA which belongs to the AVSI network, an international non-governmental organization, which joins together 28 national organizations supporting projects in more than 35 countries, with a special emphasis on education and on the promotion of the dignity of every human person. On your seats you should have found some literature about these organizations and their activities.

I would like to thank our speakers for being here tonight. I will leave the introductions to Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, who has kindly accepted to moderate our discussion. But before that, I would like to make just some brief comments regarding what motivated us to organize this event, and why we think that having Peter Beinart and Paul Berman discussing current challenges and opportunities to American foreign policy is truly a unique occasion to understand our current situation. I think that most of us remember the years right after the end of the Soviet Union, when many thought that the age of the great totalitarian ideologies had finally come to an end. Thus, it seemed likely that world politics were headed back to something like the 19th century, to the "great game" of national powers competing for political and economic supremacy. Little did we imagine that, on the contrary, the next quarter of a century would witness a veritable worldwide

explosion of ideology. Little did we imagine that by now we would be back to a situation where what is at stake in foreign policy is not just the distribution of political power in the world, but much more fundamental philosophical and even theological issues, as in the Pope's remarkable speech in Regensburg a week ago. What is freedom? What is reason? What is it that we prize in our civilization? How is a true dialogue among cultures possible?

Peter Beinart and Paul Berman are among the few commentators who seem to be fully aware of this cultural and philosophical dimension of the present political situation in the world and especially in the Middle East. Their work, including Peter's new book that he will present to us tonight, centers on the struggle of human freedom against totalitarian ideology. On our part, together with Msgr. Luigi Giussani, we regard ideology and nihilism as the deeply ingrained diseases that are undermining our civilization and threatening our freedom, not only from the outside (in its Islamic forms), but also, in different ways, from the inside. It is difficult to imagine a constructive dialogue with other civilizations when one is increasingly alienated from the ideals that underlie our collective awareness and, ultimately, our freedom. And now to Monsignor Albacete.

Albacete: I just wanted to begin by thanking again our speakers for their participation and in a certain sense explain why we like to do this kind of stuff, why we like to invite and sponsor occasions and discussions like this one. At the basic level, we are motivated by a passion for the human, a passion for humanity, recognizing immediately as our friends those who share this, and those who live their lives with passion for the human adventure and its great possibilities whatever be our agreements or disagreements. In terms indeed of the current discussion, to put it mildly, we want to learn from those who value, respect and promote the capacity of our intelligence, our reason, to grasp what is real and to follow its implications. Our speakers tonight certainly fit that description. I also want to add a personal word. I am very grateful for this occasion since I know that one of the reasons they are here is because of our friendship. Indeed, reason is awakened and sustained by friendship, or else it would degenerate into intolerant ideology.

Our first speaker, Peter Beinart, knows the spirit which animates our friendship since he was gracious enough to participate some years ago in our summer meeting called "A Meeting for the Friendship among People" in Rimini, Italy. The only problem is every time we lost sight of him he had been led over to the meeting of our university students because he looks so young.

Responding to some of the points made by Peter in his book, we are privileged to have Mr. Paul Berman, and we are very, very grateful to him because he's not been feeling well, and this is a great gesture of friendship, his being here. I met Paul as part of a network of friends that met to discuss the questions of the day. I suppose I told him to somehow represent the dimension of the invisible, in the transcendent. In reality, I loved to be with them and to eat the Chinese food that followed.

I have their claims to fame here. I don't think its needed...Whatever they have written, places they have spoken....We can skip all of that. So let's just get started. Peter will

speaking first, and then Paul, and then I will take your questions, and then in the end I will give a final blessing.

Beinart: Thanks very much. It's really a privilege to be here. I want to thank Crossroads and my friend Paul, and particularly Msgr. Albacete. It's true, I went with him to Rimini seven years ago and I still haven't fully recovered. Just at a kind of gastronomic level, the event was indescribable and I would love to go back every year but I know that I couldn't take it just at a kind of physiological level. So I have to pace myself.

This book *The Good Fight* was inspired by an unlikely source. It was inspired by George W. Bush and something he said repeatedly during the 2004 Presidential campaign, arguably something that I think helped him win the 2004 Presidential campaign. What he said was, "You may not always agree with me, but at least you know where I stand." With the implication that the same not be said about John Carey or the democrats, liberals more generally, and that resonated with me because of the disturbing experience that I've had over the years in speaking to liberals and conservative student audiences. And you ask the American conservative students, "What is a book that to you has really shaped what it means to you to be a conservative?" and you get a certain litany of books—Hayek, Russell Kirk, Freedman, William F. Buckley—even if the students haven't read these books, there is a litany that they are familiar with, maybe at least the cliff notes version of these books. In my experience, if you ask the liberal students, "What is a book that has shaped for you what it means to be a liberal?" you get nothing. You really get virtually nothing. Maybe you might get a biography of somebody, a biography of Martin Luther King or something, and that has always bothered me, and it's particularly bothered me about foreign policy since 9/11, which has now become, at least for now, and I think probably for a ways to come, the heart of American politics.

If you want you want to understand the time when liberals knew what they believed about foreign policy, not just at the level of policy but at the level of principle, you have to go back a long time. You have to go back before the Vietnam War. If you just look at it politically from the perspective of the Democratic Party, the really chilling thing is that the Democratic Party has not won a presidential election fought on national security in America since the Vietnam War. The democrats won the election in 1976, which was an election when a country turned inward some degree after Vietnam and during Détente, polls showed that Americans no longer thought that national security was their number one issue, and of course democrats won the two presidential elections of the 1990s after the cold war when America again turned inward. If you want to go back to a time when the Democratic Party actually won presidential elections fought on national security, you have to go back before the Vietnam War.

So I went back in this book and tried to rummage through the history of the first two decades of the cold war to try to understand the roots of the conservative story that we have heard since 9/11 from George W. Bush and Dick Cheney, and the roots of this, what I see as the lost liberal story about how liberals see American foreign policy. And I want to talk first about the conservative story and then about the liberal story as I see them, and then end with something more about what this means for today.

George W. Bush's foreign policy has often been described as neo-conservative, and neo-conservatism is a movement that really emerges in the early 1970s, but what struck me, going back and reading the conservative thinkers of the 1950s, was how striking the similarity was between many of their anxieties about America and the Bush administration's anxieties about America. I'm thinking about the people who really created the modern conservative movement in the mid-1950s, this extraordinary constellation of intellectuals associated with the magazine *National Review*, William F. Buckley himself, Whittaker Chambers, and particularly James Burnham, who has been kind of somewhat forgotten, but was probably the most important conservative foreign policy intellectual of the first couple decades of the cold war. The striking thing about these conservatives of the 50s were that they had a very particular fear; the fear was that Americans did not believe strongly enough in ourselves, that Americans were prone to a kind of crippling self-doubt. We looked at the Soviets. We recognized that we may have more money than them, more weapons than them, but they have this fanatical self-confidence, this absolute belief that they represent good and we represent evil. We as a democracy are prone to a debilitating moral relativism, to a belief that maybe it's all a big misunderstanding; maybe we're not really any better than them after all. And this is at the heart of our weakness; this is the great danger, and the great role of government is to eradicate this self-doubt, that there's a kind of cancer in the American body politic undermining our foreign policy. So why did very smart American conservative intellectuals like Buckley get behind Joseph McCarthy? I think, in large part, because the feeling that McCarthy was the first guy to come along and draw a clear line in the sand between American freedom and Soviet communism. Again, from the conservative point of view, the expansion of the American welfare state starting under Franklin Roosevelt has diminished the distinctions between American freedom and Soviet communism. It's put us down, what Hayek called "the road to serfdom"....So McCarthy is here drawing a clear line in the sand. Again you see a second iteration of this after Vietnam, this enormous conservative fear which neo-conservatism is really partly about, that Americans in the wake of Vietnam don't believe strongly enough in ourselves, that we don't believe we have anything valuable to represent in the world, were not really any better than the Soviet Union. And Ronald Reagan takes power and famously says, "The era of self-doubt is over." And then again you see a third iteration after 9/11. What's interesting if you look at conservative commentary right after 9/11 is the sense that the great danger in this new struggle that America faces against this new totalitarian enemy is that America has been morally disarmed by the Clinton baby boom generation, by a generation that can't tell right from wrong, that succumbs to moral relativism. For instance, if you look at William Bennett's book that he wrote right after 9/11, *Why We Fight*, you see this theme that the great danger is the moral relativism of this baby boom Clinton generation. So you see a third iteration of the same anxiety, and Bush in his 2002 Statement to the Union address uses this Talibanic phrase *evil*; he refers to the axis of evil. And he's referring that to Reagan's 83 speech to the National Association of Evangelicals where Reagan talks about "the evil empire." And Reagan, interestingly, in that speech, is quoting Whittaker Chambers, from his 1952 book *Witness*. So you see this arch of this conservative narrative about how the role of government when America's threatened is to eradicate the self-doubt that cripples us, and make America strong. And

that produces, I think, a particular kind of predisposition towards criticism that American is not living up to its own ideal. Again, if we believe that our Achilles' heel is our excessive self-doubt, nothing is more dangerous, or more sinister than the accusation that America is not living up to its own ideal, that America is not as good as it says it is. So you find this strange tendency, to my mind strange, that you hear among George W. Bush just recently in these days where George W. Bush says, surrounded by multitudes of evidence, that America has been torturing in terrible ways, and many ways, since 9/11. A bold statement, "We do not torture; that's not the United States," When Amnesty International confronts the Bush administration with all of this documentary evidence, George W. Bush said, "This is an absurd allegation. Everybody knows that America is a country that stands for freedom around the world." Even as fewer and fewer are confident of that around the world.

The liberal story that I think also emerges at this time I think is in many ways exactly the opposite or very different. If the key conservative intellectual in my mind is Burnham, the key liberal intellectual is Reinhold Niebuhr who I think is a little bit like the Kevin Bacon of cold war liberalism in the sense that he connects to almost everyone. He has a great influence on Arthur Schlesinger, a great influence on George Kennan, a big influence on Martin Luther King, and Niebuhr's argument is in some ways exactly the opposite. Niebuhr says that in some ways America's self-doubt, the right kind of self-doubt, is actually our critical strength in confronting the Soviet Union, that American virtue is not inherited, it's not simply asserted, it's not something that we're born with, it's a constant struggle against our own capacity for injustice, that Americans are inherently no different from anyone else. We are as hateful of harm, of evil as anybody else, but it's precisely that recognition that we are capable of doing that that leads us to build in the restraints that make us different from the predatory powers of the past, give us the capacity to inspire the world. And this idea I think has very powerful implications at the dawn of the cold war. America in 1945-1946 represents 50% of the world's GDP, and you think about how Dick Cheney might have responded to that enormous amount of power, virtually unrestrained power that America was able to wield at the dawn of the cold war when Western Europe was on its knees, much of East Asia was on its knees. What the Truman and Roosevelt administrations do is they go about and build a whole series of international institutions. They're a frenetic institution builder: the UN, NATO, the INF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, partly because of the recognition—a very un-Bush-like recognition, that there are problems in the world—in fact, most problems in the world too big for America to solve alone. But also, and I think this is even a more important point, because of the recognition that American power needs to be legitimate, that America wants legitimate power, not unrestrained power. Kennan is fond of saying that the Soviet Union is an empire. It looks different than the British and French empires, but it's really an empire because it rules in Eastern Europe based on coercion and brute force. And empires always crack from the periphery. But if America can develop an alliance system in Western Europe in particular, that's based on legitimacy, on persuasion, on consent, not on brute force, we can develop an alliance system that will endure long after the Soviet Union has collapsed. This idea that American virtue is not inherited, is not simply declared, but is a constant struggle against our own capacity for injustice, has to be earned in every generation, recognizing that in every generation we

have the capacity to betray our own history of good works, also has enormous implications for domestic policy.

You know, I think many liberals, American liberals, have been somewhat bewildered by how to respond to George W. Bush's rhetoric about democracy. He's taken up, starting with his second inaugural address in particular this Wilsonian mantle of America's role in both freedom and democracy around the world. But George W. Bush tends to talk about American democracy as a kind of finish line we've crossed. We stand on the far side of this finish line and we look at the benighted peoples of the rest of the world, more frequently the Islamic world, and we kind of urge them to get their act together, to come on this side of the great divide between freedom and lack of freedom. That's really not the way that the anti-communist liberals that I write about talk about American democracy. It wasn't American democracy as a settled accomplishment, as kind of a fixed fact. It was American democracy as an on-going struggle, American democracy as a struggle against our own capacity for injustice to become a better nation. That's why civil rights and anti-communism were so critically linked for Truman, for Hubert Humphrey, for the intellectuals around them, because of the recognition that what would inspire the world in America, if anything, was America's use of its own democratic processes to become a better nation. Chester Bowles, who was Kennedy's deputy secretary of state said, "The world will see us as no better than we really are," which if you think about it is even more true today in a globalized world where people have ever more access to what happens inside America's borders and America's prisons.

I was very struck, researching this book, by a quotation I read from the Jordanian Journalist Rami Pouri whose been one of the most articulate democrats in the Middle East arguing happily against the tyranny in that region. And he said, "George W. Bush's speeches are nice speeches, but they don't inspire me because I see in his speeches that America is stringent about human rights and freedom around the world, and complacent about those things at home. What inspires me about America is the legacy of the civil rights movement between 1956 and 1964 because then I saw an America struggling against its own capacity for injustice, recognizing that sermonizing to others is easy, but confronting your own capacity for evil is hard."

I want to just end by saying something about what I think is my meaning for today. The cold war liberals that I write about in my book, people like Niebuhr, Schlesinger, Humphrey, John Kenneth Galbraith...recognized that America was interdependent with the rest of the world. They had seen the 1920s when America, after the disillusioning experience of World War I, had tried to isolate itself, and seeing that its great oceans didn't, in fact, protect us, that the pathologies that emerge in Europe—depression, fascism—cross that ocean and threaten the United States. That in reality, that interdependence is so much more true today, if you think about it, in the globalized world, there are so many more ways that the pathologies that emerge in other countries can threaten the United States so much faster than ever before. Not just what happens in a very powerful country like Germany, at the center of the international system, but who would have thought on September 10th, 2001, who in America would ever have thought that anything that happened in a country as remote and backward as Afghanistan would

ever really have mattered to the United States? Or that some Chinese village could incubate a bird flu that quickly spreads across the world and threatens to become a pandemic? Or that the Thai banking system can collapse in 1998 setting off a chain reaction that almost sends the world into recession? In a globalized world where pathologies are much less likely to stop at any one nation's borders as never before, America has a greater interest than ever before in how other countries govern themselves because other countries respect human rights if they can provide public health, if they can regulate their financial systems, if they don't massively degrade the environment, if they secure loose weapons of mass destruction, they don't read the pathologies that now spread much faster to our shores. But if America tries to do that alone, and this is the great Niebuhrian insight, if America takes that mission on itself alone, we will tell other societies how to govern themselves in accordance with a moral law that we ourselves define. Then America falls into the great trap that Kennan feared. We start to look like an empire. It's not just that we lack the capacity to do that effectively, as has been tragically illustrated in Iraq, but we start to look like an empire, that the only way that America can constructively lead, move towards some kind of global governance in which countries respect a higher standard in their domestic behavior so they don't threaten their neighbors is for America itself to recognize that there are standards, above all human rights, but also on things like the environment, on things like the trading in weaponry that stand above our actions, that human rights is not whatever the United States does because America by definition is freedom. Human rights is a moral law that we struggle to achieve against our very human capacity for injustice in solidarity with people around the world also struggling. Not that we are at exactly the same level, but that we are common strivers for a certain moral law that exists above and beyond our behavior. That's I think why the liberals of the 40s believed so much in national institutions because they recognized that moral progress required some degree of moral reciprocity, that if America was going to be able to hold other countries to a higher standard, it was also going to have to be held to a higher standard itself. And that is what's been so tragically lacking in the conservative foreign policy of the past years, and what has bred such tragic cynicism about America's rhetoric about democracy and freedom around the world at the very time that that rhetoric is needed most.

My fear in the coming years...if you look at conservative foreign policy in America going back to the 40s, you can make an argument that conservative foreign policy oscillates between the kind of neo-imperialism that I would associate with Burnham and with Dick Cheney, and the kind of isolationism. The conservatives were isolationists in the 40s. They became isolationists again in the 1990s. Remember Pat Buchanan's presidential campaign? And I wouldn't be surprised if conservatives move back in an isolationist direction, particularly if they lose power. I think that's a lot what the whole immigration panic of the Republicans is about. About the sense that, you know what? Our efforts to transform the world have failed. Let's just make sure that the world does not transform America. And I think it will be up to liberals, particularly Democrats need to take power, which I think they're very likely to do, to stand against that. There is this widespread sense in America that America has taken its best shots since 9/11 at trying to create a better world. We've poured our idealism into all these benighted parts of the world and we've found, in fact, that people want nothing from us at all. And the

challenge I think for liberals, now more than ever, will be to say to the American people is what the world is saying to the United States is not, "We want nothing from you." But something much more akin to "When do we get America back? When do we get back the country that by struggling to make itself a better society, inspired people around the world to go home and do that in their countries?" And that I think is the liberal opportunity and the great liberal challenge in the years to come. So with that, I will stop. Thank you again for having me.

Albacete: Now Paul.

Berman: I'll just throw out a few remarks and hopefully I'll be able to respond to some of the comments that I'm sure will come from the audience.

I want to say, first, that I've been looking for an opportunity for several months now to make a comment on Peter's book, and I haven't had an opportunity until now. I think he's doing an historic thing. I think he's written a book that's an absolutely huge intellectual ambition which virtually no one among the liberals or on the left has tried to do in many years. What he's done is to propose a narrative, a way of understanding modern history for the last 60 years in such a manner that people who are liberals and tend to be Democrats, can begin to see the whole scope of modern history. Without this, it is impossible develop a strong liberal movement or to have a successful Democratic party in the role of politics.

One of the things that struck me most painfully during the 2004 election was watching the radical conventions on TV of the Democrats and Republicans, was that I noted that the Republicans had a very acute line on American history, on its meaning, on American history as a story in progress of freedom. They tried to have Arnold Schwarzenegger as a somewhat peculiar but authentic example of immigrant success, and they even managed to claim, Bush himself, I think, managed to claim that he stood for the legacy of the American Revolution, which was okay, Lincoln, which was fair enough, but he even stood for the legacy of FDR. And then he stood for the legacy of the Civil Rights movement, and Ronald Regan, and they had a whole narrative arch. And the Democratic convention, by contrast, had none of this, not one aspect of this. Only a series of lesser issues with no way to present to the party or to its potential voters or to the country, a larger picture of what America ought to be about. And I think that Peter has done more to address this larger disastrous problem than anyone else. And I think that's just tremendous.

This crucial thing that he's done, in addition, is to identify, I think correctly, the question of totalitarianism and anti-totalitarianism as the central issue. Now, this is an extremely complicated question and on the matter of how to define totalitarianism, or how to define the problems that we face right now on the question of whether Islamic fascism is the correct term or not, on many of these points, there is much to argue about, much to discuss, and I myself am not in agreement with Peter on every aspect of it. But I am enthusiastic on the main point that there is an "it" to argue about. There is a thing, and the meaning of this thing is to say that our political problems now, as in various moments in

the past, do not consist of the ordinary categories of politics. They are not about fishing rights and Halifax or banana wars, or things like that. They do reflect a vast range of issues which are philosophical and theological, and so forth, as has been said. And so our first challenge is also not just to divide us into parties to try and come to grips with this. And I must say from this point of view, I myself am right now extremely discouraged. I see, as everybody sees, that militarily things are catastrophic in Iraq. They are extremely bad in Afghanistan, but the front in the struggle which has concerned me most of all has always been the intellectual front, the ideological front, and in my reading, this front is just as catastrophic. And on this front we are losing just as badly, and we can see that loss in some of the many intellectual journals. So at least the issue of identifying that there is an "it" to totalitarianism seems to me just crucial.

Now I'll throw out one other point that I would want to add to Peter's argument which is this: He identifies the central figure of the cold war liberalism that he admirably wants to arrive as Niebuhr, and I would like to throw out another name which I thought to be inadequately represented in his book, which is that of David Dubinsky. David Dubinsky was an American trade union leader who came out of the American Socialist Party. He was the leader of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in the ILGWU, which at one point was one of the strongest of the American unions. It was really from out of his trade union movement that organizationally the movement that led to the Americans for Democratic Action that arose, and a whole series of other things arose. And this is a history that I think has been completely forgotten and needs to be understood in this way: One of our problems right now is that the entire history of the American left has I think been improperly described and is incorrectly understood. If it were correctly understood, people would realize that one of the great achievements of the American left was to lead in a worldwide way the struggle against Communism, the struggle against the Soviet Union. And this happened because the Soviets brought it in the United States, which was somewhat big in New York and a few other places; it was very big in the New York labor movement. The socialist party had its own connections to Eastern Europe and it had above all its own connections to the Russian Social Democratic Party. After the Bolshevik Revolution, some of the Mensheviks, Russian anarchists and other people were killed, but some of them fled into exile and were able to present the news of what was actually happening in the Soviet Union, and the single principle force which took up the cause of solidarity with these people was the Soviet movement in New York and of the labor movement. And this was Dubinsky and his union. It's the beginning really in a powerful way in the 1930s the American labor union. The American labor movement in this corner of it was already rejecting an international solidarity with the oppressed workers, the oppressed democrats of the Soviet Union. This continued during the fascist era and then after in the immediate aftermath of World War II. It was a labor movement, Dubinsky and his labor movement which now began to set up actual organizations of solidarity of really oppressed people in the East bloc. This now became the big corner of the Truman foreign policy and a big element in the democratic cold war foreign policy that began to take place. And it was precisely this aspect, I think, more than any other aspect which eventually led success in the struggle against communism. I just now have happened to read a book by one of the American Mensheviks called *The Choice* in 1950 by David Schell where you can see the actual way in which the Soviet Union communist

party was overthrown through the support of Democrats in the East bloc and this sort of thing.

Now I mention all this history because it's interesting history in itself, but it also points to, I think, what has always been the crucial thing for us to do now which is very little and that is this: There are any number of people who could be thought of as Mensheviks today from Iraq, from Iran, from all over the Arab and Muslim world—that is to say, people with democratic values also with a social justice aspect to them who are completely and thoroughly isolated. They're isolated because a large part of the left which considers itself an anti-imperialist left looks at these people as imperialist tools and manages to sneer at them, which is something quite common in the academy and in the United States and elsewhere. And they are isolated because liberals in a generic sense, including the European democratic left, have shown very little interest in these people, and they are isolated because of a great many other people actually accept the notion that there is some sort of clash of civilizations and there is no point really in trying to communicate across the chasm, and that therefore the battle we are in should be either a strictly military battle or a strictly police battle. So this whole other element has been abandoned, and this whole other element is certainly the principle thing the liberals in the United States should be clamoring for. It ought, in fact, to be something uncontroversial because it doesn't bear on questions of military action or non-military action. It is something that has to do with action, solidarity, intellectual engagement, this kind of thing.

A final point. Since I've brought up the Jewish socialists, I think that the question of Catholicism should be mentioned here too, and the Pope has weighed in in the last week and I think that this also is an issue that should be discussed. The Pope's speech was, I think, disastrous, and I assume everybody understands that. But there were elements of it that were quite interesting. When he got away from the Byzantine Empire, and he spoke about a general spiritual crisis of technology and science on one hand, and a spirituality or religious sense on the other hand, he actually strayed into a terrain in which he or Catholics and other religious people in the West could perfectly well dialogue with interesting arguments with not just the Islamic world, actually with the most radical Islamists. If you read the Islamist literature itself...in one of my books I write about Salya Kurtif (?), the great founder of the worst elements of the Islamist current. He addresses these kinds of issues precisely, and this should be extremely interesting to us. It should say to us, these people in the radical Islamist currents are struggling with issues, some of which we in the liberal democratic west, whether those of us who are Catholics and those of us who are non-Catholics, some of which we can recognize, and we can actually talk with these people about these points. But we can also draw another lesson here too which is if you look back at the history of the Catholic argument about these things—the crisis of humanism versus technology, you can see that in the past, in the 20th Century, there were aspects of the Catholic Church which likewise fed into the nihilist error, and it ought not be so hard to recognize that part of the fascist movement in Europe in the 1920s and 30s and after drew on a Catholic humanist rhetoric. And the fact that it drew on a Catholic humanist rhetoric ought to sober us because it ought to make us realize how dangerously flexible these kinds of analyses can be, and how easily they can veer into a

nihilist direction, so that people who regarded themselves as the best of Catholics could have been shouting, as they were in Spain in the civil war, “Viva la muerte!”- a totally nihilist slogan which it stands to reason ought to have been obvious to everyone was totally and absolutely in contradiction to anything which could have been described as heroism, Catholic or otherwise. Looking back on this history, what I hope the Pope will do would be to reflect on this and to look at the history of Christianity in Europe itself and see all the ways in which the nihilist lure was so powerful and can draw into it the most intelligent theological thinkers, the most intelligent writers and political activists. How easy it is to fall into these errors. And by looking back on these particular errors of Europe and Christianity, it might be that there could be a lesson offered or a discussion opened with people from other religions, Islam, who are right now visibly plunged into their own version of the same error. This is part of the advantage, I think, of using this concept of totalitarianism because what’s good about this word totalitarianism is that it does not refer strictly to this religion, Islam. On the contrary, totalitarianism is something which arose in Europe and in the west. The totalitarian lure is something which anybody can fall deep into, and it’s something which virtually all societies or elements of virtually all societies of the world have at one time or another during the last ten years fallen victim to. There’s a long history of falling victim to this lure and also a long history of how to struggle against it, and this is what we need to draw upon. I’ve mentioned many things and I’ll stop. Thank you.

~ QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION~

Albacete: I think tonight we have seen, for my part, the possibilities that can be opened up by dialogue when it is based on respect, respect born of friendship. This discussion tonight, I think, moved us close to what I think is the key point again and I think that is: what is the nature of the common ground? What is the nature of the point of encounter, and how do we live it? Mention was made of the narrative, the narrative which Peter has provided, the narrative for which we become conscious of a reason for living and even a reason for dying. Upon what can that narrative be constructed? Upon a certain experience, an experience which we must have in common, that is independent of explicit religious convictions, experience that guides reason, that is not afraid of judgments. I am aware as a result of tonight’s discussion of how true, how so important and true is the point made by Pope Benedict in the now notorious speech. Prof. Berman has seen something very important. Recognize the possibilities that the threats of nihilism to the religious experience can be an important point of encounter. For that reason I would like to conclude tonight’s presentation by reading to you the last paragraph of a press release containing a statement made by the President of our movement about the Pope’s speech:

“This position of the Pope [primacy of reason, or as he called it 20 years ago, ‘the primacy of the Logos’] saves the possibility for an authentic religious experience for every man and woman, and permits an encounter in peace. It is not a question of a clash of civilizations, but the elementary experience of the “poor of spirit” of every religion: those who live a reasonable relationship with God, beginning from the needs for truth, beauty, justice, and happiness that are in the heart of every man and woman, and

precisely for this reason cannot follow the violent degenerations of those who, in the name of an ideology, reject reason for a power, be they in the West or anywhere else.”

Thank you. Good night.

Simmonds: I want to thank our speakers for this fascinating dialogue, and all of you for joining us this evening.

Our next event will take place on Wednesday, October 25, 2005, at 7:00pm in this room. For our “Face to Face” series, we will meet with Joel Meyerowitz, one of the most talented and skilled photographers in the US, author of the recently published “Aftermath”, that is a unique and extraordinary photographic archive of Ground Zero after the attacks on the World Trade Center. Mr. Meyerowitz was the only photographer to gain continued access to the site after the event.

You can find more information about Crossroads at the information desk at the exit, where you can register to be informed about Crossroads' activities. Also, if you wish to purchase a copy of "The Good fight" you can do so at the exit.

Thank you and have a good evening.