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Q & A: Professor Charles Camosy

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Distinctly Catholic

We finish our two week Q & A with young theologians from the Fordham Conversation Project where we started, with some reflections by Professor Charles Camosy, one of the organizers of the FCP and an assistant Professor of Theology at Fordham. I asked him to reflect upon the submissions of his colleagues.

Professor Camosy: Let's see if I can identify some trends or themes in the blog entries from the Fordham Conversation Project participants during the last couple of weeks:

- Caution and humility.
Aware that a blog entry cannot do justice to the complexity of the very large questions we are addressing, coupled with the fact that we are just starting our careers, we were generally hesitant to make broad, sweeping claims. But our experience, both of our students and of our fellow younger theologians, is not easily dismissed. Something different seems to be coming down the pike.
- The inadequacy of our late 20th Century American political categories.
Our generation of theologians, and many of our students, often fail to see the world through the liberal/conservative lens through which the media and the generation that lived through the 60s/70s/Vatican II polarization often seem to look. This, coupled with the coming massive shift of energy in the Catholic Church to the global south (which, unsurprisingly, also rejects this peculiarly American binary), might signal the death knell for these categories. Our world is neither red nor blue but is increasingly identified as a complex shade of magenta.
- Establishing an attitude of unity.
Before diving into depths of the polarizing issues that divide so many in the Church, we needed to establish a safe space in our community for differences to be explored. Due in part to symbolic

actions like table fellowship (especially in a wonderful concluding liturgy) that safe space was created.

- Hope rather than despair.

Buoyed by our positive experience at the FCP, which reinforced other reasons for hope that many of us had already, we are ready to energetically move forward in our researching and writing, in our teaching many thousands of Catholic students, and in our other service to the Church in the spirit of unity and intellectual solidarity.

The FCP is a modest first step, but the overwhelming positive response it has received in most quarters gives us reason to think that, properly cultivated, it could gain traction and energy. Next steps include formalizing a mission statement and planning our next event. Early suggestions have focused on taking up the issue of authority in the Church—especially given that this overarching issue is so often connected to many of the more specific issues which tend to polarize American Catholics. One of Fordham’s own, Avery Cardinal Dulles, wrote *Models of the Church*, a famous book which explored the many ways in which authority functions in our tradition. Perhaps revisiting that book in light of a new generation of Catholics, all of us formed after Vatican II, is a good place to start our discussions.

Let me close by recalling the “discourse” in the American Catholic Church surrounding President Obama’s being honored at Notre Dame—perhaps a low point for unity in the American Church. Nevertheless, that event has produced not only the Fordham Conversation Project, but also the historic “Open Hearts, Open Minds” abortion conference at Princeton this October. What a powerful example of a lesson that one can easily forget in light of our despair and frustration: sometimes great good can come from what appears to be a hopelessly discouraging situation. The FCP’s great good, for me anyway, was the tremendous spirit of Christ’s friendship present in the midst of all the participants—especially during our final liturgy.

I look forward to continuing our journey together in the spirit of good will and intellectual solidarity as we move our conversation forward.

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