

BISHOP'S WELCOME

Welcome. I am delighted that you are meeting in San Jose, and my welcome is heartfelt. Your ministry is essential to the life of the church, and it is deeply appreciated.

I welcome you to the Santa Clara Valley. The Franciscans named our valley for Saint Clare. The Jesuits named their university, which is so important in the life of our Church, for Santa Clara. But more recently, our valley has been unofficially but effectively renamed. Our new patron is Saint Silicon. You are at ground zero of the information, economic, and social revolution overtaking our time.

I use the word "revolution" advisedly. There is a consensus that we are in the midst of a transition similar to the industrial revolution. We all know enough history to recognize that our church has not done well during revolutionary transitions. I think it fair to say that the church's tardy and ineffective response to the human cost of industrialization was a factor in the decline of European Catholicism and the unhappy history of Europe in the last century. And we have yet to come to terms with the intellectual upheavals of historical consciousness and the scientific revolution.

Perhaps this time the community which claims Christ can bring his vision for humanity to the social, political, and economic transformations already underway. If the church is to have a voice, if the spirit of Christ is to have some influence on the new world presently being shaped here, we need your ministry. I am grateful the theme of your convention this year is "Catholicism and Public Life." It seems to me you are doing just what needs to be done—probing our tradition in the face of challenging and uncharted circumstances. Your work is essential for the church. So I repeat: We are delighted to have you with us.

Your program evidences a breadth of topics, theological opinion, and cultural perspectives. While not neglecting our past, the topics you will take up read like a catalogue of the issues pressing upon our society and church—technology, the world economy, labor, gender, health care, science, race, and culture. What and how can the Church speak to these complex questions? No one has a certain compass for navigating the new sea on which we find ourselves. Discerning what is good, true, and just is no easy matter. And believe me, episcopal ordination brings with it no privileged perspective or ex-officio access to truth. We must proceed as did our predecessors in the faith—by honest discourse, through troubling differences, making advances and, yes, missteps. In this the church, including the College of Bishops, needs your best efforts.

Our task is compounded or, perhaps, our opportunities multiplied, by the undeniable fact that our church is itself in the midst of a revolution. I see an example of that revolution before me this evening. As your program reflects the issues pressing on society and church, so your faces mirror our church and the transition within which we find ourselves. Looking across this room, I see the

changing face of Roman Catholic theology. Many of you are not what theologians have always been—bishops, monks, seminary professors, European, and, yes, male. You are lay, cleric and religious, women and men from the many ethnic groups that make up both our local and universal church.

We at San Jose are a relatively new diocese, established in 1981. From its beginning, the Diocese of San Jose—thanks to the insight of my predecessor, Bishop DuMaine—has prided itself on including among its leaders laypersons and clerics, women and men. As is the case in so many parts of our country, we are a multiethnic, multicultural church, seeking to be one community in Christ. One might think of us as a rather privileged microcosm of the emerging world church. Can we attain an authentic unity that embraces rather than erases our diversity? Again, your program addresses these topics. Our church needs your work, and we are grateful.

I want to underscore another essential contribution of your convention to the local and universal church. You meet in civil discourse. You are friends who trust and enjoy one another. You are a community of Catholic scholars. You do not agree about everything. Facile consensus is not your job.

Again, your program manifests the diversity of theological perspectives which characterizes our church today. The fact that you meet to discuss these troublesome and sometimes volatile topics is, itself, a ministry to our society and church. Our civil and ecclesial discourse is too often marred by acrimony, recrimination, and accusations of disloyalty. Your meeting, your conversations rooted in good faith and trust, model what our church and society must be. For this, too, we are grateful.

I know it is your custom to invite the local bishop to the opening session of your convention. Given events over the past decade or more, you must wonder what this unknown cleric might say. Will his welcome be an ill-disguised scolding? Well, I want you to know that my welcome is heartfelt for all of the reasons I have mentioned, and more. Yours is an essential ministry within the church, even if, at times, your efforts are not universally appreciated. I am not alone in my gratitude for this intellectual forum where faithful Catholics with various, sometimes competing perspectives, can converse about the difficult issues and new opportunities facing church and society. We never know the shape of things to come, and this is especially true in turbulent times like ours. What we do know is that the Spirit is with us in our efforts, the spirit of truth and of charity. The Spirit lives within the entire community, the one Spirit of love and truth. As the great teachers of our tradition remind us, love is the light of truth, and without charity, we cannot grasp God's revelation in Christ. In all things, charity—in all things, charity. My hope and my prayer is that this meeting, this learned society, this church will prosper as a community of love in search of truth. Welcome, and thank you.

PATRICK J. McGRATH
Bishop of San Jose