

Dean's Remarks -- STRS Commencement, May, 13, 2006

Today I share this podium with our former Dean Father Frank Moloney. This week I emailed him inviting him to send a greeting to the graduates. This is what he wrote:

“It is with joy, tinged with a little sadness, that I have accepted Dean Irwin’s invitation to address the graduands on your Commencement Day, 2007.

My joy comes from the fact that I have journeyed with many of you towards this day. As you have heard, I have several of my doctoral students receiving their degrees today. To earn a doctorate is no mean task for both student and director. I wish to congratulate Kelly, Tim and Marc for their significant achievement, and also Clint, whose dissertation I supported as a Reader. As always in a doctor-director relationship, the learning process is mutual. Thus, not only do I congratulate you all on your achievement, but also thank you for what you have taught me.

I also rejoice in the many Masters and STB students who are graduating today who have been subjected to my course on the Gospel of John during their time at Catholic University. Whether your future lies in ministry or further studies, may the Word of God continue to enlighten your path.

My sadness comes from the fact that I miss you all, colleagues and students, and the academic setting and life that I enjoyed so much at CUA. However, I am happy to be in my home country, doing my best to serve the Church and my Salesian Congregation to the best of my ability. Let us keep one another in our prayers.”

These greetings are fully consonant with many of his emails since January and I am delighted he sent it along.

In 1987 the book *The Catholic Moment* by Richard John Neuhaus was published. As a product of what we now call an ecumenical family, (formerly a “mixed marriage”) I was intrigued by this fundamentally favorable portrait of post Vatican II Catholic life set against the temper of the times – the late eighties. On the one hand I also found it an engaging read. But on the other hand I was not convinced that it was totally accurate.

I later read a review which both praised it and listed several limitations. At the end of the review it was observed that *The Catholic Moment* was not Catholic enough.

“Not Catholic enough.” What does it mean to be “Catholic enough?” From my perspective this means taking very seriously the length, depth and breadth of the Catholic tradition -- theology, teaching, prayer, liturgy, spirituality, arts etc. It means that we can appropriate differences within our unity that need not divide. It means a fundamental approach to human life that can be Augustinian, Bonaventuran or Thomist. It means following a spiritual path laid out by martyrs, mendicants, monastics and post moderns. It means relishing the kind of art which the church has fostered through patronage, recognizing creative genius and supporting it. It means recounting high points in our theological tradition that made for key insights to be shared among believers and non believers alike. It means a fundamental optimism that good will out. It means rigorous study of sources and bringing to them academic discipline. It means applying varying

theological methodologies to the sources of our tradition in order to draw out wisdom and insight for our age and for the ages.

It also means admitting when this Catholic tradition has failed in being a sufficient and diminished light for the world. It means admitting when the pilgrim church on earth stubbed its toe even as it tries to follow the paths of justice and peace. It means naming grace where it abounds. It means naming sin where that regrettably can also abound.

It means being loyal but not uncritical. It means being committed to the Catholic tradition while at the same time that may require that we work for change and reform. The phrase *semper reformanda* should never be far from our thoughts and prayers.

It means being humble before all that we do not yet know and seek to understand under the umbrella of Catholicism. It means being challenges to live the gospel in a marketplace that vies for wisdom and insight. It means revering Christ in the other and rejoicing that where twos and threes are gathered in the Lord's name it is there that we are most at home.

In effect it means that there have been and always should be many Catholic moments.

Graduates, today signals a major turning point in your academic lives. For some it means being credentialed to teach others, to write and to do research. There are many things which all of us here wish for you. One of the things that I wish for you as you graduate from The Catholic University of America is that you have come to appreciate the Catholic tradition from the inside even if this is not your faith tradition. And it is my

hope that those Catholics among us might luxuriate in appreciating the Catholic tradition even more and more fully from the inside.

The challenge I would offer you as you depart these walls is to strive with all your might always to seize the Catholic moment -- and to be sure that you strive always to be Catholic enough.