

Baccalaureate Mass 2013

Carroll College

Bishop George Leo Thomas

THE FIFTH FORCE

Fifty years ago, Bishop Raymond G. Hunthausen, the former priest-President of Carroll College, and sixth Bishop of Helena, participated all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council. At age 91, he is now the last living American Father of the Council.

Upon his final return from Rome, Bishop Hunthausen ushered in dramatic and unprecedented change into the Diocese of Helena. These changes impacted not only the rhythm of life in the Diocese, but also directly and dramatically affected the life and structures of Carroll College.

Many of those changes were immediate and simple to describe, visibly and directly impacting the clergy and laity in their everyday lives:

- The Bishop introduced a vision of shared responsibility, where priests and laity were asked, or more accurately, expected, to collaborate together in a new and untested model of leadership. This was a radical departure from a formerly all clerical leadership structure, and introduced a new vocabulary into Church—unheard words like “collaboration,” “consultation,” and “collegiality,” to name a few. This vision gave rise to parish and finance councils in the Diocese, and new structures like the Faculty Council and the Board of Trustees at Carroll College.
- Bishop Hunthausen encouraged a new level of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue among religious leaders of all persuasions, a major change in a Church that was distinguished by a highly honed skill of talking to itself. In the next decade, Carroll began to describe itself “as a Catholic diocesan college in the *ecumenical tradition*.”
- Bishop Hunthausen introduced the vernacular into the liturgy, which proved to be a welcome change for most, but provoked strong reaction by others who had grown accustomed to hearing Latin as the only liturgical language they had ever known.
- He directly responded to Council’s challenge to First World bishops to share their resources and personnel with Third World countries living hand-to-mouth in quiet desperation. The Helena mission in Guatemala mission was born, and soon celebrates its golden jubilee of missionary service.
- The fifth major change that came to college and to diocese was much more difficult to describe or to detect. It came like that proverbial “thief in the night,” entering through a process of quiet evolution.

It was an unrelenting force that resulted in a change of outlook, attitude, and outcome.

It produced a breakup of boundaries, and a breach in horizons, a shedding of Montana myopia.

For decades, it remained a change without a name, a force that challenged both the College and Diocese to think more expansively, to live more inclusively, to shed a dangerous preoccupation with self.

The fifth force compelled the College to move beyond the four walls of laboratory, library, sacristy and lecture hall, and to take a seat at the table of the global community. It is still a work in progress.

You, the Class of 2013, are the beneficiaries of the fifth force, a spirit that has radically altered the old model of Catholic Higher Education in exchange for something new and good and necessary.

The fifth force is seen on the applied level, in programs like Engineers without Borders and the Guatemala Pilgrimage, along with service learning projects that have taken root in your respective departments.

The fifth force is embodied in Carroll's Headlights Program, which places students shoulder to shoulder with poor and underserved populations at home and abroad.

In the past twenty years, the fifth force has taken a new and identifiable title and identity, a force that can now be named, described, identified and lived, though its name still draws blank stares among many ordinary Catholics.

The Fifth Force is now identified as Catholic Social Teaching, a vision born in heart of the Gospel. It evolved and repaired subtly onto the world stage, unannounced, unheralded, in some circles, unwelcomed.

From my vantage, Catholic Social Teaching has been ushered in by the Spirit of God.

Catholic Social Teaching is the Gospel in action, compassion on the pavement, deeply hallowed conviction that every person has inherent and transcendent worth, fashioned in the image and likeness of God.

Catholic Social Teaching is based upon a conviction that there are no throwaway people, no castoff or disposable souls.

Catholic Social Teaching is a new way of seeing, no longer with just human eyes, but with the "eyes of the heart." It provides a lens through which to examine the most vexing and complex problems and challenges in modern society.

Catholic Social Teaching challenges the centripetal forces of unbridled capitalism and consumerism, and replaces them with a theology of community, of common ground and common good, always with a "preferential option for the poor."

I propose to you that Catholic Social Teaching is the new distinctive hallmark of Catholic Higher Education, a *constitutive* element of every Catholic College. I propose that Catholic Social Teaching is a force that must be integrated into every aspect of the college's life as the *sine qua non* of the Catholic mind and the true mark of mission effectiveness.

Today, I give thanks to God for the leadership of our new President, Dr. Thomas Evans. As he describes a strategic vision for the future--faithful, local, global, and digital—I see in this vision so many vital components of Catholic Social Teaching.

I turn to the faculty at Carroll College with words of gratitude and encouragement.

- I thank those of you who have already introduced the foundational elements of Catholic Social Teaching into your respective disciplines, either by intention or by instinct.
- I thank you for assisting our young people in making real life connections between classroom and community, between education and justice, between theory and service learning.

- I especially commend the members of the theology and philosophy faculty for assisting our students in exploring the ethical and moral implications associated with their ever expanding fields of knowledge and technology.
- I thank those of you who have engaged the civic community in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue at a time when we are witnessing the erosion of religious freedom and the ascent of religious extremism in every portion of the globe. The world is desperate for leaders who will replace diatribe with dialogue, and bring to a halt all forms of violence carried out under the banner of religion.

Your efforts are providing powerful evidence of Catholic Social Teaching in action!

To Father Marc, Colleen, Katie, Dan, and Tyler, and those involved in Peer Ministry, I want to express my admiration and support for your tireless efforts on behalf of our students.

- I thank you for helping them explore the dynamic relationships between faith and reason, Christ and compassion, sacristy and service. You are assisting them in integrating their faith and life in meaningful ways.
- I thank you for your courage in preaching and teaching uncomfortable truths that do not always please popular opinion, but are necessary to safeguard the integrity of the Gospel and the authentic good of society;
- I bless your efforts in accompanying students on their walk of life, and for serving as mentors and models of prayerful and humble Christian living.

Your efforts are providing powerful evidence of Catholic Social Teaching in action!

I now turn to the Board of Trustees, who are often laden with heavy leadership responsibilities and concerns with strategic planning, policy, payroll, buildings, and blueprints. I offer this challenge to our board:

To recover and reclaim our historic commitment already codified but not yet fully realized in the Carroll college mission statement – – that *"Carroll College re-dedicates its spiritual, academic, and social resources" beyond the citizens of Montana" (to include) " the worldwide human family..."*

- Are these, dear members of the Board of Trustees, only symbolic words and concepts, or are we willing to find and to fund new ways for this mission to come to life in the very bone and marrow of Carroll College?
- Are we willing to make an institutional commitment to the people of God, and to help our students be formed and fashioned beyond the academic classroom in the classrooms of the poor?

And finally, I turn to you, the graduating class of 2013.

You are preparing for promising careers and vocations in the fields of teaching, engineering, business, theology, medicine, nursing, and law. Your class has led the charge as 325 Carroll students have completed 5422 service hours at home and abroad. For that we are both grateful and proud.

As you prepare to take leave from Carroll College, I ask these things of you:

- I ask you to be ever vigilant about the ubiquitous forces that are present and active in contemporary society, forces that have the potential to sap the human spirit. Intentionally embrace the Gospel vision you have experienced here.
- I ask you, wherever you go, to continue making real life connections between love of God and love of neighbor. Apply what you have learned for the greater good and betterment of the human family.
- I ask you to remain connected to your brothers and sisters, not only in the local community, but across the globe, in demonstrable global solidarity work.
- Finally, I ask you to use your extraordinary gifts and talents not only in direct service, but also helping society discover and address the underlying causes of poverty and misery that have shackled whole populations for generations on end.

Take to heart the words of your classmate and colleague Gaylin Mills, who said, "If you just focus on yourself, you're going to be empty."

Let the words of Blessed John Paul II and the example of Pope Francis resonate in your hearts, that "Your life will have meaning to the extent that it becomes a free gift for others."

I ask you to allow the poetic voice of John Valjean resonate in your heart, who says simply and profoundly, that "To love another person is to see the face of God."

I propose that your success or failure as graduates of Carroll College, and our success or failure as an institution of Catholic higher education, rests not only upon our commitment to academic excellence, but also upon our solidarity with the poor.

Catholic Social Teaching is a vision born in the heart of the Gospel, and stands as the new hallmark of Catholic higher education. Let Jesus Christ be your lodestar into the future, Jesus Christ, who is ever in our midst, "as one who serves."