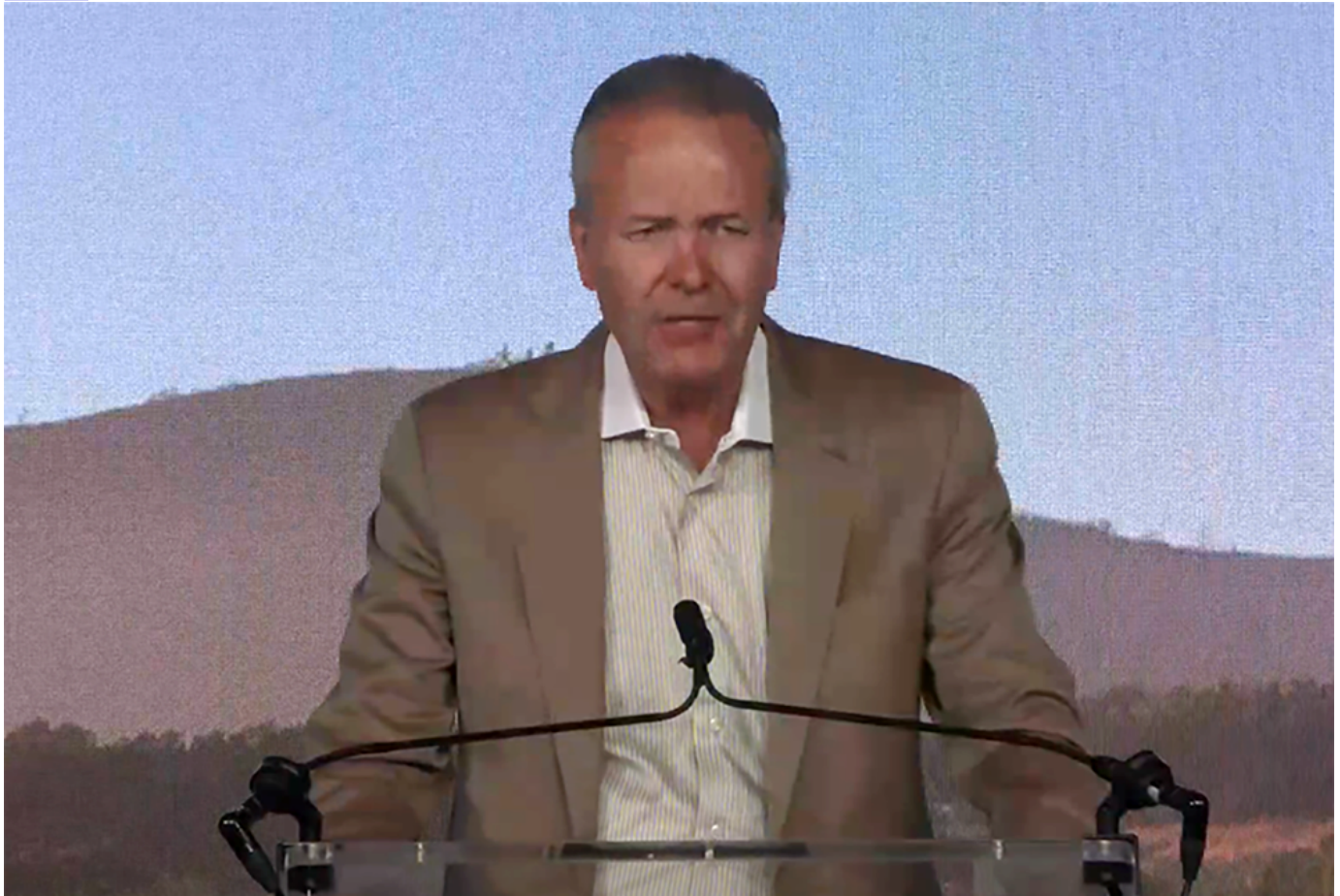


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Timothy Busch, cofounder of the Napa Institute, speaks in the July 25 opening remarks during the organization's 14th annual summer conference. (NCR screenshot)



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Citing the July 13 [attempted assassination](#) of former President Donald Trump, Napa Institute board chairman Tim Busch said American society is "in a very delicate time" as he called for people to "stop hating and start loving."

"We have our principles. I'm not going off the reservation," Busch, cofounder of the Napa Institute, said in his July 25 opening remarks during the organization's 14th annual summer conference.

Held July 24-28 at the Meritage Resort and Spa in Napa, California, the Napa Institute's [annual summer gathering in 2024](#) struck a more conciliatory tone than in past years, when culture war issues such as abortion, LGBTQ rights and modern secularism were often emphasized.

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Noting the polarization that has caused deep political divisions in the country as well as the Catholic Church in the United States, Busch mentioned how he and his wife have hosted dinners at their Manhattan apartment with Catholics from across the political spectrum. He said some of those dinners have featured the editorial staff of *America Magazine*, the progressive-leaning Jesuit publication.

"We're not going to solve our disagreements, but [the dinners] have been very touching," said Busch, who told the audience of 700 people who attended the conference that attendees at those dinners have at times broken down crying.

"They're tired of hating," Busch said. "They're just tired of hating people."

Though the 2024 summer conference was more irenic than past iterations, controversial topics in the culture wars still surfaced.

The Napa Institute presented its St. Thomas More Award, given for "defense of moral truth," to [Mary Rice Hasson](#), a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a conservative think tank in Washington D.C.

Hasson, who also cofounded and directs the Ethics and Public Policy Center's [Person and Identity Project](#), spoke at the conference about "gender ideology," which she described as presenting a "false and dangerous vision of the human person." The Person and Identity Project [has played a leading role](#) in influencing Catholic diocesan policies on transgender individuals.

Touching on controversial topics related to transgenderism and sexual morality, Hasson attacked the birth control pill as "the first accepted transgender intervention" by conditioning people "to see God's view of sex as an obstacle."

"The pill implicitly taught women that their body and their fertility were also problems," Hasson said.



Napa Institute board chairman and cofounder Tim Busch, left, speaks with Napa Institute president and cofounder Jesuit Fr. Robert Spitzer on Napa Institute podcast titled "In Vino Veritas."

Organizers said roughly 700 people paid the \$2,900 registration fee to attend the conference — the fee was waived for bishops and slashed 50% for priests and religious — which had as its theme, "What It Means To Be Human."

In keynote speeches, which were livestreamed on the [Napa Institute's website](#), presenters spoke mostly in philosophical terms about what it means to be human, and the conditions that allow for humanity's flourishing.

"What it means to be human is a question that's as old as humanity. Every culture, every civilization has grappled with it, devising myths and philosophies to try to unwrap it," said [Msgr. James Patrick Shea](#), president of the University of Mary in North Dakota.

Shea and other speakers said that the Catholic Church's social and moral teachings illuminate the truths about humanity.

"The denial of these truths, that we're created, that we're fallen and that we're redeemed by the action of God and the resulting confusion about the nature of humanity is fundamentally rooted in one thing, pride," Shea said.

In a talk titled, "Answering Pilate: Why We Hunger for Truth," [Carl Trueman](#), a professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, said that humans are created "to move towards God."

"Christian truth is not just about the things we believe. It's about the direction, the destiny of our lives as well," Trueman said.

"The denial of these truths, that we're created, that we're fallen and that we're redeemed by the action of God and the resulting confusion about the nature of humanity is fundamentally rooted in one thing, pride."

— Msgr. James Patrick Shea

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Msgr. James Patrick Shea, president of the University of Mary in North Dakota, speaks at the Napa Institute's 14th annual summer conference (NCR screenshot)

Since its founding in 2010, the Napa Institute has [become a driving force in the U.S. Catholic Church](#), and the 2024 conference provided examples of the organization's significance as several Catholic bishops from across the country were present and celebrated Mass for attendees.

Notable conservative bishops attended the conference, including San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone; Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois; Bishop James Conley of Lincoln, Nebraska; and Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley.

Coakley, the ecclesiastical advisor to the Napa Institute, presented Conley with an award, named after former Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput, for showing "courage in the public square" by sharing [his struggles with mental health](#).

"In his efforts to heal and fully return to his ministry, he recognized that he was not alone in what he was experiencing, but that so many people found themselves in a very similar dark place, as he had found himself in," Coakley said.

As the convening progressed, [Jesuit Fr. Robert Spitzer](#), cofounder and president of the Napa Institute, later suggested that the movement for so-called gender-affirming care for transgender people in medical settings is being driven by an agenda aimed at "toppling God, toppling the true identity of the human person, and toppling truth."

Spitzer also thanked Trueman after his presentation for "reminding us that there is no my truth, and your truth; there is the objective truth, and teleologically, it is Jesus Christ our lord."

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