

TOM FOX – BISHOP TOM GUMBLETON FORUM

Sacred Heart Church, Detroit
May 16, 2005

OPENING REMARKS

Fr. Tom Lumpkin

Welcome to the Elephants' forum on Church structures. This is the first forum in which everyone has been invited.

The Elephants, as you may note from a paragraph at the bottom of the agenda sheet, is an organization of the priests of the Archdiocese of Detroit, strongly supported by participating laity, who seek renewal of the Church of Detroit. We do this by offering opportunities for education and creating an open forum for discussion and dialogue that will lead to developing and advocating more collegial solutions to the challenges we face. We firmly believe these efforts will contribute to a greater solidarity among priests and a renewed Church of Detroit.

We see three goals for this afternoon:

1. We hope that by being here today, we will receive insight into the reality of our present situation, and what needs to be done. And that goal will be the task of the two speakers; they will try to give us some insight.
2. A second goal is that we hope to come up with some strategies that we can do here locally. That's the last hour of the afternoon. And we consider it to be a very important part of the afternoon. Although this is an educational forum, this is an afternoon where the Elephants are looking for suggestions, strategies and actions that we can take to bring about reform of Church structures. And we're really depending on all of you gathered here to give us some proposals. That's your task.
3. We hope that the afternoon will bring a little bit deepening of hope, a revival of hope, a new energy to commit ourselves to this task that faces us.

So, that's what we hope to accomplish.

I will now call on Tom Gumbleton, who will introduce Tom Fox.

INTRODUCTION OF TOM FOX

Bishop Tom Gumbleton

Good afternoon to everyone. I am happy to be here and I hope you are happy to be here also. I am very pleased to be able to introduce Tom Fox to you this afternoon. All of us have heard of the National Catholic Reporter, and many of you probably subscribe to that news weekly, and have for many, many years. Tom Fox in 1967 was named by the Board of the Directors of the National Catholic Reporter as its publisher. Previous to that, he had been the editor of the National Catholic Reporter for seventeen years.

Tom is a graduate of Stanford University and also has a masters degree in Asian studies from Yale University. Back in the 1960s Tom lived in Viet Nam for a couple of years; he was a volunteer in the International Voluntary Services in Viet Nam from 1966-1968. During that time he wrote pieces for the New York Times, Time Magazine, and then also for the National Catholic Reporter. After he left Viet Nam he came to Detroit and lived here in Detroit for a number of years. At that time, he was a staff reporter for the Detroit Free Press. I don't know if he knows this, but he was also a featured reporter in Bill Kienzle's books. In those books he was known as Tom Cox – the Rosary Murders and other books. Bill always said that there was no reference to anyone living or dead in his books, but He worked at the Free Press as a staff writer from '73 to '78, and then he was the editor for the Washington Star before his appointment to NCR.

Tom has written a number of books. He has co-authored one called "The Children of Viet Nam. He is the author of another book, "Iraq: Military Victory – Moral Defeat." A third book, "Sexuality and

Catholicism: Catholicism on the Web.” And most recently, he has written a book, a lengthy book, on the Church in Asia called, “Pentecost in Asia, a New Way of Bring Church.” At the present time Tom and his wife, Kim Hoa, live in Shawnee Mission, Kansas. There are three children: Dan, Christine and Katherine, who are graduates of Stanford University.

Tom has come here to Detroit today to speak to us, as Tom Lumpkin has mentioned already, to give us some insights into the Church throughout the world, but also to try to inspire us with a sense of hope as we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, as we try to work for reform in our Church. I am very pleased that Tom is with us and am very pleased that I can present him to us now.

ONE BODY – ONE SPIRIT

Tom Fox

Thank you, Bishop Gumbleton, for those kind remarks. I would also add to that I am a graduate of Sacred Heart parish here in Detroit. All three of our children were born in Detroit. Actually, we went to three different parishes. The children would ask which church we were going to today. There was the *candle church*, the *donut church*, and the *singing church*. The *candle church* is Old St. Mary's. My parents went there, and sometimes we would join them there. The *donut church* was the Neuman Center at Wayne State University. And Sacred Heart was the *singing church*. And if somebody would say, “We're going to the *singing church*,” they'd say, “Yeh! We're going to the *singing church*.” They liked the singing church because they could get out of the pews anytime they wanted and dance around; and when we went up to Communion, it was like a dance. It probably still is.

So, one of the other things I wanted to mention before getting into the talk: usually when I'm introduced, and I'm introduced much like Bishop Gumbleton introduced me. But, the only thing that gets applause is that our youngest child, Katherine, a real advocate of the singing church, is also a two-time Olympic gold medalist; and she won gold medals in swimming in the '96 Olympics in Atlanta. [Applause] Now ask yourself why you didn't applaud like that when you were given the introduction I was given. So, I'd like to operate on her coattails.

My remarks today really come out of Ephesians, and nothing is co-incidental. If I had to give a name to the talk I would give today, I guess I would call it, “One Body – One Spirit.”

Had I spoken to you only a few weeks ago on the subject of structural changes in the Church, I would have stressed that change is certainly on its way. [Laughter] (You're with me already!) I would have said that in the coming conclave, that leadership symbolized in the College of Cardinals was going to correctly read the signs of the times, and as I have been saying for some years now, that 110, or so, outside cardinals in the Church would throw out the inside clique, those that had over centralized authority in the Church, and would elect a new pope with a more collegial track record. He would be a pope, I would have argued, who would share authority, and who would, once again, allow the pressing issues facing the Church to be discussed. I would have suggested that he would have been a candidate much like the one who became John XXIII. Had I given this talk a few weeks back, it would not have taken long to see how wrong I would be, and how I had misread events. I have earned some worthwhile humility. However, one can still hope that Pope Benedict XVI turns out to follow a radically different tract than he has been on for the past three decades as the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith.

Just as President Nixon went to China, Ratzinger is the best possible candidate to revamp the Church's teachings on celibacy and ordination. Do we dare hope? Certainly we are tempted. We are called to be hopeful people. There was always the example of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was a traditionalist in all manners, until he was touched by the spirit of the people, whom he had been called to serve. Yes! hope.

But I feel especially pressed today to ask myself this question: In what and in whom do I place my hope: in the pope, in the College of Cardinals, in the Church itself? Today, I want to share some personal thoughts about where I am in my own spiritual journey. Entering this arena of soul, I want to cite

the words of an old friend of ours, Bishop Ken Untener, who wrote: “There are two ways to approach religion. One is see it as a fixed set of truths, boxed, set, and a pat hand. Another way to see it is as a call to believe truths that the eye has not fully seen nor the ear fully heard. It is a call to ongoing discovery.” In the spirit of this ongoing discovery of journey, knowing that I am only perhaps catching small glimpses of the truth, perhaps hearing only faint echoes of the truth, that I want to share the following thoughts with you.

I have to admit that they do not directly address the subject of structural change in the Church; of course, they do address these issues indirectly. For the moment, and perhaps for every moment, the question each of us faces in some way is: NOW: How can we become more passionate followers of Christ? How can we enable others to do the same? How can we live and spread the gospel of love, compassion and forgiveness more fully, even especially in the face of real discouragement. I believe we are being called, especially in these difficult times, to ask ourselves: What do we really believe? What core truths do we hold? Where do we find hope?

Michelangelo was once asked, “How did you create David?” The artist replied, “I got a block of marble and I chipped away at everything that was not David.” Allow me to suggest that this might be what God is calling us to do in these difficult days. It seems that we are so conditioned, so involved in the business of our work, our culture, our own world, that the Spirit hardly has a chance to break through. Now, admittedly, perhaps I am speaking only for myself. Take from my remarks, then, whatever rings true to you.

Recently, I decided to resign as NCR publisher. The decision came out of discouragement, family considerations, and the desire to bring something new within me to new life. I decided to try to create a new fulfilling reality. Nearly half a year later, call or not, I am finding myself on a new and fulfilling path. I have little idea yet where I am headed. Maybe I have nowhere to go. Maybe I am already where I need to be. Now, I am not advocating you share my own recklessness. I am only suggesting that I felt I needed to make a complete break, stop everything, get off the merry-go-round, and listen more to the Spirit, as best I could, discern her voice within me.

Much I had read by spiritual gurus stressed slowing the importance of slowing down, centering one’s self, finding one’s inner core, and then heeding it, coming to terms with one’s self and the universal, growing in the process to greater wholeness. Mystics, of course, maintain that is the very purpose of our lives. Eastern gurus speak in terms of gaining awareness of enlightenment; Western gurus speak in terms of gaining holiness and spirituality. Both are core choices. One comes out of mind; the other comes out of heart. There is, we know well, no one path. In fact, East and West are seemingly coming together in our spiritual practices. They certainly have in mine. Both East and West stress a common path leading to compassion. As I see it, in compassion there is hope for true transformation and the building of a more just and peaceful world.

In the past months I have entered into reflection, sensing the need to achieve greater awareness, hoping it will lead to greater wholeness, and recapturing health and in turn to a needed groundedness. Over the months, this desire to follow my new unspoken call grew into a kind of compassion of necessity. And soon I was discovering simple truths that seemed to pop up before my eyes – nothing profound really – but personally meaningful to me. Like Michelangelo, I decided I had to keep chipping away at some of the excesses that were not me, not the believing me, to find the essential me. Now, I am no where near where I expect I will end up, or maybe I have already been to where I expect to get to someday.

One idea has kept coming to me: Of the many issues that have preoccupied me, and have gotten me down: issues of Church teachings on sexuality, abusive Church authority, prejudice against gays and lesbians, episcopal inability to become preachers of compassion, love and peace, the Bush administration, the war on Iraq, the increasing divide between super-rich and super-poor, an aging NCR readership. All these issues seemed to be connected somehow to other matters – deeper matters – that I needed to first attend to. I began to think that if I took more time to work on some of the primary questions, while trusting the Spirit that eventually I would be in a better position to deal with, to cope with, these other matters.

So I listened; I really tried to listen. I began meditations. I turned off television. I listened to music, sat in silence, spent more time with my wife of 34 years, spent more time in the garden. Eventually, I began to try to step out of my own ego into a deeper primary sense of being. All the spiritual gurus call upon us to do this. I realized it was not only possible, but necessary, and that in the primary state there is being. In it, I began to find a seamlessness and connectedness that I had never quite experienced before. Buddhists have long taught that it is necessary to jettison the ego identity, which they claim is an illusion, in order to even begin a spiritual journey. Christians speak of losing oneself in order to find oneself.

Along the way I was developing a deeper sense of peace, or was it that I was gaining a deeper spiritual understanding. In any event, it did come with a greater peace of mind, and even a dissolving of some of the fears I had quietly carried – like the fear of losing status, or the fear of losing recognition. Mostly, in my new freedom, I began to feel happier, even more playful. My energy level was once again rising. So far, I think a core rediscovery I am playing with is this: we are primarily spirit, not flesh and bones, and can learn a lot about ourselves, if we listen. And in doing so, we can become more whole, healthier, and more compassionate people. But we must trust in the Spirit. It is what every mystic seems to have said for centuries.

Now I have several observations that I am going to share with you, looking out at the Church – seven, in fact; but these observations are in order to help us to become more listening, more caring, more compassionate people, energized by love and the Spirit:

- ❖ The first one: So many, many American Catholics are hurting. We feel divided. We feel, for reasons, unfulfilled. We suffer considerable spiritual pain – feeling the difference between the Church that is and the Church we so want to be. For lack of a better word, I would say that each of us exhibits considerable brokenness in our lives today. The corollary for this brokenness is a cry for hope. Everywhere I go, I hear people say, “Speak to us of hope. Give me something to be hopeful about. Tell me some good news.”

Of course the Church teaches good news; but the primary evangelical message of this past pontificate has been: “Jesus died on the cross for our salvation, and for the salvation of all humanity.” Yes, but, the good news, which I hope our Church will begin to articulate, is deeper, more profound, more basic, and more simple. It is this: “You are all gifts; you are all loved; you are all forgiven; the Spirit is alive within you.”

- ❖ This leads me to a second observation: Catholics can generally be divided into two groups. The older group, that is to say, those about 50 or more, I find need to be reminded that they are forgiven, that is, they need to be reminded that the brokenness, or as they might say, the sinfulness in their lives, has long ago been forgiven by a loving God. I’m not sure I have the power to forgive sins. I think I do. I think we all do. Or at least we all can remind ourselves that our sins are forgiven. What I am sure of is this: I am sure I am called to remind you that your sins are forgiven.

While most Catholics over 50 need to be reminded of this, those Catholics under 50 need to be reminded that they are loved. Both forgiveness and love originate in a loving Creator and permeate Creation. It is a love that fills every being, although admittedly it gets buried at times under complexities and the confusion of its existence. Remember that you are loved, infinitely loved, and that whatever you think of yourself, you are truly accepted as is, and that every perceived blemish is part of being that which enjoys absolute love. It is a message that many younger Catholics and others need to hear. They need to ponder and they need to believe. The problem is that we have not heard this message enough; or you have heard it said, but simply do not dare to believe this stark, uncompromising truth. So, let me dare say this to all of you: You are all forgiven; you are all loved.

What follows from these simple observations flows like water from the side of a mountain. We are called to trust the Spirit in our lives. In some ways, the younger we are, the more child-like we are, the more open we are to the Spirit. The wonder of a child discovering life is not easily replicated. It gets buried, it seems. We become encrusted people, barring our enthusiasm, our wonder, our openness. Our Church over the years has gotten a lot of things right. It has also gotten a lot of things wrong. It has taught us that the Spirit lives, and that She will never abandon us – indeed that our bodies are tabernacles of the Spirit. Yet, the Church seems to fear the implications of this marvelous assertion, that is, that we are basically good and loving creatures, and that we are participating in the unfolding of Creation, and that our lives are infinitely valuable, and that our inner-convictions, feelings, inclinations, sexual identity, preferences, fears, hopes, intuitions, - all of these are manifestations of the Spirit in our life. If you will, they are the unfolding of God's plan for the universe.

Pope John XXIII once wrote, "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations, which by men's and women's own efforts, and even by their very expectations, are directed toward the very fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs." Do we trust the Spirit? I don't think we trust the Spirit enough; and in some ways, this is because we have been taught from our early childhood to let the Church do the work for us, and then follow its lead. No, we need to take on more personal responsibility. We are called to listen to the Spirit in our lives. We can begin doing this by believing truly, coming to know that the Spirit talks to us, when we want to take the time to listen.

- ❖ This leads to a third observation. The Spirit is continually active in our lives, but we often fail to recognize her work. I think the main reason for this is that we are simply too busy or simply not willing to believe what we actually profess to be true. Another reason is that we are too focused on the past, especially the pain of the past, and too focused on the future, especially the worries of the future. Remember, all this pain and all these worries really take place only in our minds. We need to assert greater control over our minds, and the games they play on us. How do we do this? We do this by living as every spiritual guru or mystic has repeatedly taught us: to live as best we can in the eternal present. Remember, it is now, and now is the only way we ever live it! This is a basic spiritual truth, but one that we seldom grasp. Today is the only day we live. This leads me into a little theology, and here maybe I'm on shaky ground – even if already I'm not on shaky ground. [Laughter]
- ❖ The fourth observation: We are bodies incarnated in spirit and not spirit incarnated in bodies. This is important! Seeing ourselves this way, helping others see it this way, helps us to better understand the human condition, and how we are essentially bonded to each other. We share, indeed live within, the same Spirit. This is, of course, basic Catholic teaching, which holds that together, we make up the body of Christ.

If one had to draw an image of our spiritual relationship with God, how many of us would draw two separate circles: one large circle, the God circle, and another small point, the me circle, perhaps with an arrow from the small point aimed at the large God circle? On the other hand, how many of us would place that small me point within the larger circle, recognizing the essential truth that we live within the Spirit, and that our spiritual life is essentially about the discovery of who we are and how we relate to each other, including a profound self-discovery.

The Indian Jesuit, Fr. Anthony DiNello, once wrote the following dialogue: "Master, how does one seek union with God?" "The harder you seek the more distance you created between Him and you." "So, what does one do about the distance?" "Understand that it isn't there." "Does this mean that God and I are one?" "Not one, but, not two." "How is this possible," the student asked. "The sun and its light, the ocean and its wave, the singer and its song: not one, not two."

Part of our problem, perhaps, is that we have not trusted what we are beginning to imagine to be true. Could life be as glorious as it would be if we were completely secure in God's love, in God's presence, no matter what. Could it be that God loves us just the way we are, that each of us is

fulfilling a purpose in Creation simply being who we are, and living the life to our fullest, to being more passionate, giving, caring, serving Christians? I think we are called to rediscover true identity, true spiritual reality. Do we allow ourselves to be guided by Scripture? We read in Matthew these very comforting words spoken by Jesus, who said, “Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” (Matthew 6:28-29)

Why can't we believe? Maybe religions have not helped us enough. In my opinion we have allowed religion to get too large, and it has created a large shadow over our lives. It has somehow dwarfed the more central reality: the mystery and the presence of the Spirit. What do I mean by this? Again, let me cite Fr. Anthony DiNello. He use to talk about Church as a finger pointing at the moon, and that we had come to mistake the finger for the moon. Church only is supposed to be a guide – it is only the finger; it is not the moon. Ironically, because our Church is terrified by fear of losing its absolute teaching authority, it has lost the freedom to truly teach, as it should: to teach to enhance freedom, not to confine it, to bestow power, not to covet it. A healthy spirituality has a reckless air to it; it liberates the soul.

Our Church needs a lesson or two in humility. It could start by recognizing that the life of the Spirit is discernable throughout Creation, and this includes, most of all, the other religions of the world. The Asian bishops are well along on this path of recognition, but Rome is highly suspicious of their insights. Our Church teaches the importance of inter-faith dialogue, but with some important exceptions, fails to celebrate the multiplicity of the life of the Spirit in other religions. All religions capture some of the truth of the Spirit; but to claim to capture it all, or most of it, both belittles the Spirit and gives false importance to institutionalized religion.

- ❖ Another observation intended to kindle our passion to serve and love – Five: Truth comes wrapped in paradox. Paradox is the core of Christian teaching – examples that you may know well: more is less; in giving we receive; absolute truths diminish understanding; to anchor ourselves we must first liberate ourselves; to find ourselves we must first lose ourselves; to live we must die; in dying we find eternal life. These at their root are all Christian teachings. And remember, to achieve rebirth we must pass through the Cross. I wonder how much more success as teachers our Church leaders would have if they offered encouragement rather than so called absolute truths or pointing fingers. How much more credible would they be if they allowed for their own doubt, their own uncertainty, if they admitted that the work of the Spirit is infinite and beyond the boundaries of absolute and simple formulas. Taoism is an Asian religion that goes back some 600 years before Christ, and there is a Taoist saying, and it is written as follows: “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The Name that can be named is not the eternal Name.”

Why are we not more hope-filled people? I came of age, that is, I turned 21, in 1965. It was a great moment of great idealism, and a great hope in the future. We were still basking in the light of the two Johns: John XXIII and John F. Kennedy, who both had taught that every one of us can make a difference, and that our lives contained great potential for good. They both taught that civilization was progressing, and the Spirit was operating in the world, guiding us all. What I did not appreciate adequately at the time was that God also had a sense of humor, and seemed to be playing some kind of cosmic trick on us. She was giving us a taste of what might come, but only a taste – call it foreplay, if you will. We know now only too well that the idealism we tasted at the time did not last. There would be setbacks:

- First, of course, the Viet Nam war and its aftermath and disillusionment in government. I had believed that government policy would be a means of liberation, truly spreading U.S. ideals around the world. But by then, the militarization of U.S. foreign policy was well on its way.
- Secondly, I believed the Second Vatican Council would liberate us and our Church from its old authoritarian crustiness, and that we were finally becoming a loving, reforming, peace and

justice Church, placing the Gospels before the preservation of institutional power. It was not to last, as we all know.

Looking back a good part of a lifetime now, and it is easy to see how many of us came to be disillusioned. The promises were not delivered – certainly not as we expected them to be. We felt betrayed; our leaders let us down. Moreover, they seemed to betray the very values we had grown to love and appreciate. Yes, there was and is deep hurt. Even now we feel the hurt. We share that hurt. We share that pain. We share that disillusionment. And in large part, it is that pain which has drawn us here today. The pain is real! It is also real that we can easily become caught up in what I call patterns of suffering and disillusionment, out of which it is difficult to escape. Now I imagine some of you are thinking to yourselves: “Were we simply naïve to believe our institutions, our Church, would live up to its ideals? Isn’t institutional selfishness the norm?” These are good questions; I’m not sure I have the answers. Without answers we need to reaffirm belief in the Spirit. I believe in a loving Creator, a Being that is all pervasive, that unites all of us together, with Her in within Her. I believe in the biblical promise that the Spirit always will be with you. It may be that we all have to accept a bit more than we have at this point, that we cannot place our final trust in any institution – government or Church. Then, if they do good, maybe by accident, maybe by intent, we will be pleasantly surprised. That does not mean that they are fundamentally wrong, as much as it might mean that they are fundamentally human.

A spiritual guru I respect, for example, shared with me four rules of life:

1. Everything changes
2. Things don’t always go according to plan
3. Pain is part of life, and
4. People are loving and loyal – but not all the time.

Those are pretty realistic rules for a man I considered as free a spirit as I ever encountered. It may be then that the idealism we need strive for grows out of a healthy touch of realism, and that realism grows out of our experience and understanding of the nature of the cosmic plan.

I think many of us grew up believing that our one, true, holy, catholic and apostolic Church could not err; or at least, this Church of ours was, if not perfect, on a journey toward perfection. To deny this is to not only bury the Church of our youth, it is to bury a bit of our own identity, being a member of the one, true Catholic Church. So it was easy to become blinded, and difficult to grow out of the blindedness, to become a mature adult. With the death of a Church we so loved, we begin to pass through emotions frequently associated with the death of a loved one. Many of us have not fully processed from each of the stages of death. Psychologists speak of stages when coming to terms with death. They speak of denial, anger, argument, depression and acceptance. The final stage is not necessarily a stage of happiness as much as it is a stage of calmness. The truth is, we’ve asked our Church more than we’ve asked ourselves. How many of us have come to terms with our own brokenness?

Are we willing then to accept and love ourselves as we are, as fallible, imperfect people, people who are incapable of letting others down, people with blemishes, people who are afraid to share themselves lest they expose their personal weaknesses, doubts and insecurities? Coming to terms with our Church requires first coming to terms with ourselves. Loving our Church might require loving ourselves more, even as we accept our own sometimes significant shortcomings. And how do we begin to love ourselves? In my opinion, the answer goes back to acceptance – acceptance of self, acceptance that each one of us is a person that God made and loves, and that each of us, whatever our failings, is filled with the Spirit, that each one of us is an integral element in the unfolding of Creation. We are indeed intimate parts of God’s plan. We are inseparable from God’s love and the Spirit. But these are pretty bold assertions, but are they all contained in our Catholic tradition? I think they are, but they are not preached adequately.

So, does this free us from sin? Can we simply go out and do what we want and expect to be forgiven? Yes! Go out and sin some more. [Laughter] However, there is a catch, if you will, and

it is this: As we slowly grasp the infinite love of God, we become prisoners in our new, mature love as well. So, how do we approach what appears to be very painful realities dealing with our own lives, and those of our children, and a seemingly disaffected Church leadership? Escaping pain might require changing the way we approach our Church and life itself. Buddhists, in fact, tell us that the very purpose of life is to escape suffering. In this instance the Buddhists might have something special to offer us. Very briefly, Buddha taught that, most or all, suffering exists in the mind.

We carry with us each day painful memories, like the ones I have been describing. We also carry with us great anxieties about the future, most connected about worries about our own human frailty and pending death. What if, then, we could truly live in the present, outside of memories and worries, which, after all, as I have noted earlier, “now” is the only time we have. What if we were able to largely or totally separate ourselves from both past and future? Wouldn't that make us infinitely more open to the beauty of the present moment, a beauty found in Creation, community, contemplation and a profound understanding of the nature of life and love itself? If we truly believe that death is an insignificant passageway on the way to a far and more vast participation in life, would that not help deliver us from some of our insecurities? If we could develop the habit of not letting our past, or our Church's past, define us, if we were able to recreate ourselves every morning when we woke up, finding beauty around us, would it not deliver us from some of the pain that holds us back?

Again, the Buddhists teach that we must let loose of the illusion that we are separate from other beings. The deeper truth they teach is that we are all one. Catholicism teaches this as well, although not as explicitly. Catholicism holds that we are one in the Spirit; yet we have individual souls. But keep in mind: all of these are constructs, of feeble human attempts to grasp infinite mysteries.

I'm not sure there are significant distinctions between the two religions on these matters. If one transcended tradition points us in the direction of spiritual oneness or unity, the other transcended tradition points us in the direction of a sacredness in relationships. I believe this too is fundamental to Christian thought, which holds that there is One God and at the same time three components or Persons in that God. Traditionally, we would say, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” or “First, Second and Third Person,” although I think that the word “Person” no longer suffices to understand or point us to the mystery. The Trinity: 1) the Creator, Cosmic Originator; 2) Incarnate Being; and 3) Spirit, Cosmic Generator. Any words we choose are necessarily inadequate. In each of our lives we have come to know and experience all three. We contemplate the Creator, when on a starry night we ponder the vastness of the universe, and wonder where it all came from. We contemplate the Incarnate Jesus, when we are drawn to peace and non-violence, when we are drawn to the beatitudes, when we celebrate birth, flesh and our own sexuality, when we ponder Jesus, who walked two thousand years ago, who taught forgiveness and asked children to be allowed to come to him, who healed bodies and spirits, who reached out to the hurting and to the women around him. He was a person who suffered pain, died and transformed to new life. We contemplate the Spirit when we open our hearts, spirits, souls and minds to Creation and to each other.

Clearly, no one expression of God suffices human experience. How could it? The mystery of God is infinite. I feel a central challenge of our Church today is to move from an almost exclusively Second Person, salvation, redemption theology, which stresses the fallen nature of humanity in a sinful world, and makes the Cross and the Church the sole means of redemption, to a more Third Person spirituality, which sees God's activity, love and fulfillment taking place within our expanding consciousness and throughout Creation, and even at times within the Church. The Spirit energizes us to carry on in hard times. At different moments in history, God speaks to us in different ways. The hope and light so many of us need so much of the time will come from a healthy Spirit-centered theology, which in turn will foster true inter-religious dialogue, and help build a global community.

Why is one notion of God not enough? Perhaps because God cannot be contained in any one expression or thought; perhaps because God necessarily escapes any one definition. The God that can be defined is not our God at all. The idea was expressed thousands of years ago in a Tao poem: "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The Name that can be named is not the eternal Name." And here is another Tao poem: "The One begets One; the One begets Two and the Two begets Three; Three begets the myriad of Creation."

- ❖ The sixth observation: Of all the major religions, the one that places the greatest theological emphasis on humanity, on flesh, on community, on working together for the common good, is Christianity. We Christians believe that God became flesh and became human, a form made in the image and likeness of God. It follows that human flesh is intrinsically good, despite some of the woefully misdirected teachings that have crept into our Church over the centuries. The body then should speak to us of godliness. What do we know about our bodies? They crave nourishment. They crave wholeness. They crave unity. They crave intimacy. Each of these cravings offers a hint about our relationship to the Spirit. We experience the Spirit through our bodies, when we feel unity with another person, or walk in a garden, or into a deep and profound truth.

This points toward another mystery-truth: It is that our God is a relational Being. Think then, if you will, of God as the substance that binds all of us together. When you are experiencing bonds or being drawn toward unity, might this then be the action of the Spirit in your life? And if this is true, could it be that the contrary is also true, that when you are experiencing forces that pull you apart, might you be experiencing somehow the absence of the Spirit at that point? The Spirit permeates our lives. Practically speaking, the Spirit is both the footing upon which we walk, and the stratosphere into which we project ourselves. To walk is not enough; we must leap. To leap we must be willing to risk. We must be willing to let go of that which seems to offer security. Remember, it is by letting go that we find true security, that ultimate security in the arms of our Creator.

I would like to leave you with a call. It is a call to be more active advocates of the Spirit. This will require for each of us to take on more responsibility, to live out what we might consider to be the ordinary work of the Church. I am trying to wake each of us to our own priestliness. The truth is that our ordained priests need all the help they can get. Don't wait to become lay priests. And don't worry about asking what the difference is between a lay and a clerical priest. Frankly, I don't think God worries much about the difference. God wants us to come alive in the Spirit. So, as newly committed priests, you need to be more active; you need to more actively begin working in at least four priestly areas:

1. You need to start offering blessings to each other, to family, to community, to anyone you meet/greet: offer blessings.
2. You need to offer forgiveness, or if you prefer, to remind people that they are forgiven.
3. You need to offer encouragement.
4. And you need to live lives of justice and peace, preaching by example.

I call upon you to believe in yourselves more. I call upon you to approach the world with all the wonder of young children. I call upon you to accept yourselves and others as they are – as love creatures of a loving Spirit. Remember, the Fathers and Mothers of the Second Vatican Council wrote – there was a woman at the Council: "Everything which has been said so far concerning the People of God applies equally to the laity, religious and clergy. All are endowed with charisms for the building of the Church, and all share in the three-fold office of Christ: priestly, prophetic and royal. Upon all the People of God there is true equality."

- ❖ So, my final observation: If you do these things: if you risk being willing to love unconditionally, if you risk forgiving unconditionally, if you encourage unconditionally, if you accept yourself unconditionally, if you serve unconditionally, you will not only give the Spirit much room in which to work within you, you will awaken to the Spirit of God, already knowing and loving you within. Thank you. [Applause]

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN DETROIT

Bishop Tom Gumbleton

I first of all feel it important to say, “Thank you very much,” to Tom Fox for a very profound presentation. [Applause] He spoke to us in a very deep way that probably many of us – I know myself included – were not expecting to be challenged via that deep, deep sense of where we are in relationship to God, and so many of us – including myself again – are thinking in practical terms: “What do we do to change this Church, to make the institution more of what we want it to be, or think it should be,” and so on. And so Tom has really given us a good foundation for our discussions this afternoon and into the future.

My task, as I perceive it, will be somewhat different. I was asked to speak about the structures of the local Church, and what we might do to reform them, but to speak especially out of history of what has been in the Church of Detroit. I think the letter that was sent out, there was a mentioning of my being around as a bishop for 37 years, so I have a bit of a history within this Church – in its past and, I hope, in its future. [Laughter, Applause] The more I go around and speak, the more I begin to wonder if I have it.

There was a time, and I’m sure many of us experienced this one, if you traveled to different parts of this country, maybe even other countries, and you said that you were from the Archdiocese of Detroit, people would say, “Oh really! The Archdiocese of Detroit?” Then they thought that was such a blessing, that any of us could be from the Archdiocese of Detroit, because we had a reputation as a Church in the United States as being very progressive Church, a very Vatican II Church. And it was true; we were that. And I thought, that first of all, it might be important to look at how that happened, and what it meant in reality to be a Vatican II Church.

Well, of course, it happened because of the leadership under Cardinal Dearden. That’s what really brought about the change in the Archdiocese of Detroit. But it was a change that started with him. He himself underwent a profound change. You may remember that he came to be the archbishop of Detroit in January of 1959. And it was in that same January of 1959 that John XXIII announced that there was to be a council. And Cardinal Dearden was, within a year or so, appointed to some of the preparatory commissions of the Council. He was involved then in the Council from the very beginning; and as the Council developed, he was on the most important commission of the whole Council, and that was the Theological Commission. It was most important because that commission wrote what I think of as the most important documents of the Council: *Lumen Gentium*, the document on the Church, and *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. In addition, the Theological Commission reviewed every other document that was written by other commissions.

So, Cardinal Dearden had a grasp of the whole Council in a very profound way. And I often would remark – do remark – that sort of jokingly, that he was able to not only be on those commissions, but he understood what was happening on the commissions, because he could quote/wrote/understood Latin. And, of course, that was the language of the Council. Most bishops from the United States did not understand Latin, could not speak Latin. And so, most of them were not as deeply involved in the Council as he was. And that was a great blessing for him – I’m sure he’s say so – that he was truly blessed, because of his participation in such a profound way in the Council. And from those two documents that he helped to write, as a member of this Theological Commission, there are certain things that came through those documents that he took to heart as he came back to Detroit for this Church of Detroit.

The *Lumen Gentium*, of course, gave us a whole different understanding of the Church from what we had had through the decades ever since the First Vatican Council in 1871, where we had a Church that was described as a “Perfect Society.” It was a very self-contained Church. It was a Church that seemed to have all the answers, and that seemed not to need to be very active in the world. The Vatican Council taught us that the Church is rather a community of disciples. It’s a pilgrim Church. It’s a Church that’s filled with sinners. It’s a Church that has to keep on growing, developing, understanding truths about God, truths about ourselves in relation to God. It’s a Church that has to keep developing and growing. It’s not a perfect, complete institution. And that was a profound change.

And as we understood the Church in a different way to what it is, we also through the Council document on the *Church in the Modern World*, came to understand that the Church is not the end. It is not in this world for itself. We're not trying to make the Church a perfect Church, but the Church is to do is to insert itself into the world and transform the world into the reign of God. And that's what the pastoral Constitution does. It plunges the Church into the world and says that the work of the Church is to change the world, to transform it into as close an image of the reign of God as possible. And those two documents had a profound influence on Cardinal Dearden.

It came a few years later – another experience of his- that helped him to get a real sense of what this Church should be and how it should function, was his participation in the Synod of 1971. That was the Synod that discussed the question of justice in the world and that concluded with that challenge that action for justice and participation for the transformation of the world constitutes the very preaching and living out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Actions for justice, participating in the changing of the world – those two things constitute what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to live out his Gospel.

Now, when you take very seriously the document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, you will begin to understand, as in the same quote that Tom used a few moments ago. What it says in paragraph 30 – there were 29 paragraphs in the beginning of that document that described the Church, how it was to function, what it is, and so on – then in paragraph 30, these words, and Tom quotes at least part of this: Everything which has been said so far concerning the People of God applies equally to the laity, religious and clergy. All are endowed with the charisms for the up building of the Church, and all share in the three-fold office of Christ: priestly, prophetic and royal. Among all the People of God there is true equality, a genuine freedom, a profound dignity, a global responsibility, a sense of vocation, and a personal union with Jesus and his mission. In fact, each one has a proper and indispensable share in the mission of the Church.” Everyone in the Church is equal in freedom and dignity. Everyone in the Church shares in the whole mission of the Church. Everyone is to be respected as an adult member of the Church.

Now, if you really take that in and begin to, as Cardinal Dearden did, lead the Church, with that as your understanding of the Church, it inevitably would change things from what they were before the Council, as far as the Church, and its structures, and its way of acting, and so on. And that's what began to happen here in the Archdiocese of Detroit. And I will mention very specific examples of what went on over the period of time that Cardinal Dearden was the leader of the Church of Detroit, and as the leader of the Church, a real servant leader, it's true too. First of all, when you take that seriously, it means you truly respect people as adults. It's not a relationship of parent-child, which so much of the Church had been prior to that. The leader of the Church, the bishop, accepts that everyone is equal in freedom and dignity. And so you truly respect the individual person, and understand that people will differ from you at times; and that's not threatening, because we're all equal in freedom and dignity.

A couple of anecdotes that, I think, bring this out and, I think, show the kind of person Cardinal Dearden was, and how he lived out that understanding of the Church. One is kind of a humorous thing that happened in 1968, when *Humanae Vitae* came out in July of that summer. And it was a shock, as you may remember, because the National Catholic Reporter in 1964 had published the contents of the special commission that had been set up to study the question of birth control. And that commission, the vast majority of it, said the Church needed to change its teachings, and to develop the teaching further, and accept birth control. Well then, when *Humanae Vitae* came out, it was a tremendous shock, because most people had already accepted the change in doctrine. They understood why and were ready to go.

Well, when this change happened, then Cardinal Dearden was president of the Conference of Bishops, and so it was his responsibility to develop some kind of a statement to respond to *Humanae Vitae*. Well, he had to work very hard at this, because he had to clear the statement with the whole administrative board, which included people you may even remember, like Cardinal O'Boyle, later in Washington, and Cardinal McIntyre, out in California, who were very, very strict conservatives, and plotted to say, “Whatever the Pope says, that's what we have to do.” Well, Cardinal Dearden worked through and finally got a statement that respected the Pope and respected the document, but also respected people's conscience.

And so he had a press conference. And I recall this very vividly, and it was quite interesting, because he made the statement, then he opened it up to questions; and he answered every question carefully. And he was trying to keep a very, very careful line between rejecting what the Pope said, and yet, accepting the fact that people, with their conscience – adult formed consciences – might do differently. Well, at the end of the press conference, just to show you how difficult it is for people, even when they are being respected as adults to accept responsibility, one of the camera people said to the Cardinal afterward; he said: “Well, you know, that was a really good statement. I respect you for all that you said; but just tell me one thing: Can I or can’t I” [Laughter]. I mean, it was essentially a clear example of someone coming out of the old Church waiting for the bishop to say: “You gotta do this,” or “You may not do this,” and so on. But Cardinal Dearden was trying to bring the Church into a different place, where each of us would be responsible in our own conscience to act as an adult member of the Church, as one responsible to God. And he lived that out constantly.

One other example that I remember very well too is: One time, when Bill Kinzel was the editor of the Michigan Catholic, and he wrote, I forget even what the topic was, but he wrote an editorial that was quite critical of something Cardinal Dearden had done. Well, Cardinal Dearden called him up and said he wanted to discuss this with Bill. And so he said, “Well fine, but what do you think I should do now?” because he didn’t agree with the editorial. Bill said, “Well, write a letter to the editor.” [Laughter] And Cardinal Dearden did. [Laughter] He didn’t fire Bill Kinzel; he wrote a letter to the editor, and set forth his thinking.

But you see, it is such a clear example of how, if you respect people as adult members of the Church, you don’t just crack down on them, rule what they can think and do, and so on; you respect their conscience and their judgments, and so on. And the way Cardinal Dearden did accept or respect the conscience of others was that he was very clear on the idea that it’s the whole Church that has to make decisions about teachings, about actions within the Church, moral judgments, and so on.

He respected what theologically has been called the *sensus fidelium*, the understanding or the thinking of the believing people; and the *sensus fidelium* is a very important part of how you develop doctrine within the Church. It does not come down from above, from the so-called Magisterium – take it or leave it – it’s the whole Church that begins to surface this understanding of how we understand God, how we relate to God, and so on.

To expand on this just a little bit, I’d like to quote from an article Ken Untener wrote some years ago, in which he spoke about this. It contains something he said at a Bishops’ meeting that was a very challenging thing for him to do at that time. And he spoke out against some things that the Conference of Bishops was trying to do. But part of his statement, he says – he was quoting from the Bishops’ Conference statement that he was responding to – he says, “In our statement,” and he quotes here: “It is our earnest belief that God’s Spirit is acting through the Magisterium in developing doctrine.” Ken says, “This is true, but it’s not the entire truth. It is also the earnest belief of our Church that the Spirit acts through the entire People of God in developing doctrine. The *sensus fidelium*, of course, is more than an opinion poll; but when people disagree with us,” that is, the bishops, “we cannot simply assume that it is mere opinion. The *sensus fidelium* is more than a head count, but the beliefs in the heads and the hearts of our people must count for something.” Thus Ken asks the question of the bishops: “Do we have adequate structures and procedures to listen to the *sensus fidelium*, particularly on this issue? In the same texts we call for those who dissent, to study and pray over their position. Could they not say to us: ‘We will, if you will;’ and ‘Let’s do it together.’ Would such a process weaken the authority of the bishops, or would it, in fact, strengthen our authority?”

So, Ken was calling for something that, in fact, Cardinal Dearden had worked out in the Diocese of Detroit. But we had a mechanism for trying to understand what is the *sensus fidelium* – what do the people think, and how do we integrate what they think into our teaching, and into the way we structure the Church? And you may remember some of these things.

We had *Synod 69*, which took place actually over a period of time, from 1967 until the final document in 1969. And it was a process whereby, throughout the whole diocese, in every parish, we tried to have people come together to discuss issues that concerned the Church. And then their discussions were formulated into documents, or they wrote down what they had to say, and made suggestions. All this was brought together to a commission that was set over the whole synod, and gradually, over a period of time, we developed that document, *Synod 69*, which was a foundation for the whole structural set up of the Church of Detroit. And it came out of *sensus fidelium*. And we continued to do that for a number of years.

Again, you may remember, we had *World-Church-Kingdom* programs for at least three years, where the same thing happened. People throughout the whole diocese gathered together in small groups, discussed, brought their discussions to some conclusions, and then, they would be forwarded, and we would try to integrate what they said – what the people said – into the way the diocese functions. So, we really did respect individual Catholics, and respected the whole *sensus fidelium*, the Church speaking as a group. And out of that, those kind of things, we developed some different structures in the Church, in the diocese. And these were all ways in which we did fulfill the idea, that again that, the bishop listens to the people, the bishop respects the people, tries to integrate their thinking into decisions that are made for the diocese.

Among other things, we developed parish councils. And there was a time when parish councils were very, very clearly the decision making body of the parish – it wasn't the pastor. We had a diocesan pastoral council, and some of you who are here, I'm sure, served on that council. And you remember some of the ways there were real back and forth discussions with Cardinal Dearden. He wasn't afraid of people disagreeing with him. They could speak up, and he would listen. Sometimes, he would respond with what he thought, and sometimes he would say, "Yes, you're right." And so, we had that kind of structure, where again, the *sensus fidelium* could be brought into the decision making process of the diocese.

Another thing that happened that, I think, made it very clear how we respected people as the Church, when we developed a whole new process for assigning priests. And it wasn't one that all the priests accepted very readily, because it made priests much more accountable than we had been before, and much more responsible for their own decisions about becoming a pastor of this parish or that parish. But the key thing was, every parish, when there was an opening, developed a profile. And they really took time to try to set forth in words what is the context of this parish, what are the pastoral needs, what kind of priest would really serve the needs of this parish. And then, that profile was forwarded to an assignment board that took it very seriously.

And we stopped the process of just moving people every five years, and moving priests from one spot to another spot, and so on. And the process was that the assignment board discussed with great care what is this profile, who would fit the profile, and then matched the two. And we discarded the whole idea of seniority – automatically you would become a pastor after a certain number of years. We discarded the idea that because you were a monsignor, you went to a certain kind of parish rather than another parish – that sort of thing. It was always based on what were the needs of the people. We don't do that anymore. And so, we've lost that kind of structure. But, back then, we truly respected what were the needs of the people and how they set them forth.

Another thing that happened back then, and again, it's this whole idea of trying to draw from the people, who are the Church, we had a very – well, I can't say it was an open process, but closer to a more open process of selecting bishops than we certainly have today, our auxiliary bishops and bishops of other dioceses – back then, for a number of years, whenever Cardinal Dearden was going to recommend the names of priests who might become bishops, he wrote letters. And I remember that sometimes – you know, before he would have to consult maybe a half-dozen or so people, but usually it would be the diocesan consultors, and maybe the financial board of the diocese – he wrote letters to every parish council, to all members of the APC (Archdiocesan pastoral Council), to heads of religious communities. There would be hundreds of letters asking people, "Suggest someone you think would be

qualified and really be able to be a bishop within the Church.” And then, Cardinal Dearden would review all those for reasons why this priest would fit.

So, we had a much more open process of naming bishops. It came not just from within the diocese; it was reviewed by the province, the different bishops of the province, and finally, of course, then to Rome. But, out of that process we got bishops who genuinely met the needs of the people. I didn't come out of that process [Laughter] so I'm not going to compare myself. This happened after I became a bishop. So, I got here by accident, or something else. [Laughter] Those are different ways in which we had structures within the diocese that made this diocese a light within the country.

One of the things we developed back then too, was advanced, was the due-process, whereby people in responsible positions in the Church could be held accountable if they mistreated the parish staffs, for example, the pastor mistreating the staff by firing people without cause, and that sort of thing. And that very process worked for a while. We don't even have it any more. Now, when there's a problem in a parish, there's really nowhere to go. Back then, we had this process, and the process worked. The board was mostly lay-people; there was one priest, who was the secretary of the board, but it was lay-people. So, laypeople really had the chance to hold accountable those who were ministering within their parish.

Let me say just a couple of words about the way that we implemented *Gaudium et Spes* in the diocese, and justice in the world. That really made a difference, and, I think, Cardinal Dearden underwent a profound change in understanding how the Church has to work to transform the world. And so here in the diocese, and we were ahead, I think, of any other place in the country, Cardinal Dearden, even before Synod 69, I think, established a Human Relations Commission in this diocese. And Jim Sheehan, who is here today, was the first chair of that commission. And it was an attempt to try to deal with the race problem that was such an important part, and still is, of this community, and of our diocese. We have not rid ourselves of the sin of racism, by any means. But back then, Cardinal Dearden took a major step forward trying to bring this issue to the fore, in trying to make sure that our Church in Detroit responded to this question of racism that was such a prominent part of our city and of our Church.

Cardinal Dearden also set up – one of the first dioceses in the country to set up – an Office of Justice and Peace. It was a full-time director of that office, assisted by other staff people, and this diocese really began to get concerned about actions for justice. And we were engaged in any number of activities. We have someone here who was a very active anti-war person back in the Viet Nam war period, Tom Lumpkin, who fasted one time for 40 days, I think it was; but Tom was one who was inspired by Cardinal Dearden, and by his own insights, of what was needed to be an activist for justice. But the Office for Justice and Peace also was a structured way in which we tried to respond to injustice within our local community, within our nation, and within the world. We don't have a Justice and Peace Office any more.

Another thing that Cardinal Dearden did that was a clear example of how institutionally and structurally we respond to injustice and racism too: After the riot in 1967, which was a very shattering experience for the city of Detroit, and the consequence of which we still feel actually, but in 1968, in part of a response to what happened to Detroit, Cardinal Dearden made the announcement that the Archdiocesan Development Fund that year, the whole fund, would be used to try to put money and resources into the city of Detroit to fight the racism, to counteract the racism, but also to help rebuild the city, which had been so devastated in so many, different ways by the riot – so many people killed, so many people burned out of their homes, and so on. That was an extraordinary, controversial thing that Cardinal Dearden did, where he experienced great negative reaction, and the ADF went down for a couple of years after that, because people were not ready for that kind of challenge that Cardinal Dearden presented to us as the Church. But he was committed to justice, and so he set up that kind of structure whereby we did try to respond to injustices that were present.

One final thing that he did, that we are experiencing the opposite, I have to say honestly today, back in the early 1970s, after the Judge Roth decision on cross-district busing that caused many people to flee the city of Detroit, and caused – well, we had a crisis in our school system at the time – but

Cardinal Dearden made a pledge back then. He said, "I will not be the archbishop of the diocese that has schools only for the well-off. There will be schools in every part of this diocese." [Applause] He would not allow for that kind of injustice to happen, that you would have a Catholic school system only for the affluent, or he would have no Catholic schools. We had to have them in every part of the diocese. And we retained that reality up until the present time.

Those are some of the things that inspired Cardinal Dearden as our leader, and that inspired all of us as we tried to respond to that kind of leadership. And we had a Church that was a Church where there was much involvement on the part of laypeople everywhere. Laypeople, religious, clergy – we worked together as a whole Church. And we really did see ourselves as a Church that was here not for itself, but we are here to serve the world, to transform the world into as close an image of the reign of God as possible. We need that kind of a Church today. So, I hope in our discussions we can develop some ideas of how we can restore the structures, or develop new structures, that will enable all of us to be the People of God – everyone equal in freedom and dignity, committed to transform our world into the reign of God. Thank you. [Applause]

Transcribed by,

Tom Kyle

20050705