



ed. by Tiziano Tosolini

Church and Culture

Selected Texts (1965–2009)

Foreword by

MONS. GIANFRANCO RAVASI

President of the Pontifical Council for Culture

Asian Study Centre

Xaverian Missionaries – Japan

CHURCH AND CULTURE

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Culture is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also lifestyles, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

UNESCO, 1982

The word “culture” in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.

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PREFAZIONE DI MONS. GIANFRANCO RAVASI

Presidente del Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura

Il vocabolo “cultura” è divenuto ai nostri giorni una sorta di parola-chiave che apre le serrature più diverse. Quando il termine fu coniato, nel Settecento tedesco (*Cultur*, divenuto poi *Kultur*), il concetto sotteso era chiaro e circoscritto: esso abbracciava l’orizzonte intellettuale alto, l’aristocrazia del pensiero, dell’arte, dell’umanesimo. Da decenni, invece, questa categoria si è “democratizzata”, ha allargato i suoi confini, ha assunto caratteri antropologici più generali, sulla scia della nota definizione creata nel 1982 dall’UNESCO, definizione posta proprio in apertura a questa raccolta, tant’è vero che si adotta ormai l’aggettivo “trasversale” per indicare la molteplicità di ambiti ed esperienze umane che essa “attraversa”. È in questa luce che si comprendono le riserve avanzate dal sociologo tedesco Niklas Luhmann, convinto che il termine “cultura” sia “il peggiore concetto mai formulato”, e a lui farà eco il collega americano Clifford Geertz quando affermerà che “esso è destituito di ogni capacità euristica”.

FOREWORD BY MONS. GIANFRANCO RAVASI

President of the Pontifical Council for Culture

In modern times, the word “culture” has become something of a keyword that opens a wide number of doors. When the term was coined in Germany during the eighteenth century (*Cultur*, then *Kultur*), the underlying concept was clear and limited: it embraced the high intellectual horizons and aristocracy of thought, art and humanism. For decades now, instead, this category has been “democratized”, it has widened its borders and acquired a more general, anthropological nature, in the wake of the famous definition created by UNESCO in 1982, a definition that has been placed at the opening of this collection of articles; indeed, today, the adjective “transversal” is used to indicate the multiplicity of areas and human experiences it “embraces”. In the light of this, we can understand the reservations of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, who is convinced that the term “culture” is “the worst word ever coined”, and he is echoed by his American colleague, Clifford Geertz, who declared that “it is devoid of all heuristic potential”.

Eppure, questa genericità o, se si vuole, “generalismo” ci riporta alla concezione classica allorché in vigore erano altri termini sinonimici molto significativi: pensiamo al greco *paideia*, al latino *humanitas*, o al nostro “civiltà” (preferito, ad esempio, da Pio XII). È in questa prospettiva più aperta che la parola “cultura” è stata accolta con convinzione dal Concilio Vaticano II che, sulla scia del magistero di Paolo VI, la fa risuonare ben 91 volte nei suoi documenti. Noi ora abbiamo tra le mani questa specie di “*Enchiridion*” antologico dei testi più importanti del Magistero della Chiesa sul tema, partendo proprio dal Concilio con la *Gaudium et Spes*, percorrendo ben 17 documenti tra encicliche ed esortazioni apostoliche, per approdare ad altre autorevoli pagine ecclesiali di vario genere, capaci alla fine di comporre un vero e proprio arcobaleno tematico nel quale si riflettono le diverse iridescenze di una nozione rilevante, anzi, decisiva per la stessa teologia e per la pastorale.

Anche il Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura nel 2003 — su impulso dell’allora presidente, il cardinale Paul Poupard, che pure è presente con un suo testo nell’*Enchiridion* che ora seguirà — aveva allestito un’“antologia di testi del magistero pontificio da Leone XIII a Giovanni Paolo II” sotto il titolo *Fede e cultura*, nella convinzione che, come si esprimeva Giovanni Paolo II nel suo discorso all’assemblea generale delle Nazioni Unite (1995), “qualsiasi cultura è uno sforzo di riflessione sul mistero del mondo e in particolare dell’uomo: è un modo di dare espressione alla dimensione trascendente della vita umana. Il cuore di ogni cultura è costituito dal suo approccio al più grande dei misteri, il mistero di Dio”. Noi ora vorremmo non tanto tracciare una mappa dell’insegnamento della Chiesa su questo tema cruciale: esso appare in filigrana in modo limpido e nitido nella raccolta testuale presente in questo volume. Noi cercheremo, invece, in maniera essenziale e semplificata, di fare solo qualche considerazione sulla categoria dell’interculturalità.

ACCULTURAZIONE O INCULTURAZIONE?

È evidente che in premessa si deve accennare a un altro concetto preliminare che ha sollecitato infinite riflessioni e precisazioni, quello di “acculturazione” o “inculturazione”, che un saggio dell’*American Anthropologist* del 1935 così delineava: “Si tratta di tutti quei fenomeni che hanno luogo quando tra gruppi di individui con culture diverse intercorrono per lungo tempo dei contatti primari, provocando una trasformazione nei modelli culturali di un gruppo o di entrambi i gruppi”. Tendenzialmente il termine volse verso un’accezione negativa: la cultura egemone non si piega a un’osmosi, ma cerca di imporre il suo marchio a quella più debole, creando uno *shock* degenerativo e una vera e propria forma di colonialismo.

Se si vuole essere meno astratti, si pensi all’ideologia eurocentrica che ha imposto non solo la sua “eredità epistemologica”, ma anche il suo modello pratico ed economico al “sistema mondo”, rivelandosi spesso in Africa e in Asia come l’interfaccia del colonialismo. In questo processo anche il Cristianesimo fu trascinato a diventare una delle componenti acculturanti. Si comprende, così, il fenomeno di reazione costituito

Nevertheless, this lack of precision takes us back to the classical concept, in the days when other, very important synonymous terms were in use: we only have to think of the Greek *paideia*, the Latin *humanitas*, or to our own “civilization” (the word preferred by Pius XII, for example). It was in this more open perspective that the word “culture” was resolutely embraced by the Second Vatican Council which, following the magisterium of Paul VI, used it 91 times in its documents. We now have in our hands this sort of anthological “*Enchiridion*” of the most important texts of the Church’s Magisterium on the topic, which opens with the Council’s *Gaudium et Spes* and moves through 17 documents, between encyclicals and apostolic exhortations, and touches upon a variety of other authoritative ecclesial documents, resulting in a work that truly reflects the various diverse nuances of a concept that is important, indeed crucial, for theology and the pastoral ministry.

In 2003, the Pontifical Council for Culture—acting on the inspiration of its then president, Cardinal Paul Poupard (one of his texts is included in this *Enchiridion*)—also published an “anthology of papal magisterium texts from Leo XIII to John Paul II” under the title *Faith and Culture*, with the conviction that, as John Paul II said in his address to the assembly of the United Nations (1995), “every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God”. We will not attempt to map out the Church’s teaching on this vital issue, since it emerges in a clear and limpid manner throughout this volume. Instead, we shall offer some essential and simplified considerations on the question of interculturality.

ACCULTURATION OR INCULTURATION?

Obviously, as an introduction, we must mention another preliminary concept that has led to an infinite number of reflections and clarifications, namely, “acculturation” or “inculturation”, which an essay published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1935 defined as: “All the phenomena that occur when groups of individuals with different cultures engage in primary contacts for a long time, causing a transformation in the cultural models of one or both groups”. The term then took on a negative meaning: the hegemonic culture does not yield to osmosis, but tries to impose its mark on the weaker one, creating a degenerative shock and a true and proper form of colonialism.

In less abstract terms, we could think of the Euro-centric ideology that has imposed, not only its “epistemological heritage”, but also its practical and economical model of the “world system”, which has often turned out to be the interface of colonialism in Africa and in Asia. This process dragged Christianity too into becoming one of the acculturation components. We can thus understand the phenomenon of the reaction of the “revivalist” movements, or forms of ethnocentrism, nationalism and indigenism, such a vigorous

dai movimenti “revivalisti” o da forme di etnocentrismo, nazionalismo, indigenismo, fenomeno così vigoroso da aver spinto non pochi osservatori a variare la terminologia da “globalizzazione” in “glocalizzazione”.

È con questo antefatto che si spiega perché la Chiesa contemporanea abbia preferito evitare il termine “acculturazione” sostituendolo con “inculturazione” per descrivere l’opera di evangelizzazione. Giovanni Paolo II, nella *Slavorum Apostoli* del 1985, definiva l’“inculturazione” come “incarnazione del Vangelo nelle culture autoctone e insieme introduzione di esse nella vita della Chiesa”. Un duplice movimento dialogico di scambio, quindi, per cui — come lo stesso Papa aveva detto ai vescovi del Kenya nel 1980 — “una cultura, trasformata e rigenerata dal Vangelo, produce dalla sua propria tradizione espressioni originali di vita, di celebrazione, di pensiero cristiano”. Il vocabolo “inculturazione” si è, così, connotato soprattutto a livello teologico come segno di compenetrazione tra Cristianesimo e culture in un confronto fecondo, gloriosamente attestato dall’incontro tra la teologia cristiana dei primi secoli e la poderosa eredità classica greco-romana.

ETNOCENTRISMO E COMPARATIVISMO

A questo punto è naturale entrare — sia pure sempre in modo molto essenziale — nella questione del nesso più specifico e delle interazioni tra le diverse culture che vengono a contatto tra loro. Ora, fu proprio in quel Settecento tedesco, nel quale — come si è detto sopra — si era coniato il termine *Cultur/Kultur*, che si iniziò anche a parlare di “culture” al plurale, gettando così le basi per riconoscere e comprendere quel fenomeno che ora è definito come “multiculturalità”. Ad aprire questa via, che superava il perimetro eurocentrico e intellettualistico e si inoltrava verso nuovi e più vasti orizzonti, era stato Johann Gottfried Herder con le sue *Idee sulla filosofia della storia dell’umanità* (1784–91), lui che tra l’altro si era già dedicato nel 1782 allo *Spirito della poesia ebraica*. L’idea, però, balenava ancora nel pensiero di Vico, Montesquieu e Voltaire che riconoscevano nelle evoluzioni e involuzioni storiche, negli stessi condizionamenti ambientali, nell’incipiente incontro tra i popoli, al seguito delle varie scoperte, nelle prime osmosi ideali, sociali ed economiche, l’emergere di un pluralismo culturale.

Certo, questo approccio si innestava all’interno di una dialettica antica, quella che — con qualche semplificazione — vedevano incrociarsi etnocentrismo e comparativismo. È stata costante, infatti, l’oscillazione tra questi due estremi e noi ne siamo ancor oggi testimoni. L’*etnocentrismo* si esaspera in ambiti politici o religiosi di stampo integralistico, aggrappati fieramente alla convinzione del primato assoluto della propria civiltà, in una scala di gradazioni che giungono fino al deprezzamento di altre culture classificate come “primitive” o “barbare”. Lapidaria era l’affermazione di Tito Livio nelle sue *Storie*: “Guerra esiste e sempre esisterà tra i barbari e tutti i greci” (31, 29). Questo atteggiamento è riproposto ai nostri giorni sotto la formula dello “scontro di civiltà”, codificata nell’ormai famoso saggio del 1996 del politologo Samuel Huntington, scomparso nel 2008, *Lo scontro delle civiltà e il nuovo ordine mondiale*.

phenomenon that led not a few observers to change the terminology from “globalization” to “glocalization”.

This explains why the contemporary Church prefers to avoid the term “acculturation”, and use “inculturation” instead, to describe the work of evangelization. John Paul II, in *Slavorum Apostoli* of 1985, defined inculturation as “the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church”. A dual dialogical movement of exchange, therefore, by which—as John Paul II said to the bishops of Kenya in 1980—“a culture, transformed and regenerated by the Gospel, brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought”. Thus, the term “inculturation” denotes, especially at a theological level, a co-penetration between Christianity and cultures in a fruitful encounter, which was gloriously corroborated by the encounter between the Christian theology of the first centuries and the mighty Greek-Roman classical heritage.

ETHNOCENTRISM AND COMPARATIVISM

At this point, it is only natural that we should consider—albeit in a very essential way—the question of the more specific relationship and the interactions between the different cultures that come into contact with each other. As we said previously, the term *Cultur/Kultur* was coined in Germany during the eighteenth century, and people began to speak also of “cultures” in the plural, thus laying the foundations for recognizing and understanding the phenomenon we now define as “multiculturality”. This path, which surpassed the Eurocentric and intellectualistic perimeter and opened the way to new and wider horizons, was inaugurated by Johann Gottfried Herder with his *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784–91); among other things, in 1782 he had already produced the work *On the Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*. The idea, however, was still being elaborated in the thought of Vico, Montesquieu and Voltaire, who recognized the emergence of a cultural pluralism in the historical evolutions and involutions, environmental conditionings and the incipient encounter between peoples, in the wake of the various discoveries, in the first ideal, social and economic osmoses.

Undoubtedly, this approach was inserted into an ancient dialectic which—simplifying matters somewhat—saw the intersection of ethnocentrism and comparativism. There has been a constant fluctuation between these two extremes and we are still witnesses of this today. *Ethnocentrism* becomes exasperated in political or religious fields that bear the mark of integralism, proudly clinging to the conviction of the absolute primacy of their own civilization, on a scale of various degrees that even result in the depreciation of other cultures, which are classified as “primitive” or “barbarous”. Tito Livio, in his *History of Rome*, succinctly states: “With foreigners and barbarians, all Greeks ever have been and ever will be at war” (31, 29). This attitude is proposed again to us today, under the guise of the “clash of civilizations”, which was codified in the famous essay, *The Clash of Civiliza-*

In questo testo erano elencate otto culture (occidentale, confuciana, giapponese, islamica, hindu, slavo-ortodossa, latino-americana e africana), enfatizzandone le differenze, così da far scattare nell'Occidente un segnale d'allarme per l'autodifesa del proprio tesoro di valori, assediato da modelli alternativi e dalle "sfide delle società non-occidentali". Significativa in questa visione era l'intuizione che, sotto la superficie dei fenomeni politici, economici, militari, si aveva uno zoccolo duro e profondo di matrice culturale e religiosa. Certo è, però, che, se si adotta il paradigma dello "scontro delle civiltà", si entra nella spirale di una guerra infinita, come già aveva intuito Tito Livio. Ai nostri giorni tale modello ha fortuna in alcuni ambienti, soprattutto quando si affronta il rapporto tra Occidente e Islam, e può essere adattato a manifesto teorico per giustificare operazioni politico-militari di "prevenzione", mentre in passato avallava interventi di colonizzazione o colonialismo (già i Romani erano in questo maestri).

Il *comparativismo* è, invece, un termine non proprio felice usato per indicare un ben differente approccio alla multiculturalità. Esso si basa sul riconoscimento della diversità come una fioritura necessaria e preziosa della radice comune "adamica". Si propone, allora, l'attenzione, lo studio, il dialogo con civiltà prima ignorate o remote, ma che ora si affacciano prepotentemente su una ribalta culturale finora occupata dall'Occidente (si pensi, oltre all'Islam, all'India e alla Cina), un affacciarsi che è favorito non solo dall'attuale globalizzazione, ma anche da mezzi di comunicazione capaci di varcare ogni frontiera (la rete informatica ne è il simbolo capitale). Queste culture, "nuove" per l'Occidente, esigono un'interlocuzione, spesso imposta dalla loro presenza imperiosa, tant'è vero che ormai si tende a parlare di "glocalizzazione" come nuovo fenomeno di interazione planetaria.

L'INTERCULTURALITÀ

Di fronte a questa dialettica tra etnocentrismo e comparativismo, che ha come terreno di attuazione la multiculturalità, può essere configurato un approccio che potremmo ora abbozzare in modo molto sintetico e approssimativo e che sarebbe possibile definire come *interculturalità*. Si tratta di un impegno complesso di confronto e di dialogo, di interscambio culturale e spirituale, che potremmo rappresentare in modo emblematico — in sede teologica cristiana — proprio attraverso la stessa caratteristica fondamentale della Sacra Scrittura. La Parola di Dio non è, infatti, un aerolito sacrale piombato dal cielo, bensì l'intreccio tra *Logos* divino e *sarx* storica. Si è, così, in presenza di un confronto dinamico tra la Rivelazione e le varie civiltà, dalla nomadica alla fenicio-cananea, dalla mesopotamica all'egizia, dall'hittita alla persiana e alla greco-ellenistica, almeno per quanto riguarda l'Antico Testamento, mentre la Rivelazione neotestamentaria si è incrociata col giudaismo palestinese e della Diaspora, con la cultura greco-romana e persino con le forme culturali pagane.

Giovanni Paolo II, nel 1979, affermava davanti alla Pontificia Commissione Biblica che, ancor prima di farsi carne in Gesù Cristo, "la stessa Parola divina s'era fatta linguaggio umano, assumendo i modi di esprimersi delle diverse culture che da Abramo

tions and the Remaking of World Order, written in 1996 by the political scientist, Samuel Huntington, who died in 2008.

This text listed eight cultures (Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slav-Orthodox, Latin American and African), emphasizing their differences to the extent that it set off alarm bells in the West for the self-defense of its own patrimony of values, which were under siege from alternative models and the “challenges of non-Western societies”. An important intuition perceived that there was a hard and profound core of a cultural and religious matrix beneath the surface of political, economic and military phenomena. Undoubtedly, however, if we adopt the “clash of civilizations” paradigm, we become entangled in the spiral of an unending war, something that Tito Livio clearly understood. In our own times, such a model has found favor in certain contexts, especially when we consider the relationship between the West and Islam, and it can be used as a theoretical manifesto to justify political-military operations of “prevention”, whilst in the past it endorsed interventions of colonization or colonialism (the Romans were masters in this).

Comparativism, instead, though not exactly the best term, is used to indicate a very different approach to multiculturality. It is based on the recognition of diversity as a necessary and precious flourishing of our common “Adamic” roots. Consequently, attention is focused on study and dialogue with previously ignored or remote civilizations, which now forcefully emerge into the cultural limelight that was until now occupied by the West (besides Islam, we can think also of India and China), an emergence that is favored, not only by the current globalization, but also by means of communication that cross every frontier (the world wide web is its capital symbol). These cultures, which are “new” to the West, demand an interlocution that is often imposed by their imperious presence, to such an extent that we now tend to speak of “glocalization” as a new phenomenon of planetary interaction.

INTERCULTURALITY

In the context of this debate between ethnocentrism and comparativism, whose terrain of implementation is multiculturality, we can configure an approach that we shall now outline in a very brief and approximate manner, and which we could define as *interculturality*. It is a complex task of comparison and dialogue, of cultural and spiritual exchange, which we could represent in an emblematic manner—in the Christian theological context—through the fundamental characteristic of Sacred Scripture. The Word of God is not a sacred aerolite that has fallen from the sky but, rather, the interweaving of the divine *Logos* and historical *sarx*. Thus, we are in the presence of a dynamic comparison between revelation and the various civilizations, from the nomadic to the Phoenician-Cananite, from the Mesopotamian to the Egyptian, from the Hittite to the Persian and the Greek-Hellenistic civilizations, at least as far as the Old Testament is concerned, whilst the New

al Veggente dell'Apocalisse hanno offerto al mistero adorabile dell'amore salvifico di Dio la possibilità di rendersi accessibile e comprensibile alle varie generazioni, malgrado la molteplice diversità delle loro situazioni storiche". La stessa esperienza di osmosi feconda tra Cristianesimo e culture — che dette origine all' "inculturazione" del messaggio cristiano in civiltà lontane (si pensi solo all'opera di Matteo Ricci nel mondo cinese) — è stata costante anche nella Tradizione a partire dai Padri della Chiesa. Basti citare un passo della *Prima Apologia* di s. Giustino (II sec.): "Del *Logos* divino fu partecipe tutto il genere umano e coloro che vissero secondo il *Logos* sono cristiani, anche se furono giudicati atei, come fra i Greci Socrate ed Eraclito e altri come loro" (46, 2-3).

PER UN AUTENTICO DIALOGO

Non si può ignorare, però, che in questo dialogo interculturale e interreligioso sono in agguato anche alcuni rischi. Non possiamo, nello spazio ridotto di questa nota, aprire il recente complesso capitolo del dialogo tra le religioni. Aveva ragione il teologo Heinz R. Schlette quando, già nel 1963, nel suo saggio *Le religioni come tema della teologia* osservava che "ci si trovava di fronte a un terreno dogmaticamente nuovo, paragonabile alle zone in bianco degli antichi atlanti". Al tradizionale paradigma dell'"esclusivismo" (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) si è sostituito quello dell'"inclusivismo", suggerito soprattutto da Karl Rahner, mentre il Concilio Vaticano II dava impulso "al dialogo e alla collaborazione dei cristiani coi seguaci delle altre religioni" (*Nostra Aetate* 2), così come si tentavano mediazioni ulteriori tra i due citati paradigmi con la proposta di un Cristianesimo "relazionale".

Ma si poteva anche procedere verso la deriva di un pluralismo che in pratica faceva perdere l'identità alla teologia cristiana stingendone, se non estinguendone, il volto proprio. Si pensi, ad esempio, al cosiddetto paradigma "geocentrico" proposto dal teologo presbiteriano britannico John Hick nelle sue opere *Dio e l'universo delle fedi* (1973) e *Dio ha molti nomi* (1980), destinato a cancellare la specificità cristologica. In sede meno teorica e più etico-politica — e, quindi, con minore assertività — si muoveva anche il noto *Progetto per un'etica mondiale*, elaborato nel 1990 da Hans Küng e adottato dal "Parlamento delle religioni" di Chicago nel 1993: esso si basava su un consenso morale minimo verso cui le grandi tradizioni culturali e religiose dovevano convergere per essere al servizio dell'*humanum*, così da creare un mondo "giusto, pacifico e sostenibile".

Se è vero che il fondamentalismo etnocentrico e integralistico è la negazione esplicita dell'interculturalità, lo sono però anche le forme di sincretismo e relativismo, che più facilmente tentano civiltà stanche e divenute meno identitarie come quelle occidentali. Anche questo atteggiamento — come quello che propone vaghe religioni "unitarie" su pallidi e inoffensivi denominatori comuni (ne sono esempi le tesi dello storico inglese Arnold Toynbee o del pensatore indiano Vivekananda) — si oppone al vero dialogo. Esso, infatti, suppone nei due soggetti un confronto di identità e di valori, certo per un arricchimento reciproco, ma non per una dissoluzione in una generica confusione o in

Testament Revelation encountered the Palestinian Judaism and the Diaspora, with the Greek-Roman culture and pagan cultic expressions.

In 1979, John Paul II, in an address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, declared that, even before becoming flesh in Jesus Christ, “the same divine Word had previously become human language, assuming the ways of expression of the different cultures which, from Abraham to the seer of the Apocalypse, offered the adorable mystery of God’s salvific love the possibility of becoming accessible and understandable for successive generations, in spite of the multiple diversity of their historical situations”. The experience of fruitful osmosis between Christianity and cultures—which gave birth to the “inculturation” of the Christian message in far-off civilizations (we only have to remember the work of Matteo Ricci in the Chinese world)—was also a constant element in the Tradition that began with the Fathers of the Church. We only have to quote a passage from the *First Apology* of St. Justin Martyr (II century): “We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the *Logos* of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them” (46, 2–3).

FOR AN AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore that there are some underlying risks in this intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Lack of space prevents us from looking further into the recent complex dialogue among the religions, but the theologian Heinz R. Schlette was right when, back in 1963, he observed in his essay *Towards a Theology of Religions* that “we find ourselves on a new dogmatic terrain, which can be compared to the white areas of ancient atlases”. The traditional paradigm of “exclusivism” (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) has been replaced by “inclusivism”, suggested above all by Karl Rahner, while the Second Vatican Council pushed for “dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions” (*Nostra Aetate* 2), and further mediations were attempted between these paradigms with the proposal of a “relational” Christianity.

Yet we could also have drifted towards a pluralism that would practically strip Christian theology of its identity by restricting, if not extinguishing, its own nature. By way of example, we only have to think of the so-called “geocentric” paradigm proposed by the British Presbyterian theologian, John Hick, in his two works *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973) and *God Has Many Names* (1980), which aimed at cancelling the Christological specificity. In a less theoretical and more ethical-political context—and, therefore, with less assertiveness—we also have the famous *Toward a Global Ethic*, elaborated in 1990 by Hans Küng and adopted in 1993 by the “Parliament of the World’s Religions” of Chicago: it is based on a minimum moral consensus towards which the great cultural and religious traditions should converge in order to be at the service of the *humanum*, in view of building a “just, peaceful and sustainable” world.

un appiattimento. Come l'eccesso di affermazione identitaria può diventare duello non soltanto teorico, ma anche armato, così il concordismo generico può degenerare in un incolore uniformismo o in una "con-fusione" relativistica. Conservare l'armonia della diversità nel dialogo e nell'incontro, come accade nel duetto musicale (che crea armonia pur nella radicale differenza dei timbri di un basso e di un soprano), è la meta di una genuina e feconda esperienza multiculturale e interculturale.

GIANFRANCO RAVASI
Presidente
Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura

If it is true that ethnocentric and integralistic fundamentalism is an explicit denial of interculturality, the same can be said of the expressions of syncretism and relativism, which are more easily tempting to tired civilizations that have become weaker in their identity-making, such as the western civilizations. This attitude—like those that proposes vague “unitary” religions based on pale and inoffensive common denominators (for example, the theories of the English historian, Arnold Toynbee, or of the Indian thinker Vivekananda)—oppose authentic dialogue. True dialogue, in fact, presupposes that the two partners compare ideas and values, certainly for a mutual enrichment, but not for a dissolution in a generic confusion or in a leveling out. Just as the excess of identity assertion can become, not only a theoretical duel, but also armed conflict, so also can a generic concordism degenerate into a colorless uniformism or a relativistic “con-fusion”. The preservation of the harmony of diversity in dialogue and encounter, as we see in a musical duet (which creates harmony even in the radical difference of tone between a basso and a soprano), is the goal of a genuine and fruitful multicultural and intercultural experience.

GIANFRANCO RAVASI
 President
 Pontifical Council for Culture

Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

GAUDIUM ET SPES (1965)

*Pastoral Constitution on the Church
in the Modern World* — nos. 53–62

53 Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Wherever human life is involved, therefore, nature and culture are quite intimately connected one with the other.

The word “culture” in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.

Thence it follows that human culture has necessarily a historical and social aspect and the word “culture” also often assumes a sociological and ethnological sense. According to this sense we speak of a plurality of cultures. Different styles of life and multiple

scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of laboring, of expressing oneself, of practicing religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridic institutions of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty. Thus the customs handed down to it form the patrimony proper to each human community. It is also in this way that there is formed the definite, historical milieu which enfolds the man of every nation and age and from which he draws the values which permit him to promote civilization.

54 The circumstances of the life of modern man have been so profoundly changed in their social and cultural aspects, that we can speak of a new age of human history.¹ New ways are open, therefore, for the perfection and the further extension of culture. These ways have been prepared by the enormous growth of natural, human and social sciences, by technical progress, and advances in developing and organizing means whereby men can communicate with one another.

Hence the culture of today possesses particular characteristics: sciences which are called exact greatly develop critical judgment; the more recent psychological studies more profoundly explain human activity; historical studies make it much easier to see things in their mutable and evolutionary aspects, customs and usages are becoming more and more uniform; industrialization, urbanization, and other causes which promote community living create a mass-culture from which are born new ways of thinking, acting and making use of leisure. The increase of commerce between the various nations and human groups opens more widely to all the treasures of different civilizations and thus little by little, there develops a more universal form of human culture, which better promotes and expresses the unity of the human race to the degree that it preserves the particular aspects of the different civilizations.

55 From day to day, in every group or nation, there is an increase in the number of men and women who are conscious that they themselves are the authors and the artisans of the culture of their community. Throughout the whole world there is a mounting increase in the sense of autonomy as well as of responsibility. This is of paramount importance for the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race. This becomes more clear if we consider the unification of the world and the duty which is imposed upon us, that we build a better world based upon truth and justice. Thus we are witnesses of the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all by this responsibility to his brothers and to history.

56 In these conditions, it is no cause of wonder that man, who senses his responsibility for the progress of culture, nourishes a high hope but also looks with anxiety upon many contradictory things which he must resolve.

What is to be done to prevent the increased exchanges between cultures, which should lead to a true and fruitful dialogue between groups and nations, from disturbing the life

1. Cf. Introductory statement of this constitution, n. 4 ff.

of communities, from destroying the wisdom received from ancestors, or from placing in danger the character proper to each people?

How is the dynamism and expansion of a new culture to be fostered without losing a living fidelity to the heritage of tradition. This question is of particular urgency when a culture which arises from the enormous progress of science and technology must be harmonized with a culture nourished by classical studies according to various traditions.

How can we quickly and progressively harmonize the proliferation of particular branches of study with the necessity of forming a synthesis of them, and of preserving among men the faculties of contemplation and observation which lead to wisdom?

What can be done to make all men partakers of cultural values in the world, when the human culture of those who are more competent is constantly becoming more refined and more complex?

Finally how is the autonomy which culture claims for itself to be recognized as legitimate without generating a notion of humanism which is merely terrestrial, and even contrary to religion itself.

In the midst of these conflicting requirements, human culture must evolve today in such a way that it can both develop the whole human person and aid man in those duties to whose fulfillment all are called, especially Christians fraternally united in one human family.

57 Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and think of these things which are above.² This duty in no way decreases, rather it increases, the importance of their obligation to work with all men in the building of a more human world. Indeed, the mystery of the Christian faith furnishes them with an excellent stimulant and aid to fulfill this duty more courageously and especially to uncover the full meaning of this activity, one which gives to human culture its eminent place in the integral vocation of man.

When man develops the earth by the work of his hands or with the aid of technology, in order that it might bear fruit and become a dwelling worthy of the whole human family and when he consciously takes part in the life of social groups, he carries out the design of God manifested at the beginning of time, that he should subdue the earth,³ perfect creation and develop himself. At the same time he obeys the commandment of Christ that he place himself at the service of his brethren.

Furthermore, when man gives himself to the various disciplines of philosophy, history and of mathematical and natural science, and when he cultivates the arts, he can do very much to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and to the formation of considered opinions which have universal value. Thus mankind may be more clearly enlightened by that marvelous Wisdom which was with

2. Cf. Col. 3:2.

3. Cf. Gen. 1:28.

God from all eternity, composing all things with him, rejoicing in the earth, delighting in the sons of men.⁴

In this way, the human spirit, being less subjected to material things, can be more easily drawn to the worship and contemplation of the Creator. Moreover, by the impulse of grace, he is disposed to acknowledge the Word of God, Who before He became flesh in order to save all and to sum up all in Himself was already “in the world” as “the true light which enlightens every man” (John 1:9–10).⁵

Indeed today’s progress in science and technology can foster a certain exclusive emphasis on observable data, and an agnosticism about everything else. For the methods of investigation which these sciences use can be wrongly considered as the supreme rule of seeking the whole truth. By virtue of their methods these sciences cannot penetrate to the intimate notion of things. Indeed the danger is present that man, confiding too much in the discoveries of today, may think that he is sufficient unto himself and no longer seek the higher things.

Those unfortunate results, however, do not necessarily follow from the culture of today, nor should they lead us into the temptation of not acknowledging its positive values. Among these values are included: scientific study and fidelity toward truth in scientific inquiries, the necessity of working together with others in technical groups, a sense of international solidarity, a clearer awareness of the responsibility of experts to aid and even to protect men, the desire to make the conditions of life more favorable for all, especially for those who are poor in culture or who are deprived of the opportunity to exercise responsibility. All of these provide some preparation for the acceptance of the message of the Gospel a preparation which can be animated by divine charity through Him Who has come to save the world.

58 There are many ties between the message of salvation and human culture. For God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself in His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to each epoch. Likewise the Church, living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures so that in her preaching she might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, that she might examine it and more deeply understand it, that she might give it better expression in liturgical celebration and in the varied life of the community of the faithful.

But at the same time, the Church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary way of life recent or ancient. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church herself.

4. Cf. Prov. 8:30–31.

5. Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*. III, 11, 8 (ed. Sagnard, p. 200; cf. *ibid.*, 16, 6: 290–92; 21, 10–22: 370–72; 22, 3: 378; etc.)

The Gospel of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of fallen man, it combats and removes the errors and evils resulting from the permanent allurements of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. By riches coming from above, it makes fruitful, as it were from within, the spiritual qualities and traditions of every people of every age. It strengthens, perfects and restores⁶ them in Christ. Thus the Church, in the very fulfillment of her own function,⁷ stimulates and advances human and civic culture; by her action, also by her liturgy, she leads them toward interior liberty.

59 For the above reasons, the Church recalls to the mind of all that culture is to be subordinated to the integral perfection of the human person, to the good of the community and of the whole society. Therefore it is necessary to develop the human faculties in such a way that there results a growth of the faculty of admiration, of intuition, of contemplation, of making personal judgment, of developing a religious, moral and social sense.

Culture, because it flows immediately from the spiritual and social character of man, has constant need of a just liberty in order to develop; it needs also the legitimate possibility of exercising its autonomy according to its own principles. It therefore rightly demands respect and enjoys a certain inviolability within the limits of the common good, as long, of course, as it preserves the rights of the individual and the community, whether particular or universal. This Sacred Synod, therefore, recalling the teaching of the first Vatican Council, declares that there are “two orders of knowledge” which are distinct, namely faith and reason; and that the Church does not forbid that “the human arts and disciplines use their own principles and their proper method, each in its own domain”; therefore “acknowledging this just liberty,” this Sacred Synod affirms the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences.⁸

All this supposes that, within the limits of morality and the common utility, man can freely search for the truth, express his opinion and publish it; that he can practice any art he chooses: that finally, he can avail himself of true information concerning events of a public nature.⁹ As for public authority, it is not its function to determine the character of the civilization, but rather to establish the conditions and to use the means which are capable of fostering the life of culture among and even within the minorities of a nation.¹⁰ It is necessary to do everything possible to prevent culture from being turned away from its proper end and made to serve as an instrument of political or economic power.

6. Cf. Eph. 1:10.

7. Cf. the words of Pius XI to Father M. D. Roland-Gosselin “It is necessary never to lose sight of the fact that the objective of the Church is to evangelize, not to civilize. If it civilizes, it is for the sake of evangelization.” (*Semaines sociales de France*, Versailles, 1936, 461–62).

8. First Vatican Council, Constitution on the Catholic Faith: Denzinger 1795, 1799 (3015, 3019). Cf. Pius XI, Encyclical letter *Quadragesimo Anno*: AAS 23 (1931), 190.

9. Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 260.

10. Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 283; Pius XII, radio address, Dec. 24, 1941: AAS 34 (1942), 16–7.

60 It is now possible to free most of humanity from the misery of ignorance. Therefore the duty most consonant with our times, especially for Christians, is that of working diligently for fundamental decisions to be taken in economic and political affairs, both on the national and international level which will everywhere recognize and satisfy the right of all to a human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of the human person without any discrimination of race, sex, nation, religion or social condition. Therefore it is necessary to provide all with a sufficient quantity of cultural benefits, especially of those which constitute the so-called fundamental culture lest very many be prevented from cooperating in the promotion of the common good in a truly human manner because of illiteracy and a lack of responsible activity.

We must strive to provide for those men who are gifted the possibility of pursuing higher studies; and in such a way that, as far as possible, they may occupy in society those duties, offices and services which are in harmony with their natural aptitude and the competence they have acquired.¹¹ Thus each man and the social groups of every people will be able to attain the full development of their culture in conformity with their qualities and traditions.

Everything must be done to make everyone conscious of the right to culture and the duty he has of developing himself culturally and of helping others. Sometimes there exist conditions of life and of work which impede the cultural striving of men and destroy in them the eagerness for culture. This is especially true of farmers and workers. It is necessary to provide for them those working conditions which will not impede their human culture but rather favor it. Women now work in almost all spheres. It is fitting that they are able to assume their proper role in accordance with their own nature. It will belong to all to acknowledge and favor the proper and necessary participation of women in the cultural life.

61 Today it is more difficult to form a synthesis of the various disciplines of knowledge and the arts than it was formerly. For while the mass and the diversity of cultural factors are increasing, there is a decrease in each man's faculty of perceiving and unifying these things, so that the image of "universal man" is being lost sight of more and more. Nevertheless it remains each man's duty to retain an understanding of the whole human person in which the values of intellect, will, conscience and fraternity are preeminent. These values are all rooted in God the Creator and have been wonderfully restored and elevated in Christ.

The family is, as it were, the primary mother and nurse of this education. There, the children, in an atmosphere of love, more easily learn the correct order of things, while proper forms of human culture impress themselves in an almost unconscious manner upon the mind of the developing adolescent. Opportunities for the same education are to be found also in the societies of today, due especially to the increased circulation of books

11. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 260.

and to the new means of cultural and social communication which can foster a universal culture. With the more or less generalized reduction of working hours, the leisure time of most men has increased. May this leisure be used properly to relax, to fortify the health of soul and body through spontaneous study and activity, through tourism which refines man's character and enriches him with understanding of others, through sports activity which helps to preserve equilibrium of spirit even in the community, and to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races. Let Christians cooperate so that the cultural manifestations and collective activity characteristic of our time may be imbued with a human and a Christian spirit. All these leisure activities however are not able to bring man to a full cultural development unless there is at the same time a profound inquiry into the meaning of culture and science for the human person.

62 Although the Church has contributed much to the development of culture, experience shows that, for circumstantial reasons, it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching. These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith, rather they can stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith. The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which affect life and which demand new theological investigations. Furthermore, theologians, within the requirements and methods proper to theology, are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another.¹² In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith.

Literature and the arts are also, in their own way, of great importance to the life of the Church. They strive to make known the proper nature of man, his problems and his experiences in trying to know and perfect both himself and the world. They have much to do with revealing man's place in history and in the world; with illustrating the miseries and joys, the needs and strengths of man and with foreshadowing a better life for him. Thus they are able to elevate human life, expressed in multifold forms according to various times and regions. Efforts must be made so that those who foster these arts feel that the Church recognizes their activity and so that, enjoying orderly liberty, they may initiate more friendly relations with the Christian community. The Church acknowledges also new forms of art which are adapted to our age and are in keeping with the characteristics of various nations and regions. They may be brought into the sanctuary since they raise the mind to God, once the manner of expression is adapted and they are conformed to liturgical requirements.¹³

12. Cf. John XXIII, Prayer proclaimed on Oct. 11, 1962, at the beginning of the Council: AAS 54 (1962), 792.

13. Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n. 123: AAS 56 (1964), p. 131; Paul VI, Discourse to the artists of Rome: AAS 56 (1964), 439–42.

Thus the knowledge of God is better manifested and the preaching of the Gospel becomes clearer to human intelligence and shows itself to be relevant to man's actual conditions of life.

May the faithful, therefore, live in very close union with the other men of their time and may they strive to understand perfectly their way of thinking and judging, as expressed in their culture. Let them blend new sciences and theories and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with Christian morality and the teaching of Christian doctrine, so that their religious culture and morality may keep pace with scientific knowledge and with the constantly progressing technology. Thus they will be able to interpret and evaluate all things in a truly Christian spirit.

Let those who teach theology in seminaries and universities strive to collaborate with men versed in the other sciences through a sharing of their resources and points of view. Theological inquiry should pursue a profound understanding of revealed truth; at the same time it should not neglect close contact with its own time that it may be able to help these men skilled in various disciplines to attain to a better understanding of the faith. This common effort will greatly aid the formation of priests, who will be able to present to our contemporaries the doctrine of the Church concerning God, man and the world, in a manner more adapted to them so that they may receive it more willingly.¹⁴

Furthermore, it is to be hoped that many of the laity will receive a sufficient formation in the sacred sciences and that some will dedicate themselves professionally to these studies, developing and deepening them by their own labors. In order that they may fulfill their function, let it be recognized that all the faithful, whether clerics or laity, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought and of expressing their mind with humility and fortitude in those matters on which they enjoy competence.¹⁵

14. Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Priestly Training and Declaration on Christian Education*.

15. Cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Chapter IV, n. 37: AAS 57 (1965), 42–3.

Encyclical Letters and Apostolic Exhortations

AFRICÆ TERRARUM (1967)

Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI
nos. 7–14

7It has always pleased me to see that studies on Africa are increasing and that knowledge of its history and traditions is spreading. If done in an honest and objective manner, this can only lead to a more accurate understanding of its past and present.

Although there is a lack of written documentation, the most recent ethnic history of the peoples of Africa appears quite complex and rich in its own characteristic individuality and spiritual and social experiences, which specialists continue to analyze and deepen with good results. Many customs and rites, which were once looked upon as bizarre and primitive, reveal themselves, in the light of today's ethnological knowledge, as integrating elements of particular social systems that are worthy of study and respect.

In connection with this, it seems appropriate that we should examine some general and typical concepts of ancient African cultures because their moral and religious value deserve our careful consideration.

8 A spiritual vision of life is the constant and general foundation of African tradition. It is not simply a matter of the so-called “animistic” idea, in the sense that was given to this word throughout the history of religions at the end of the last century. Instead, it is a more profound, vast and universal concept, according to which all beings and visible nature are looked upon as being bound to the world of the invisible and the spirit. In a particular way, man is never considered only as matter, which is limited to the earthly life; rather, within him there is a spiritual element by which human life is always placed in relationship with the hereafter.

The notion of God is a very important element of this spiritual idea, as the first and ultimate cause of all things. This notion, which is more a matter of perception than analysis, lived out more than thought about, is given a different expression from culture to culture. The presence of God permeates African life as the presence of a superior, personal and mysterious being.

People turn to this being in the most critical moments of life, when the intercession of every other intermediary is seen to be useless. Overcoming the fear of his omnipotence, God is almost always invoked as Father. The individual or collective prayers that are addressed to Him are spontaneous and sometimes moving; whilst among the forms of sacrifice practiced, the sacrifice of the first fruits stands out for its clarity of meaning.

9 The respect for human dignity is another common characteristic of African tradition. It is true that there were aberrations and rites that seem to be in strident contrast with the respect that is due to the human person; however, these aberrations were endured by their protagonists and, just like slavery, they have, thanks be to God, either completely disappeared or are about to disappear.

Respect for the person is visible, though not in a systematic manner, in traditional family education, the social initiations and in participation in social and political life, according to the traditional order that is proper to each people.

10 The family is a typical element of African tradition. It is important to emphasize the moral and religious value of the attachment to the family, further prove of which is the bond with the ancestors, which is expressed in many widespread cultic manifestations.

For the Africans, the family is the natural setting in which a person is born and lives, finds the necessary protection and security and, ultimately, continuity beyond earthly life through union with the ancestors.

11 In the family, the role and the authority of the father is respected, and even though this does not happen everywhere to the same degree, it is so widespread and has such deep roots that it is rightly considered to be a characteristic sign of African tradition in general.

The *patria potestas* is profoundly respected also in the African societies based on the matriarchate where, although the rights to property and the social condition of children

are determined by the mother, the moral authority of the father in the domestic organization remains nevertheless intact.

This concept in some African cultures gives a father typically priestly functions, through which he acts as mediator, not only between the ancestors and his family, but also between the family and God, by performing the cultic acts established by custom.

12 As far as community life is concerned—which was almost the extension of the family in African tradition—we can see that participation in the life of the community, with relatives and in the wider public life, is considered to be a precise duty and a right of every person. The individual achieves this right only after a process of preparation through a series of initiations, the purpose of which is to form the character of the young candidates and instruct them on the traditions and customary norms of society.

13 Today, Africa is moving towards new forms of life thanks to the progress made possible by science and technology. This is not in contradiction with the essential values of the moral and religious tradition of the past, which we described succinctly earlier, belonging as they do in some way to the natural law, which is innate in the heart of every person and which is the foundation of the ordered co-existence of peoples of all ages.

This is why it is right that we should respect its legacy as a cultural heritage of the past, but it is equally right that its meaning and expression be renewed. Nevertheless, in the face of modern civilization, it is sometimes necessary “to choose wisely from among the things that are offered. We must test and reject false values that would tarnish a truly human way of life, while accepting noble and useful values in order to develop them in their own distinctive way”.¹ New forms of life will thus be born from all that is good in the old and in the new, and they will offer themselves to the young generations as a valid and meaningful heritage.

14 The Church has great respect for the moral and religious values of African tradition, not only for their meaning, but also because she sees in them the providential foundation for the proclamation of the gospel message and for setting in motion the building of a new society in Christ, as We pointed out at the canonization of the Ugandan Martyrs, who are the first fruits of the Christian holiness of the new Africa, which sprung from the living stock of ancient tradition.²

The teaching of Jesus Christ and his redemption constitute the accomplishment, renewal and perfection of everything good in human tradition. This is why an African, when he becomes a Christian, does not deny himself, but takes up again the ancient values of tradition “in spirit and in truth”.³

1. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, 41: AAS 59 (1967), 278.

2. Cf. *Homily*, October 18, 1964: AAS 56 (1964), 907 ss.

3. Jn. 4, 24.

EVANGELII NUNTIANDI (1975)

Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI
nos. 19–20, 63–64

19 Strata of humanity which are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.

20 All this could be expressed in the following words: what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*,¹ always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

¹ Cf. 53: AAS 58 (1966), 1075.

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.

63 The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world, which distinguish this or that human gathering, have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.

The transposition has to be done with the discernment, seriousness, respect and competence which the matter calls for in the field of liturgical expression,² and in the areas of catechesis, theological formulation, secondary ecclesial structures, and ministries. And the word “language” should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological and cultural.

The question is undoubtedly a delicate one. Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it; if, in other words, one sacrifices this reality and destroys the unity without which there is no universality, out of a wish to adapt a universal reality to a local situation. Now, only a Church which preserves the awareness of her universality and shows that she is in fact universal is capable of having a message which can be heard by all, regardless of regional frontiers.

Legitimate attention to individual Churches cannot fail to enrich the Church. Such attention is indispensable and urgent. It responds to the very deep aspirations of peoples and human communities to find their own identity ever more clearly.

2. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37–8: AAS 56 (1964), 110; cf. also the liturgical books and other documents subsequently issued by the Holy See for the putting into practice of the liturgical reform desired by the same Council

64 But this enrichment requires that the individual Churches should keep their profound openness towards the universal Church. It is quite remarkable, moreover, that the most simple Christians, the ones who are most faithful to the Gospel and most open to the true meaning of the Church, have a completely spontaneous sensitivity to this universal dimension. They instinctively and very strongly feel the need for it, they easily recognize themselves in such a dimension. They feel with it and suffer very deeply within themselves when, in the name of theories which they do not understand, they are forced to accept a Church deprived of this universality, a regionalist Church, with no horizon.

As history in fact shows, whenever an individual Church has cut itself off from the universal Church and from its living and visible center—sometimes with the best of intentions, with theological, sociological, political or pastoral arguments, or even in the desire for a certain freedom of movement or action—it has escaped only with great difficulty (if indeed it has escaped) from two equally serious dangers. The first danger is that of a withering isolationism, and then, before long, of a crumbling away, with each of its cells breaking away from it just as it itself has broken away from the central nucleus. The second danger is that of losing its freedom when, being cut off from the center and from the other Churches which gave it strength and energy, it finds itself all alone and a prey to the most varied forces of slavery and exploitation.

The more an individual Church is attached to the universal Church by solid bonds of communion, in charity and loyalty, in receptiveness to the Magisterium of Peter, in the unity of the *lex orandi* which is also the *lex credendi*, in the desire for unity with all the other Churches which make up the whole—the more such a Church will be capable of translating the treasure of faith into the legitimate variety of expressions of the profession of faith, of prayer and worship, of Christian life and conduct and of the spiritual influence on the people among which it dwells. The more will it also be truly evangelizing, that is to say, capable of drawing upon the universal patrimony in order to enable its own people to profit from it, and capable too of communicating to the universal Church the experience and the life of this people, for the benefit of all.

CATECHESI TRADENDAE (1979)

Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

no. 53

53 Now a second question. As I said recently to the members of the Biblical Commission: “The term ‘acculturation’ or ‘inculturation’ may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the Incarnation.”¹ We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures.

For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery² and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought. Two things must however be kept in mind.

On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the

1. Cf. AAS 71 (1979), 607.

2. Cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:5.

biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.

On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with the cultures.

To forget this would simply amount to what St. Paul very forcefully calls “emptying the cross of Christ of its power.”³

It is a different matter to take, with wise discernment, certain elements, religious or otherwise, that form part of the cultural heritage of a human group and use them to help its members to understand better the whole of the Christian mystery. Genuine catechists know that catechesis “takes flesh” in the various cultures and *milieux*: one has only to think of the peoples with their great differences, of modern youth, of the great variety of circumstances in which people find themselves today. But they refuse to accept an impoverishment of catechesis through a renunciation or obscuring of its message, by adaptations, even in language, that would endanger the “precious deposit” of the faith,⁴ or by concessions in matters of faith or morals. They are convinced that true catechesis eventually enriches these cultures by helping them to go beyond the defective or even inhuman features in them, and by communicating to their legitimate values the fullness of Christ.⁵

3. 1 Cor. 1:17.

4. Cf. 2 Tm. 1:14.

5. Cf. Jn. 1:16; Eph. 1:10.

SLAVORUM APOSTOLI (1985)

Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II

nos. 21–22

21 The Brothers from Salonika were not only heirs of the faith but also heirs of the culture of Ancient Greece, continued by Byzantium. Everyone knows how important this heritage is for the whole of European culture and, directly or indirectly, for the culture of the entire world. The work of evangelization which they carried out as pioneers in territory inhabited by Slav peoples contains both a model of what today is called “inculturation” the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.

By incarnating the Gospel in the native culture of the peoples which they were evangelizing, Saints Cyril and Methodius were especially meritorious for the formation and development of that same culture, or rather of many cultures. Indeed all the cultures of the Slav nations owe their “beginning” or development to the work of the Brothers from Salonika. For by their original and ingenious creation of an alphabet for the Slavonic language the

Brothers made a fundamental contribution to the culture and literature of all the Slav nations.

Furthermore, the translation of the sacred books, carried out by Cyril and Methodius together with their pupils, conferred a capacity and cultural dignity upon the Old Slavonic liturgical language, which became for many hundreds of years not only the ecclesiastical but also the official and literary language, and even the common language of the more educated classes of the greater part of the Slav nations, and in particular of all the Slavs of the Eastern Rite. It was also used in the Church of the Holy Cross in Cracow, where the Slav Benedictines had established themselves. Here were published the first liturgical books printed in this language. Up to the present day this is the language used in the Byzantine liturgy of the Slavonic Eastern Churches of the Rite of Constantinople, both Catholic and Orthodox, in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, as well as in various countries of Western Europe. It is also used in the Roman liturgy of the Catholics of Croatia.

22In the historical development of the Slavs of Eastern Rite, this language played a role equal to that of the Latin language in the West. It also lasted longer than Latin in part until the nineteenth century and exercised a much more direct influence on the formation of the local literary languages, thanks to its close kinship with them. These merits *vis-à-vis* the culture of all the Slav peoples and nations make the work of evangelization carried out by Saints Cyril and Methodius in a certain sense constantly present in the history and in the life of these peoples and nations.

REDEMPTORIS MISSIO (1990)

Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II

nos. 35, 37–38, 52–54

35 The mission *ad gentes* faces an enormous task, which is in no way disappearing. Indeed, both from the numerical standpoint of demographic increase and from the socio-cultural standpoint of the appearance of new relationships, contacts and changing situations the mission seems destined to have ever wider horizons. The task of proclaiming Jesus Christ to all peoples appears to be immense and out of all proportion to the Church's human resources.

The difficulties seem insurmountable and could easily lead to discouragement, if it were a question of a merely human enterprise. In certain countries missionaries are refused entry. In others, not only is evangelization forbidden but conversion as well, and even Christian worship. Elsewhere the obstacles are of a cultural nature: passing on the Gospel message seems irrelevant or incomprehensible, and conversion is seen as a rejection of one's own people and culture.

37 After preaching in a number of places, St. Paul arrived in Athens, where he went to the Areopagus

and proclaimed the Gospel in language appropriate to and understandable in those surroundings (cf. Acts 17:22–31). At that time the Areopagus represented the cultural center of the learned people of Athens, and today it can be taken as a symbol of the new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed.

The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a “global village.” The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media.

To some degree perhaps this Areopagus has been neglected. Generally, preference has been given to other means of preaching the Gospel and of Christian education, while the mass media are left to the initiative of individuals or small groups and enter into pastoral planning only in a secondary way. Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church’s authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the “new culture” created by modern communications.

This is a complex issue, since the “new culture” originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Pope Paul VI said that “the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time,”¹ and the field of communications fully confirms this judgment.

There are many other forms of the “Areopagus” in the modern world toward which the Church’s missionary activity ought to be directed; for example, commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world. These too are areas which need to be illuminated with the light of the Gospel. We must also mention the immense “Areopagus” of culture, scientific research, and international relations which promote dialogue and open up new possibilities. We would do well to be attentive to these modern areas of activity and to be involved in them. People sense that they are, as it were, traveling together across life’s sea, and that they are called to ever greater unity and solidarity. Solutions to pressing problems must be studied, discussed and worked out with the involvement of all. That is why international organizations and meetings are proving increasingly important in many sectors of human life, from culture to politics, from the economy to research. Christians who live and work in this international sphere must always remember their duty to bear witness to the Gospel.

1. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

38 Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization. This phenomenon—the so-called “religious revival”—is not without ambiguity, but it also represents an opportunity. The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer humankind, a heritage in Christ, who called himself “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6): it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life’s meaning. Here too there is an “Areopagus” to be evangelized.

52 As she carries out missionary activity among the nations, the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the Church’s pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent. The process of the Church’s insertion into peoples’ cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation “means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”² The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church’s reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.

Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community.³ She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within.⁴ Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission. Thanks to this action within the local churches, the universal Church herself is enriched with forms of expression and values in the various sectors of Christian life, such as evangelization, worship, theology and charitable works. She comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal. During my pastoral visits to the young churches I have repeatedly dealt with these themes, which are present in the Council and the subsequent Magisterium.⁵

2. Extraordinary Assembly of 1985, Final Report, II, D, 4.

3. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), 53: AAS 71 (1979), 1320; Encyclical Letter *Slavorum Apostoli* (June 2, 1985), 21: AAS 77 (1985), 802f.

4. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

5. *Address to the Bishops of Zaire, Kinshasa*, May 3, 1980, 4–6: AAS 72 (1980), 432–435; *Address to the Bishops of Kenya, Nairobi*, May 7, 1980, 6: AAS 72 (1980), 497; *Address to the Bishops of India, Delhi*, February 1, 1986, 5: AAS 78 (1986), 748f; *Homily at Cartagena*, July 6, 1986, 7–8: AAS 79 (1987), 105f; cf. also Encyclical Letter *Slavorum Apostoli*, 21–22.

Inculturation is a slow journey which accompanies the whole of missionary life. It involves those working in the Church's mission *ad gentes*, the Christian communities as they develop, and the bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its implementation.⁶

53 Missionaries, who come from other churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence they must learn the language of the place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture, and discover its values through direct experience.

Only if they have this kind of awareness will they be able to bring to people the knowledge of the hidden mystery (cf. Rom 16:25–27; Eph 3:5) in a credible and fruitful way. It is not of course a matter of missionaries renouncing their own cultural identity, but of understanding, appreciating, fostering and evangelizing the culture of the environment in which they are working, and therefore of equipping themselves to communicate effectively with it, adopting a manner of living which is a sign of gospel witness and of solidarity with the people.

Developing ecclesial communities, inspired by the Gospel, will gradually be able to express their Christian experience in original ways and forms that are consonant with their own cultural traditions, provided that those traditions are in harmony with the objective requirements of the faith itself.

To this end, especially in the more delicate areas of inculturation, particular churches of the same region should work in communion with each other⁷ and with the whole Church, convinced that only through attention both to the universal Church and to the particular churches will they be capable of translating the treasure of faith into a legitimate variety of expressions.⁸ Groups which have been evangelized will thus provide the elements for a “translation” of the gospel message,⁹ keeping in mind the positive elements acquired down the centuries from Christianity's contact with different cultures and not forgetting the dangers of alterations which have sometimes occurred.¹⁰

54 In this regard, certain guidelines remain basic. Properly applied, inculturation must be guided by two principles: “compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal Church.”¹¹ Bishops, as guardians of the “deposit of faith,” will

6. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 22.

7. Cf. *ibid.*

8. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 64.

9. *Ibid.*, 63: Particular Churches “have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language... And the word ‘language’ should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological or cultural.”

10. Cf. Address at the General Audience of April 13, 1988: *Insegnamenti* XI/I (1988), 877–81.

11. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, (November 22, 1981), 10: AAS 74 (1982), 91, which speaks of inculturation “in the context of marriage and the family.”

take care to ensure fidelity and, in particular, to provide discernment,¹² for which a deeply balanced approach is required. In fact there is a risk of passing uncritically from a form of alienation from culture to an overestimation of culture. Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be “healed, ennobled and perfected.”¹³

This kind of process needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community’s Christian experience. As Pope Paul VI said in Kampala: “It will require an incubation of the Christian ‘mystery’ in the genius of your people in order that its native voice, more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of other voices in the universal Church.”¹⁴ In effect, inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei* which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community’s life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research. The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith.

12. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 63–5.

13. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

14. Address to those participating in the Symposium of African Bishops at Kampala, July 31, 1969, 2: AAS 61 (1969), 577.

CENTESIMUS ANNUS (1991)

Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II

nos. 24, 50–51

24 The second factor in the crisis was certainly the inefficiency of the economic system, which is not to be considered simply as a technical problem, but rather a consequence of the violation of the human rights to private initiative, to ownership of property and to freedom in the economic sector. To this must be added the cultural and national dimension: it is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone, nor to define him simply on the basis of class membership. Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated within the sphere of culture through his language, history, and the position he takes towards the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. When this question is eliminated, the culture and moral life of nations are corrupted. For this reason the struggle to defend work was spontaneously linked to the struggle for culture and for national rights.

But the true cause of the new developments was the spiritual void brought about by atheism, which deprived the younger generations of a sense of direction and in many cases led them, in the irrepressible search for personal identity and for the meaning of life, to rediscover the religious roots of their national cultures, and to rediscover the person of Christ himself as the existentially adequate response to the desire in every human heart for goodness, truth and life.

This search was supported by the witness of those who, in difficult circumstances and under persecution, remained faithful to God. Marxism had promised to uproot the need for God from the human heart, but the results have shown that it is not possible to succeed in this without throwing the heart into turmoil.

50 From this open search for truth, which is renewed in every generation, the culture of a nation derives its character. Indeed, the heritage of values which has been received and handed down is always challenged by the young. To challenge does not necessarily mean to destroy or reject a priori, but above all to put these values to the test in one's own life, and through this existential verification to make them more real, relevant and personal, distinguishing the valid elements in the tradition from false and erroneous ones, or from obsolete forms which can be usefully replaced by others more suited to the times.

In this context, it is appropriate to recall that evangelization too plays a role in the culture of the various nations, sustaining culture in its progress towards the truth, and assisting in the work of its purification and enrichment.¹ However, when a culture becomes inward looking, and tries to perpetuate obsolete ways of living by rejecting any exchange or debate with regard to the truth about man, then it becomes sterile and is heading for decadence.

51 All human activity takes place within a culture and interacts with culture. For an adequate formation of a culture, the involvement of the whole man is required, whereby he exercises his creativity, intelligence, and knowledge of the world and of people. Furthermore, he displays his capacity for self-control, personal sacrifice, solidarity and readiness to promote the common good.

Thus the first and most important task is accomplished within man's heart. The way in which he is involved in building his own future depends on the understanding he has of himself and of his own destiny. It is on this level that the Church's specific and decisive contribution to true culture is to be found.

The Church promotes those aspects of human behavior which favor a true culture of peace, as opposed to models in which the individual is lost in the crowd, in which the role of his initiative and freedom is neglected, and in which his greatness is posited in the arts of conflict and war. The Church renders this service to human society by preaching the truth about the creation of the world, which God has placed in human hands so that

1. Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 39; 52.

people may make it fruitful and more perfect through their work; and by preaching the truth about the Redemption, whereby the Son of God has saved mankind and at the same time has united all people, making them responsible for one another. Sacred Scripture continually speaks to us of an active commitment to our neighbor and demands of us a shared responsibility for all of humanity.

PASTORES DABO VOBIS (1992)

*Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation
of Pope John Paul II – no. 55*

55 A further problem that is strongly felt these days is the demand for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the message of faith. An eminently pastoral problem, this should enter more broadly and carefully into the formation of the candidates to the priesthood: In the present circumstances in which, in a number of regions of the world, the Christian religion is considered as something foreign to cultures (be they ancient or modern), it is very important that in the whole intellectual and human formation the dimension of inculturation be seen as necessary and essential.”¹

But this means we need a genuine theology, inspired by the Catholic principles on inculturation. These principles are linked with the mystery of the incarnation of the word of God and with Christian anthropology, and thus illumine the authentic meaning of inculturation. In the face of all the different and at times contrasting cultures present in the various parts of the world,

1. *Proposition 32.*

inculturation seeks to obey Christ's command to preach the Gospel to all nations even unto the ends of the earth. Such obedience does not signify either syncretism or a simple adaptation of the announcement of the Gospel, but rather the fact that the Gospel penetrates the very life of cultures, becomes incarnate in them, overcoming those cultural elements that are incompatible with the faith and Christian living, and raising their values to the mystery of salvation which comes from Christ.²

The problem of inculturation can have a particularly great interest when the candidates to the priesthood are themselves coming from indigenous cultures. In that case, they will need to find suitable ways of formation, both to overcome the danger of being less demanding and to strengthen their weaker education in human, Christian and priestly virtues, and also to make proper use of the good and genuine elements of their own cultures and traditions.³

2. Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 67.

3. Cf. *Proposition* 32.

VERITATIS SPLENDOR (1993)

Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II

nos. 45, 53, 94

45 The Church gratefully accepts and lovingly preserves the entire deposit of Revelation, treating it with religious respect and fulfilling her mission of authentically interpreting God's law in the light of the Gospel. In addition, the Church receives the gift of the New Law, which is the "fulfillment" of God's law in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit.

This is an "interior" law (cf. Jer 31:31–33), "written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3); a law of perfection and of freedom (cf. 2 Cor 3:17); "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2).

Saint Thomas writes that this law "can be called law in two ways. First, the law of the spirit is the Holy Spirit... who, dwelling in the soul, not only teaches what it is necessary to do by enlightening the intellect on the things to be done, but also inclines the affections to act with uprightness... Second, the law of the spirit can be called the proper effect of the Holy Spirit, and thus faith working through love (cf. Gal 5:6), which teaches inwardly

about the things to be done... and inclines the affections to act”.¹ Even if moral-theological reflection usually distinguishes between the positive or revealed law of God and the natural law, and, within the economy of salvation, between the “old” and the “new” law, it must not be forgotten that these and other useful distinctions always refer to that law whose author is the one and the same God and which is always meant for man.

The different ways in which God, acting in history, cares for the world and for mankind are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they support each other and intersect. They have their origin and goal in the eternal, wise and loving counsel whereby God predestines men and women “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). God’s plan poses no threat to man’s genuine freedom; on the contrary, the acceptance of God’s plan is the only way to affirm that freedom.

53 The great concern of our contemporaries for historicity and for culture has led some to call into question the *immutability of the natural law* itself, and thus the existence of “objective norms of morality”² valid for all people of the present and the future, as for those of the past. Is it ever possible, they ask, to consider as universally valid and always binding certain rational determinations established in the past, when no one knew the progress humanity would make in the future?

It must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates that there is something in man which transcends those cultures. This “something” is precisely human nature: this nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that man does not become the prisoner of any of his cultures, but asserts his personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of his being. To call into question the permanent structural elements of man which are connected with his own bodily dimension would not only conflict with common experience, but would render meaningless Jesus’ reference to the “beginning”, precisely where the social and cultural context of the time had distorted the primordial meaning and the role of certain moral norms (cf. Mt 19:1–9). This is the reason why “the Church affirms that underlying so many changes there are some things which do not change and are ultimately founded upon Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and for ever”.³ Christ is the “Beginning” who, having taken on human nature, definitively illumines it in its constitutive elements and in its dynamism of charity towards God and neighbor.⁴

Certainly there is a need to seek out and to discover the most adequate formulation for universal and permanent moral norms in the light of different cultural contexts, a

1. In *Epistulam ad Romanos*, c. VIII, lect. 1.

2. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.

3. *Ibid.*, 10.

4. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q.108, a. 1. St. Thomas bases the fact that moral norms, even in the context of the New Law, are not merely formal in character but have a determined content, upon the assumption of human nature by the Word.

formulation most capable of ceaselessly expressing their historical relevance, of making them understood and of authentically interpreting their truth. This truth of the moral law—like that of the “deposit of faith”—unfolds down the centuries: the norms expressing that truth remain valid in their substance, but must be specified and determined “*eodem sensu eademque sententia*”⁵ in the light of historical circumstances by the Church’s Magisterium, whose decision is preceded and accompanied by the work of interpretation and formulation characteristic of the reason of individual believers and of theological reflection.⁶

94 In this witness to the absoluteness of the moral good Christians are not alone: they are supported by the moral sense present in peoples and by the great religious and sapiential traditions of East and West, from which the interior and mysterious workings of God’s Spirit are not absent. The words of the Latin poet Juvenal apply to all: “Consider it the greatest of crimes to prefer survival to honor and, out of love of physical life, to lose the very reason for living.”⁷ The voice of conscience has always clearly recalled that there are truths and moral values for which one must be prepared to give up one’s life. In an individual’s words and above all in the sacrifice of his life for a moral value, the Church sees a single testimony to that truth which, already present in creation, shines forth in its fullness on the face of Christ. As Saint Justin put it, “the Stoics, at least in their teachings on ethics, demonstrated wisdom, thanks to the seed of the Word present in all peoples, and we know that those who followed their doctrines met with hatred and were killed.”⁸

5. Saint Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium Primum*, c. 23: PG 50, 668.

6. The development of the Church’s moral doctrine is similar to that of the doctrine of the faith (cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, Chap. 4: DS, 3020, and Canon 4: DS, 3024). The words spoken by John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council can also be applied to moral doctrine: “This certain and unchanging teaching (i.e., Christian doctrine in its completeness), to which the faithful owe obedience, needs to be more deeply understood and set forth in a way adapted to the needs of our time. Indeed, this deposit of the faith, the truths contained in our time-honored teaching, is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth (with their meaning preserved intact) is something else”: AAS 54 (1962), 792.

7. “*Summum crede nefas animam praeferre pudori et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas*”: *Satirae*, VIII, 83–4.

8. *Apologia* II, 8: PG 6, 457–58.

EVANGELIUM VITAE (1995)

Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II

no. 95

95 “Walk as children of light... and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph 5:8, 10–11). In our present social context, marked by a dramatic struggle between the “culture of life” and the “culture of death”, there is need to develop a deep critical sense, capable of discerning true values and authentic needs.

What is urgently called for is a general mobilization of consciences and a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life. All together, we must build a new culture of life: new, because it will be able to confront and solve today’s unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians; new, because it will be capable of bringing about a serious and courageous cultural dialogue among all parties.

While the urgent need for such a cultural transformation is linked to the present historical situation, it is also rooted in the Church’s mission of evangelization.

The purpose of the Gospel, in fact, is “to transform human-

ity from within and to make it new”¹ Like the yeast which leavens the whole measure of dough (cf. Mt 13:33), the Gospel is meant to permeate all cultures and give them life from within,² so that they may express the full truth about the human person and about human life.

We need to begin with the renewal of a culture of life within Christian communities themselves. Too often it happens that believers, even those who take an active part in the life of the Church, end up by separating their Christian faith from its ethical requirements concerning life, and thus fall into moral subjectivism and certain objectionable ways of acting. With great openness and courage, we need to question how widespread is the culture of life today among individual Christians, families, groups and communities in our Dioceses. With equal clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth. At the same time, we need to promote a serious and in-depth exchange about basic issues of human life with everyone, including non-believers, in intellectual circles, in the various professional spheres and at the level of people’s everyday life.

1. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 18: AAS 68 (1976), 17.

2. Cf. *ibid.*, 20: *loc. cit.*, 18.

ECCLESIA IN AFRICA (1995)

*Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation
of Pope John Paul II — nos. 59, 61–62, 78, 87*

59 On several occasions the Synod Fathers stressed the particular importance for evangelization of inculturation, the process by which “catechesis ‘takes flesh’ in the various cultures”.¹ Inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity” and, on the other, “the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures”.² The Synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the particular Churches, for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa.³ It is “a requirement for evangelization”,⁴ “a path towards full evangelization”,⁵ and one of the greatest challenges for the Church on the Continent on the eve of the Third Millennium.⁶

1. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53: AAS 71 (1979), 1319.

2. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 52, AAS 83 (1991), 229; cf. *Propositio* 28.

3. Cf. *Propositio* 29.

4. Cf. *Propositio* 30.

5. Cf. *Propositio* 32.

6. Cf. *Propositio* 33.

61 Given the close and organic relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and the Word that the Church proclaims, the inculturation of the revealed message cannot but follow the “logic” proper to the Mystery of the Redemption. Indeed, the Incarnation of the Word is not an isolated moment but tends towards Jesus’ “Hour” and the Paschal Mystery: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Jesus says: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:32). This emptying of self, this kenosis necessary for exaltation, which is the way of Christ and of each of his disciples (cf. Phil 2:6–9), sheds light on the encounter of cultures with Christ and his Gospel. “Every culture needs to be transformed by Gospel values in the light of the Paschal Mystery”.⁷

It is by looking at the Mystery of the Incarnation and of the Redemption that the values and counter-values of cultures are to be discerned. Just as the Word of God became like us in everything but sin, so too the inculturation of the Good News takes on all authentic human values, purifying them from sin and restoring to them their full meaning.

Inculturation also has profound links with the Mystery of Pentecost. Thanks to the outpouring and action of the Spirit, who draws gifts and talents into unity, all the peoples of the earth when they enter the Church live a new Pentecost, profess in their own tongue the one faith in Jesus, and proclaim the marvels that the Lord has done for them. The Spirit, who on the natural level is the true source of the wisdom of peoples, leads the Church with a supernatural light into knowledge of the whole truth. In her turn the Church takes on the values of different cultures, becoming the “*sponsa ornata monilibus suis*”, “the bride who adorns herself with her jewels” (cf. Is 61:10).

62 Inculturation is a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the Church’s fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures. Rightly therefore the Synod Fathers observed: “Considering the rapid changes in the cultural, social, economic and political domains, our local Churches must be involved in the process of inculturation in an ongoing manner, respecting the two following criteria: compatibility with the Christian message and communion with the universal Church... In all cases, care must be taken to avoid syncretism”.⁸

“Inculturation is a movement towards full evangelization. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels so that they can live a holy life in total union with God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit”.⁹

Thanking God for the fruits which the efforts at inculturation have already brought forth in the life of the Churches of the Continent, notably in the ancient Eastern Churches of Africa, the Synod recommended “to the Bishops and to the Episcopal Conferences to take note that inculturation includes the whole life of the Church and the whole process

7. *Propositio* 28.

8. *Propositio* 31.

9. *Propositio* 32.

of evangelization. It includes theology, liturgy, the Church's life and structures. All this underlines the need for research in the field of African cultures in all their complexity". Precisely for this reason the Synod invited Pastors "to exploit to the maximum the numerous possibilities which the Church's present discipline provides in this matter".¹⁰

78 By reason of its deep conviction that "the synthesis between culture and faith is not only a demand of culture but also of faith", because "a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived",¹¹ the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops considered inculturation a priority and an urgent task in the life of Africa's particular Churches. Only in this way can the Gospel be firmly implanted in the Continent's Christian communities. Following in the footsteps of the Second Vatican Council,¹² the Synod Fathers interpreted inculturation as a process that includes the whole of Christian existence—theology, liturgy, customs, structures—without of course compromising what is of divine right and the great discipline of the Church, confirmed in the course of centuries by remarkable fruits of virtue and heroism.¹³

The challenge of inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values. Inculturation of the faith in every area of Christian and human life is an arduous task which can only be carried out with the help of the Spirit of the Lord who leads the Church to the whole truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

87 The proclamation of the Good News by word and deed opens people's hearts to the desire for holiness, for being configured to Christ. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul addresses "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). Preaching the Gospel also aims to build up the Church of God, in the light of the coming of the Kingdom, which Christ will hand over to the Father at the end of time (cf. 1 Cor 15:24).

"Entrance into the Kingdom of God demands a change of mentality (*metanoia*) and behavior and a life of witness in word and deed, a life nourished in the Church by the reception of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, the Sacrament of salvation".¹⁴

Inculturation, through which the faith penetrates the life of individuals and their primary communities, is also a path to holiness. Just as in the Incarnation Christ assumed human nature in everything but sin, analogously through inculturation the Christian message assimilates the values of the society to which it is proclaimed, rejecting whatever

10. *Ibid.*

11. John Paul II, *Discorso ai partecipanti al Congresso nazionale del movimento ecclesiale d'impegno culturale* (16 January 1982), 2: *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (1982), 131.

12. *Ad gentes*, 22.

13. Cf. *Propositio* 32; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37–40.

14. *Propositio* 5.

is marked by sin. To the extent that an ecclesial community can integrate the positive values of a specific culture, inculturation becomes an instrument by which the community opens itself to the riches of Christian holiness. An inculturation wisely carried out purifies and elevates the cultures of the various peoples.

From this point of view the *liturgy* is called to play an important role. As an effective way of proclaiming and living the mysteries of salvation, the liturgy can make a valid contribution towards the elevation and enrichment of specific manifestations of the culture of a people. It will therefore be the task of competent authority to see to the inculturation of those liturgical elements which, following artistically worthy models, can be changed in the light of current norms.¹⁵

15. Cf. *Propositio* 34.

FIDES ET RATIO (1998)

Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II

nos. 70–72

70 Because of its implications for both philosophy and theology, the question of the relationship with cultures calls for particular attention, which cannot however claim to be exhaustive. From the time the Gospel was first preached, the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with cultures. Christ's mandate to his disciples to go out everywhere, "even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), in order to pass on the truth which he had revealed, led the Christian community to recognize from the first the universality of its message and the difficulties created by cultural differences. A passage of Saint Paul's letter to the Christians of Ephesus helps us to understand how the early community responded to the problem. The Apostle writes: "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the wall of hostility" (2:13–14).

In the light of this text, we reflect further to see how the Gentiles were transformed once they had embraced the faith.

With the richness of the salvation wrought by Christ, the walls separating the different cultures collapsed. God's promise in Christ now became a universal offer: no longer limited to one particular people, its language and its customs, but extended to all as a heritage from which each might freely draw. From their different locations and traditions all are called in Christ to share in the unity of the family of God's children. It is Christ who enables the two peoples to become "one".

Those who were "far off" have come "near", thanks to the newness brought by the Paschal Mystery. Jesus destroys the walls of division and creates unity in a new and unsurpassed way through our sharing in his mystery. This unity is so deep that the Church can say with Saint Paul: "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

This simple statement contains a great truth: faith's encounter with different cultures has created something new. When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being's characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent. Therefore they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human.¹ Insofar as cultures appeal to the values of older traditions, they point—implicitly but authentically—to the manifestation of God in nature, as we saw earlier in considering the Wisdom literature and the teaching of Saint Paul.

71 Inseparable as they are from people and their history, cultures share the dynamics which the human experience of life reveals. They change and advance because people meet in new ways and share with each other their ways of life. Cultures are fed by the communication of values, and they survive and flourish insofar as they remain open to assimilating new experiences. How are we to explain these dynamics? All people are part of a culture, depend upon it and shape it. Human beings are both child and parent of the culture in which they are immersed. To everything they do, they bring something which sets them apart from the rest of creation: their unfailing openness to mystery and their boundless desire for knowledge. Lying deep in every culture, there appears this impulse towards a fulfillment. We may say, then, that culture itself has an intrinsic capacity to receive divine Revelation.

Cultural context permeates the living of Christian faith, which contributes in turn little by little to shaping that context. To every culture Christians bring the unchanging truth of God, which he reveals in the history and culture of a people. Time and again, therefore, in the course of the centuries we have seen repeated the event witnessed by the pilgrims in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Hearing the Apostles, they asked one another: "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia,

1. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 53–59.

Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:7–11). While it demands of all who hear it the adherence of faith, the proclamation of the Gospel in different cultures allows people to preserve their own cultural identity. This in no way creates division, because the community of the baptized is marked by a universality which can embrace every culture and help to foster whatever is implicit in them to the point where it will be fully explicit in the light of truth.

This means that no one culture can ever become the criterion of judgment, much less the ultimate criterion of truth with regard to God’s Revelation. The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if in engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it. On the contrary, the message which believers bring to the world and to cultures is a genuine liberation from all the disorders caused by sin and is, at the same time, a call to the fullness of truth. Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter; rather, they are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel’s truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways.

72 In preaching the Gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded. Today, as the Gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation, which mean that our generation faces problems not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries.

My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems.

In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought. In this work of discernment, which finds its inspiration in the Council’s Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, certain criteria will have to be kept in mind.

The first of these is the universality of the human spirit, whose basic needs are the same in the most disparate cultures.

The second, which derives from the first, is this: in engaging great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This criterion is valid for the Church in every age, even for the Church of the future, who will judge herself enriched by all that comes from today’s engagement with Eastern cultures and will find

in this inheritance fresh cues for fruitful dialogue with the cultures which will emerge as humanity moves into the future.

Thirdly, care will need to be taken lest, contrary to the very nature of the human spirit, the legitimate defense of the uniqueness and originality of Indian thought be confused with the idea that a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference and affirm itself by opposing other traditions.

What has been said here of India is no less true for the heritage of the great cultures of China, Japan and the other countries of Asia, as also for the riches of the traditional cultures of Africa, which are for the most part orally transmitted.

ECCLESIA IN AMERICA (1999)

*Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation
of Pope John Paul II — no. 70*

70 My Predecessor Paul VI widely remarked that “the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our time”.¹ Hence the Synod Fathers rightly felt that “the new evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture”.²

The Son of God, by taking upon himself our human nature, became incarnate within a particular people, even though his redemptive death brought salvation to all people, of every culture, race and condition. The gift of his Spirit and his love are meant for each and every people and culture, in order to bring them all into unity after the example of the perfect unity existing in the Triune God. For this to happen, it is necessary to inculturate preaching in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers.³ At the same time, how-

1. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), 20: AAS 68 (1976), 19.

2. *Propositio* 17.

3. Cf. *ibid.*

ever, it must not be forgotten that the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the supreme manifestation of the infinite God within the finitude of history, is the only valid point of reference for all of humanity on its pilgrimage in search of authentic unity and true peace.

In America, the *mestiza* face of the Virgin of Guadalupe was from the start a symbol of the inculturation of the Gospel, of which she has been the lodestar and the guide. Through her powerful intercession, the Gospel will penetrate the hearts of the men and women of America and permeate their cultures, transforming them from within.⁴

4. Cf. *ibid.*

ECCLESIA IN ASIA (1999)

*Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation
of Pope John Paul II — no. 21*

21 Culture is the vital space within which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel. Just as a culture is the result of the life and activity of a human group, so the persons belonging to that group are shaped to a large extent by the culture in which they live. As persons and societies change, so too does the culture change with them. As a culture is transformed, so too are persons and societies transformed by it. From this perspective, it becomes clearer why evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture; they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures. Thus Paul VI called the split between the Gospel and culture the drama of our time, with a profound impact upon both evangelization and culture.¹

1. Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 20: AAS 68 (1976), 18f.

In the process of encountering the world's different cultures, the Church not only transmits her truths and values and renews cultures from within, but she also takes from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them.

This is the obligatory path for evangelizers in presenting the Christian faith and making it part of a people's cultural heritage. Conversely, the various cultures, when refined and renewed in the light of the Gospel, can become true expressions of the one Christian faith. "Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission".² This engagement with cultures has always been part of the Church's pilgrimage through history. But it has a special urgency today in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural situation of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign.

It is good to remember at this point what was said repeatedly during the Synod: that the Holy Spirit is the prime agent of the inculturation of the Christian faith in Asia.³ The same Holy Spirit who leads us into the whole truth makes possible a fruitful dialogue with the cultural and religious values of different peoples, among whom he is present in some measure, giving men and women with a sincere heart the strength to overcome evil and the deceit of the Evil One, and indeed offering everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.⁴ The Spirit's presence ensures that the dialogue unfolds in truth, honesty, humility and respect.⁵

"In offering to others the Good News of the Redemption, the Church strives to understand their culture. She seeks to know the minds and hearts of her hearers, their values and customs, their problems and difficulties, their hopes and dreams.

Once she knows and understands these various aspects of culture, then she can begin the dialogue of salvation; she can offer, respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of the Redemption to all who freely wish to listen and to respond".⁶ Therefore the people of Asia who, as Asians, wish to make the Christian faith their own, can rest assured that their hopes, expectations, anxieties and sufferings are not only embraced by Jesus, but become the very point at which the gift of faith and the power of the Spirit enter the innermost core of their lives.

It is the task of the Pastors, in virtue of their charism, to guide this dialogue with discernment. Likewise, experts in sacred and secular disciplines have important roles to play in the process of inculturation.

But the process must involve the entire people of God, since the life of the Church as a whole must show forth the faith which is being proclaimed and appropriated. To ensure

2. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 52: AAS 83 (1991), 300.

3. Cf. Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 9.

4. Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991), 273f.

5. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 56: AAS 83 (1991), 304.

6. John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for the Catholics of West Bengal, Calcutta (4 February 1986), 3: *Insegnamenti* IX, 1 (1986), 314.

that this is done soundly, the Synod Fathers identified certain areas for particular attention—theological reflection, liturgy, the formation of priests and religious, catechesis and spirituality.⁷

7. Cf. *Propositio* 43.

NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE (2000)

Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II

nos. 40, 55–56

40 To nourish ourselves with the word in order to be “servants of the word” in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium. Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a “Christian society” which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of “globalization” and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the *new evangelization*.

I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardor of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).

This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of “specialists” but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the people of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived as the *everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups*. This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in which the Christian message must be planted, in such a way that the particular values of each people will not be rejected but purified and brought to their fullness.

In the Third Millennium, Christianity will have to respond ever more effectively to this *need for inculturation*. Christianity, while remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root. In this Jubilee Year, we have rejoiced in a special way in the beauty of the Church’s varied face. This is perhaps only a beginning, a barely sketched image of the future which the Spirit of God is preparing for us.

Christ must be presented to all people with confidence. We shall address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but taking into account each person’s needs in regard to their sensitivity and language, after the example of Paul who declared: “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). In making these recommendations, I am thinking especially of the *pastoral care of young people*. Precisely in regard to young people, as I said earlier, the Jubilee has given us an encouraging testimony of their generous availability. We must learn to interpret that heartening response, by investing that enthusiasm like a new talent (cf. Mt 25:15) which the Lord has put into our hands so that we can make it yield a rich return.

55 It is in this context also that we should consider the great challenge of *interreligious dialogue* to which we shall still be committed in the new millennium, in fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.¹ In the years of preparation for the Great Jubilee the Church has sought to build, not least through a series of highly symbolic meetings, *a relationship of openness and dialogue with the followers of other religions*. This dialogue must continue.

In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread specter of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: *a name of peace and a summons to peace*.

1. Cf. Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*.

56 Dialogue, however, cannot be based on religious indifferentism, and we Christians are in duty bound, while engaging in dialogue, to bear clear witness to the hope that is within us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15).

We should not fear that it will be considered an offence to the identity of others what is rather the joyful proclamation of a gift meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love, the God who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). As the recent Declaration *Dominus Iesus* stressed, this cannot be the subject of a dialogue understood as negotiation, as if we considered it a matter of mere opinion: rather, it is a grace which fills us with joy, a message which we have a duty to proclaim.

The Church therefore cannot forgo her missionary activity among the peoples of the world. It is the primary task of the *missio ad gentes* to announce that it is in Christ, “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (Jn 14:6), that people find salvation. Interreligious dialogue “cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented towards proclamation”.² This missionary duty, moreover, does not prevent us from approaching dialogue with an attitude of profound willingness to listen. We know in fact that, in the presence of the mystery of grace, infinitely full of possibilities and implications for human life and history, the Church herself will never cease putting questions, trusting in the help of the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 14:17), whose task it is to guide her “into all the truth” (Jn 16:13).

This is a fundamental principle not only for the endless theological investigation of Christian truth, but also for Christian dialogue with other philosophies, cultures and religions. In the common experience of humanity, for all its contradictions, the Spirit of God, who “blows where he wills” (Jn 3:8), not infrequently reveals signs of his presence which help Christ’s followers to understand more deeply the message which they bear. Was it not with this humble and trust-filled openness that the Second Vatican Council sought to read “the signs of the times”?³ Even as she engages in an active and watchful discernment aimed at understanding the “genuine signs of the presence or the purpose of God”,⁴ the Church acknowledges that she has not only given, but has also “received from the history and from the development of the human race”.⁵ This attitude of openness, combined with careful discernment, was adopted by the Council also in relation to other religions. It is our task to follow with great fidelity the Council’s teaching and the path which it has traced.

2. Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Instruction on the Proclamation of the Gospel and Interreligious Dialogue *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations* (19 May 1991), 82; AAS 84 (1992), 444.

3. Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

4. *Ibid.*, 11.

5. *Ibid.*, 44.

ECCLESIA IN OCEANIA (2001)

*Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation
of Pope John Paul II — nos. 16–17, 25*

16 The Synod Fathers frequently emphasized the importance of inculturation for any authentic Christian life in Oceania. The process of inculturation is the gradual way in which the Gospel is incarnated in the various cultures. On the one hand, certain cultural values must be transformed and purified, if they are to find a place in a genuinely Christian culture. On the other hand, in various cultures Christian values readily take root. Inculturation is born out of respect for both the Gospel and the culture in which it is proclaimed and welcomed.

The process of inculturation began in Oceania as immigrant people brought the Christian faith from their homelands. For the indigenous peoples of Oceania, inculturation meant a new conversation between the world that they had known and the faith to which they had come. As a result, Oceania offers many examples of unique cultural expressions in the areas of theology, liturgy and the use of religious symbols.¹ The Synod Fathers saw

1. Cf. *Propositio* 1.

further inculturation of the Christian faith as the way leading to the fullness of ecclesial *communio*. Authentic inculturation of the Christian faith is grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation.² “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16); in a particular time and place, the Son of God took flesh and was “born of a woman” (Gal 4:4). To prepare for this momentous event, God chose a people with a distinctive culture, and he guided its history on the path towards the Incarnation. All that God did in the midst of his chosen people revealed what he intended to do for all humanity, for all peoples and cultures. The Scriptures tell us this story of God acting among his people. Above all, they tell the story of Jesus Christ, in whom God himself entered the world and its many cultures. In all that he said and did, but especially in his Death and Resurrection, Jesus revealed the divine love for humanity. From deep within human history, the story of Jesus speaks to the people not only of his time and culture but of every time and culture. He is forever the Word made flesh for all the world; he is the Gospel that was brought to Oceania; and he is the Gospel that now must be proclaimed anew.

The Word made flesh is foreign to no culture and must be preached to all cultures. “From the time the Gospel was first preached the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with culture.”³ Just as the Word made flesh entered history and dwelt among us, his Gospel enters deeply into the life and culture of those who hear, listen and believe. Inculturation, the “incarnation” of the Gospel in the various cultures, affects the very way in which the Gospel is preached, understood and lived.⁴

The Church teaches the unchanging truth of God, addressed to the history and the culture of a particular people. Therefore, in each culture the Christian faith will be lived in a unique way. The Synod Fathers were convinced that the Church, in her efforts to present Jesus Christ effectively to the peoples of Oceania, must respect each culture and never ask the people to renounce it. “The Church invites all people to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to their heart and minds.”⁵ “The Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it.”⁶ It is vital that the Church insert herself fully into culture and from within bring about the process of purification and transformation.⁷

An authentic inculturation of the Gospel has a double aspect. On the one hand, a culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived. On the other hand, the Gospel challenges cultures and requires that some values and forms change.⁸ Just as the Son of God became like us in all things

2. Cf. *Propositio* 2.

3. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 70: AAS 91 (1999), 58.

4. Cf. *Propositio* 2.

5. John Paul II, Address to Aboriginal People, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 12: AAS 79 (1987), 978; see also Paul VI, Address to Aboriginal People, Sydney (2 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 69.

6. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 71: AAS 91 (1999), 60.

7. Cf. *Propositio* 2.

8. Cf. *ibid.*

except sin (cf. Heb 4:15), so the Christian faith welcomes and affirms all that is genuinely human, while rejecting whatever is sinful. The process of inculturation engages the Gospel and culture in “a dialogue which includes identifying what is and what is not of Christ”.⁹ Every culture needs to be purified and transformed by the values which are revealed in the Paschal Mystery.¹⁰ In this way, the positive values and forms found in the cultures of Oceania will enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived.¹¹ The Gospel “is a genuine liberation from all the disorders caused by sin and is, at the same time, a call to the fullness of truth. Cultures are not only not diminished by this encounter; rather they are prompted to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel’s truth and to be stirred by this truth to develop in new ways”.¹² Transformed by the Spirit of Christ, these cultures attain the fullness of life to which their deepest values had always looked and for which their people had always hoped. Indeed, without Christ, no human culture can become what it truly is.

17 In recent times the Church has strongly encouraged the inculturation of the Christian faith. In this regard, Pope Paul VI insisted when he visited Oceania that “far from smothering what is good and original in every form of human culture, Catholicism accepts, respects and puts to use the genius of each people, endowing with variety and beauty the one, seamless garment of the Church of Christ”.¹³ These are words which I echoed when I met the Aboriginal people of Australia: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human, and when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God”.¹⁴ The Synod Fathers asked that the Church in Oceania develop an understanding and presentation of the truth of Christ drawing on the traditions and cultures of the region. In missionary areas, all missionaries are urged to work in harmony with the indigenous Christians to ensure that the faith and life of the Church are expressed in legitimate forms appropriate to each culture.¹⁵

From the time the first immigrants and missionaries arrived, the Church in Oceania has inevitably been involved in a process of inculturation within the many cultures of the region, which often exist side by side. Attentive to the signs of the times, the Synod Fathers “recognized that the many cultures each in different ways, provide insights which help the Church to understand better and express the Gospel of Jesus Christ”.¹⁶

To guide this process, fidelity to Christ and to the authentic Tradition of the Church

9. *Propositio* 4.

10. Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, 61: AAS 88 (1996), 38.

11. Cf. *Propositio* 2.

12. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), 71: AAS 91 (1999), 60.

13. Address to the Bishops of Oceania, Sydney (1 December 1970): AAS 63 (1971), 56.

14. Address to Aboriginal Peoples, Alice Springs (29 November 1986), 12: AAS 79 (1987), 977.

15. Cf. *Propositio* 2.

16. *Ibid.*

is required. Genuine inculturation of the Christian faith must always be done with the guidance of the universal Church. While remaining wholly faithful to the spirit of *communio*, local Churches should seek to express the faith and life of the Church in legitimate forms appropriate to indigenous cultures.¹⁷ New expressions and forms should be tested and approved by the competent authorities. Once approved, these authentic forms of inculturation will better enable the peoples of Oceania to experience in their own way the abundant life offered by Jesus Christ.¹⁸ The Synod Fathers expressed the desire that future priests, deacons and catechists be thoroughly familiar with the culture of the people they are to serve. In order to become good Christian leaders they should be trained in ways that do not separate them from the circumstances of ordinary people. They are called to a service of inculturated evangelization, through sensitive pastoral work which allows the Christian community to welcome, live and pass on the faith in its own culture in harmony with the Gospel and the communion of the universal Church.¹⁹ As their guiding vision, the Synod Fathers evoked the ideal of the many cultures of Oceania forming a rich and distinctive civilization inspired by faith in Jesus Christ. With them, I pray fervently that all the peoples of Oceania will discover the love of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, so that they will experience and build together the civilization of love and peace for which the world of the Pacific has always longed.

25 Greater travel opportunities and easier migration have resulted in unprecedented encounters among the cultures of the world, and hence the presence in Oceania of the great non-Christian religions. Some cities have Jewish communities, made up of a considerable number of survivors of the Holocaust, and these communities can play an important role in Jewish-Christian relations.

In some places too there are long established Muslim communities; in others, there are communities of Hindus; and in still others, Buddhist centers are being established. It is important that Catholics better understand these religions, their teachings, way of life and worship. Where parents from these religions enroll their children in Catholic schools, the Church has an especially delicate task. The Church in Oceania also needs to study more thoroughly the traditional religions of the indigenous populations, in order to enter more effectively into the dialogue which Christian proclamation requires. "Proclamation and dialogue are, each in its own place, component elements and authentic forms of the one evangelizing mission of the Church. They are both oriented toward the communication of salvific truth."²⁰ In order to pursue a fruitful dialogue with these religions, the Church needs experts in philosophy, anthropology, comparative religions, the social sciences and, above all, theology.

17. Cf. *ibid.*

18. Cf. Special Assembly For Oceania of the Synod of Bishops, *Relatio post disceptationem*, 12.

19. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 54 : AAS 83 (1991), 301.

20. Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and Pontifical Council For Interreligious Dialogue, *Instruction Dialogue and Proclamation* (19 May 1991), 2: AAS 84 (1992), 41

ECCLESIA IN EUROPA (2003)

*Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation
of Pope John Paul II — nos. 46–47, 50, 58*

46 In various parts of Europe a first proclamation of the Gospel is needed: the number of the unbaptized is growing, both because of the significant presence of immigrants of other religions and because children born into families of Christian tradition have not received Baptism, either as a result of the Communist domination or the spread of religious indifference.¹

Indeed, Europe is now one of those traditionally Christian places which, in addition to a new evangelization, require in some cases a first evangelization.

The Church cannot shirk the responsibility of making a courageous diagnosis which will make it possible to decide on appropriate therapies. On the “old” continent too, there are vast social and cultural areas which stand in need of a true *missio ad gentes*.²

1. Cf. *Propositio* 3b.

2. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 37: AAS 83 (1991), 282–86.

47 Everywhere, then, a renewed proclamation is needed even for those already baptized. Many Europeans today think they know what Christianity is, yet they do not really know it at all. Often they are lacking in knowledge of the most basic elements and notions of the faith. Many of the baptized live as if Christ did not exist: the gestures and signs of faith are repeated, especially in devotional practices, but they fail to correspond to a real acceptance of the content of the faith and fidelity to the person of Jesus.

The great certainties of the faith are being undermined in many people by a vague religiosity lacking real commitment; various forms of agnosticism and practical atheism are spreading and serve to widen the division between faith and life; some people have been affected by the spirit of an immanentist humanism, which has weakened the faith and often, tragically, led to its complete abandonment; one encounters a sort of secularist interpretation of Christian faith which is corrosive and accompanied by a deep crisis of conscience and of Christian moral practice.³ The great values which amply inspired European culture have been separated from the Gospel, thus losing their very soul and paving the way for any number of aberrations.

“When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8). Will he find faith in our countries, in this Europe of ancient Christian tradition? This is an open question which clearly reveals the depth and the drama of one of the most serious challenges which our Churches are called to face. It can be said as the Synod emphasized that this challenge frequently consists not so much in baptizing new converts as in enabling those already baptized to be converted to Christ and his Gospel:⁴ in our communities we need to be seriously concerned about bringing the Gospel of hope to all those who are far from the faith or who have abandoned the practice of Christianity.

50 “Europe’s cultural and religious situation today calls for the presence of Catholics who are adult in their faith and for missionary Christian communities who testify to God’s love before all mankind”.⁵ The proclamation of the Gospel of hope thus implies a concern to foster the movement from a faith supported by social tradition, important as this is, to a more personal and adult faith, one marked by knowledge and conviction. Christians are therefore “called to have a faith capable of critically confronting contemporary culture and resisting its enticements; of having a real effect on the world of culture, finance, society and politics; of demonstrating that the fellowship between Catholics and other Christians is more powerful than any ethnic bond; of joyfully passing on the faith to new generations; and of building a Christian culture ready to evangelize the larger culture in which we live”.⁶

3. Cf. Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, I, 2: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 3 October 1999, 7.

4. Cf. *Propositio* 3a.

5. *Propositio* 8,1.

6. Cf. *Propositio* 8,2.

58 The proclamation of Jesus Christ must also reach contemporary European culture. The evangelization of culture must show that in today's Europe too it is possible to live the Gospel fully as a path which gives meaning to existence. To this end, pastoral practice must undertake the task of shaping a Christian mentality in ordinary life: in families, in schools, in social communications, in cultural life, in the workplace and the economy, in politics, in leisure-time, in health and in sickness. What is needed is a calm critical assessment of the current cultural situation of Europe and an evaluation of the emerging trends and the more significant contemporary events and situations in the light of the centrality of Christ and of Christian anthropology.

Today too, in recalling Christianity's contributions to culture throughout the history of Europe, there is a need to demonstrate the Gospel approach, both theoretical and practical, to reality and to man himself. Furthermore, considering the great importance of the sciences and technological achievements in European culture and society, the Church, through both her institutes of study and in her practical pastoral initiatives, is called to be constructive in her approach to scientific knowledge and its applications, pointing out the insufficiency and inadequacy of notions inspired by a scientism which recognizes only experimental knowledge as objectively valid, and presenting ethical criteria which man possesses as inscribed in his very nature.⁷

7. Cf. *Propositio* 23.

CARITAS IN VERITATE (2009)

Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI

nos. 26, 42

26 On the cultural plane, compared with Paul VI's day, the difference is even more marked. At that time cultures were relatively well defined and had greater opportunity to defend themselves against attempts to merge them into one. Today the possibilities of *interaction between cultures* have increased significantly, giving rise to new openings for intercultural dialogue: a dialogue that, if it is to be effective, has to set out from a deep-seated knowledge of the specific identity of the various dialogue partners. Let it not be forgotten that the increased commercialization of cultural exchange today leads to a twofold danger.

First, one may observe a *cultural eclecticism* that is often assumed uncritically: cultures are simply placed alongside one another and viewed as substantially equivalent and interchangeable. This easily yields to a relativism that does not serve true intercultural dialogue; on the social plane, cultural relativism has the effect that cultural groups coexist side by side, but remain separate, with no authentic dialogue and therefore with no true

integration. Secondly, the opposite danger exists, that of *cultural leveling* and indiscriminate acceptance of types of conduct and life-styles. In this way one loses sight of the profound significance of the culture of different nations, of the traditions of the various peoples, by which the individual defines himself in relation to life's fundamental questions.¹ What eclecticism and cultural leveling have in common is the separation of culture from human nature. Thus, cultures can no longer define themselves within a nature that transcends them,² and man ends up being reduced to a mere cultural statistic. When this happens, humanity runs new risks of enslavement and manipulation.

42 Sometimes globalization is viewed in fatalistic terms, as if the dynamics involved were the product of anonymous impersonal forces or structures independent of the human will.³ In this regard it is useful to remember that while globalization should certainly be understood as a socio-economic process, this is not its only dimension. Underneath the more visible process, humanity itself is becoming increasingly interconnected; it is made up of individuals and peoples to whom this process should offer benefits and development,⁴ as they assume their respective responsibilities, singly and collectively. The breaking-down of borders is not simply a material fact: it is also a cultural event both in its causes and its effects. If globalization is viewed from a deterministic standpoint, the criteria with which to evaluate and direct it are lost. As a human reality, it is the product of diverse cultural tendencies, which need to be subjected to a process of discernment. The truth of globalization as a process and its fundamental ethical criterion are given by the unity of the human family and its development towards what is good. Hence a sustained commitment is needed so as to *promote a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence*.

Despite some of its structural elements, which should neither be denied nor exaggerated, "globalization, *a priori*, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it".⁵ We should not be its victims, but rather its protagonists, acting in the light of reason, guided by charity and truth. Blind opposition would be a mistaken and prejudiced attitude, incapable of recognizing the positive aspects of the process, with the consequent risk of missing the chance to take advantage of its many opportunities for development. The processes of globalization, suitably understood and directed, open up the unprecedented possibility of large-scale redistribution of wealth on a world-wide scale; if badly directed, however, they can lead to an increase in poverty and inequality, and could even trigger a global crisis. It is necessary to *correct the malfunctions*, some of them serious,

1. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 24: AAS 83 (1991), 821–22.

2. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (6 August 1993), 33, 46, 51: AAS 85 (1993), 1160, 1169–71, 1174–1175; Id., Address to the Assembly of the United Nations, 5 October 1995, 3.

3. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation *Libertatis Conscientia* (22 March 1987), 74: AAS 79 (1987), 587.

4. Cf. John Paul II, Interview published in the Catholic daily newspaper *La Croix*, 20 August 1997.

5. John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 27 April 2001.

that cause new divisions between peoples and within peoples, and also to ensure that the redistribution of wealth does not come about through the redistribution or increase of poverty: a real danger if the present situation were to be badly managed. For a long time it was thought that poor peoples should remain at a fixed stage of development, and should be content to receive assistance from the philanthropy of developed peoples. Paul VI strongly opposed this mentality in *Populorum Progressio*.

Today the material resources available for rescuing these peoples from poverty are potentially greater than before, but they have ended up largely in the hands of people from developed countries, who have benefited more from the liberalization that has occurred in the mobility of capital and labor. The world-wide diffusion of forms of prosperity should not therefore be held up by projects that are self-centered, protectionist or at the service of private interests. Indeed the involvement of emerging or developing countries allows us to manage the crisis better today.

The transition inherent in the process of globalization presents great difficulties and dangers that can only be overcome if we are able to appropriate the underlying anthropological and ethical spirit that drives globalization towards the humanizing goal of solidarity. Unfortunately this spirit is often overwhelmed or suppressed by ethical and cultural considerations of an individualistic and utilitarian nature. Globalization is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon which must be grasped in the diversity and unity of all its different dimensions, including the theological dimension. In this way it will be possible to experience and to *steer the globalization of humanity in relational terms, in terms of communion and the sharing of goods*.

Pontifical Texts

Man's Entire Humanity is Expressed in Culture Pope John Paul's Address to UNESCO

2 June 1980

*Mr. President of the General Conference,
Mr. President of the Executive Council,
Mr. Director General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I wish in the first place to express my very cordial thanks for the invitation that Mr. Amadou Mahtar-M'Bow, Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, extended to me several times, even at the first of the visits he has done me the honor of paying me. There are many reasons for which I am happy to be able to accept today the invitation, which I highly appreciated immediately.

For the kind words of welcome they have just addressed to me, I thank Napoléon Leblanc, President of the General Conference, Mr. Chams Eldine El-Wakil, President of the Executive Council, and Mr. Amadou Mahtar-M'Bow, Director General of the Organization. I also wish to greet all those who are gathered here for the 109th session of UNESCO's Executive Council.

I cannot conceal my joy in seeing gathered on this occasion so many delegates from nations all over the world, so many eminent personalities, so many authorities, so many illustrious representatives of the world of culture and science. Through my intervention, I will try to bring my modest stone to the edifice you are constructing with assiduity and perseverance, Ladies

and Gentlemen, through your reflections and your resolutions in all the fields that are in UNESCO's sphere of competence.

2 Allow me to begin by referring to *the origins of your Organization*. The events that marked the foundation of UNESCO inspire me with joy and gratitude to Divine Providence: the signature of its constitution on 16 November 1945; the coming into force of this constitution and the establishment of the Organization on 4 November 1946; the agreement between UNESCO and the United Nations Organization approved by the General Assembly of the U.N. in the same year. Your Organization is, in fact, the work of the nations which, after the end of the terrible second world war, were impelled by what could be called a spontaneous desire for peace, union and reconciliation. These nations looked for the means and the forms of a collaboration capable of establishing this new understanding and of deepening it and ensuring it in a lasting way. So UNESCO came into being, like the United Nations Organization, because the peoples knew that at the basis of the great enterprises intended to serve peace and the progress of humanity over the whole globe, there was *the necessity of the union of nations*, mutual respect and international cooperation.

3 Prolonging the action, thought and message of my great predecessor Pope Paul VI, I had the honor of speaking before the United Nations General Assembly, in the month of October last, on the invitation of Mr. Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of U.N. Shortly afterwards, on 12 November 1979, I was invited by Mr. Edouard Saouma, Director General of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome. On these occasions I had the honor of dealing with questions deeply linked with all the problems connected with man's peaceful future on earth. In fact, all these problems are closely linked. We are in the presence, so to speak, of a vast system of communicating vessels: the problems of culture, science and education do not arise, in the life of nations and in international relations, independently of the other problems of human existence, such as those of peace or hunger. The problems of culture are conditioned by the other dimensions of human existence, just as the latter, in their turn condition them.

4 All the same there is—and I stressed it in my address to the U.N., referring to the Universal Declaration of human rights—one fundamental dimension, which is capable of shaking to their very foundations the systems that structure mankind as a whole and of freeing human existence, individual and collective, from the threats that weigh on it. This fundamental dimension is man, man in his integrality, man who lives at the same time in the sphere of material values and in that of spiritual values. Respect for the inalienable rights of the human person is at the basis of everything (cf. *Address to the U.N.*, ns. 7 and 13). Any threat to human rights, whether in the framework of man's spiritual goods or in that of his material goods, does violence to this fundamental dimension. That is why in my address to FAO, I emphasized that no man, no country and no system in the world can remain indifferent to the "geography of hunger" and the gigantic threats

that will ensue if the whole direction of economic policy, and in particular the hierarchy of investments, do not change in an essential and radical way. That is also why, referring to the origins of your Organization I stress the necessity of mobilizing all forces which direct the spiritual dimension of human existence, and which bear witness to the primacy of the spiritual in man—and of what corresponds to the dignity of his intelligence, his will and his heart—in order not to succumb again to the monstrous alienation of collective evil, which is always ready to use material powers in the exterminating struggle of men against men, of nations against nations.

5 At the origin of UNESCO, as also at the basis of the Universal Declaration on human rights, there are, therefore, these first noble impulses of human conscience, intelligence and will. I appeal to this origin, to this beginning, to these premises and to these first principles. It is in their name that I come today to Paris, to the headquarters of your Organization, with an entreaty: that at the end of a stage of over thirty years of your activities, you will unite even more round these ideals and principles on which the beginning was based. It is in their name also that I shall now take the liberty of proposing to you some really fundamental considerations, for it is only by their light that there shines forth fully the meaning of this institution, which has as its name UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

6 *Genus humanum arte et ratione vivit* (cf. St Thomas, commenting on Aristotle, in *Post. Analyt.*, n. 1). These words of one of the greatest geniuses of Christianity, who was at the same time a fruitful continuer of the thought of antiquity, take us beyond the circle and contemporary meaning of Western culture, whether it is Mediterranean or Atlantic. They have a meaning that applies to humanity as a whole, where the different traditions that constitute its spiritual heritage and the different periods of its culture, meet. The essential meaning of culture consists, according to these words of St. Thomas Aquinas, in the fact that it is a characteristic of human life as such. *Man lives a really human life thanks to culture*. Human life is culture in this sense too that, through it, man is distinguished and differentiated from everything that exists elsewhere in the visible world: man cannot do without culture. Culture is a specific way of man's "existing" and "being". Man always lives according to a culture which is specifically his, and which in its turn, creates among men a tie which is also specifically theirs, determining the inter-human and social character of human existence. *In the unity* of culture as the specific way of human existence, there is rooted at the same time *the plurality of cultures* in the midst of which man lives. In this plurality, man develops without losing, however, the essential contact with the unity of culture as the fundamental and essential dimension of his existence and his being.

7 Man who, in the visible world, *is the only ontic subject of culture*, is also *its only object and its term*. Culture is that through which man, as man, becomes more man, "is" more, has access to "being". The fundamental distinction between what man

is and what he has, between being and having, has its foundation there too. Culture is always an essential and necessary relationship to what man is, whereas its relationship to what he has, to his “having”, is not only secondary, but entirely relative. All man’s “having” is important for culture, is a factor creative of culture, only to the extent to which man, through his “having”, can at the same time “be” more fully as a man, become more fully a man in all the dimensions of his existence, in everything that characterizes his humanity.

The experience of the various eras, without excluding the present one, proves that people think of culture and speak about it *in the first place in relation to the nature of man*, then only *in a secondary and indirect way in relation to the world of his products*. That in no way detracts from the fact that we judge the phenomenon of culture on the basis of what man produces, or that we draw from that, at the same time, conclusions about man. Such an approach—a typical way of the “a posteriori” process of knowledge—contains in itself the possibility of going back in the opposite direction, to ontic-causal dependencies. Man, and only man, is the “protagonist”, or the “architect” of culture; man, and only man, expresses himself in it and finds his balance in it.

8 All of us present here meet *on the ground of culture, the fundamental reality* which unities us and which is at the basis of the establishment and purposes of UNESCO. We thereby meet around man and, in a certain sense, in him. This *man* who expresses himself and objectivizes himself in and through culture, is *unique, complete and indivisible*. He is at once subject and architect of culture. Consequently, he cannot be envisaged solely as the resultant—to give only one example—of the production relations that prevail at a given period. Is this criterion of production relations not at all, then, *a key to the understanding of man’s historicity, to the understanding of his culture and of the multiple forms of his development?*

Certainly, this criterion is a key, and even a precious key, but it is not the fundamental, constitutive one. Human cultures reflect, there is no doubt, the various systems of production relations; however, it is not such and such a system that is at the origin of culture, but man, man who lives in the system, who accepts it or tries to change it. A culture without human subjectivity and without human causality is inconceivable; in the cultural field, *man is always the first fact: man is the prime and fundamental fact* of all culture. And he is so, always, in his totality: *in his spiritual and material subjectivity as a complete whole*.

If the distinction between spiritual culture and material culture is correct with respect to the character and content of the products in which the culture is manifested, it is necessary to note at the same time that, on the one hand, the works of material culture always show a “*spiritualization of matter*”, a submission of the material element to man’s spiritual forces, that is, his intelligence and will,—and that, on the other hand, the works of spiritual culture manifest, specifically, a “*materialization of the spirit*”, an incarnation of what is spiritual. In cultural works, this double characteristic seems to be equally of prime

importance and equally permanent. Here is, therefore, by way of theoretical conclusion, a sufficient basis to understand culture through the complete man, through the whole reality of his subjectivity.

Here is also—in the field of action—a sufficient basis to seek always in culture the complete man, the whole man, in the whole truth of his spiritual and corporeal subjectivity; the basis which is sufficient in order *not to superimpose* on culture—a truly human system, a splendid synthesis of spirit and body—*preconceived divisions and oppositions*. In fact, whether it is a question of an absolutization of matter in structure of the human subject, or, inversely, of an absolutization of the spirit in this same structure, neither expresses the truth about man or serves his culture.

9I would like to stop here at another essential consideration, a reality of a quite different order. We can approach it by noting the fact that the Holy See is represented at UNESCO by its permanent Observer, whose presence is set in the perspective of the very nature of the Apostolic See. This presence is, even more widely, with the nature and mission of the Catholic Church and, indirectly, with that of the whole of Christianity. I take the opportunity which is offered to me today to express a deep personal conviction.

The presence of the Apostolic See in your Organization—though motivated also by the specific sovereignty of the Holy See—has its justification above all in *the organic and constitutive link* which exists between *religion* in general and Christianity in particular, on the one hand, and *culture*, on the other hand. This relationship extends to the multiple realities which must be defined as concrete expressions of culture in the different periods of history and all over the world. It will certainly not be an exaggeration to state in particular that, through a multitude of facts, the whole of Europe—from the Atlantic to the Urals—bears witness, in the history of each nation as in that of the whole community, to the link between culture and Christianity.

Recalling this, it is not at all my intention to belittle the heritage of other continents, or the specific character and value of this same heritage which is derived *from the other* sources of religious, humanistic and ethical inspiration. What is more, I wish to pay *the deepest and most sincere tribute* to all the cultures of the human family as a whole, from the most ancient to the contemporary. It is in thinking of all cultures that I wish to say in a loud voice, here in Paris, at the headquarters of UNESCO, with respect and admiration: “Here is man!”. I wish to proclaim my admiration before the creative riches of the human spirit, before its incessant efforts to know and strengthen *the identity of man*: this man who is always present in all the particular forms of culture.

10Speaking, on the contrary, of the *place of the Church* and of the Apostolic See in your Organization, I am thinking not only of all the works of culture in which, in the course of the last two millennia, the man who has accepted Christ and the Gospel expressed himself, or of the institutions of different kinds that came into being from the same inspiration in the fields of education, instruction, charity, social work and

in so many others. I am thinking above all, Ladies and Gentlemen, of *the fundamental link between the Gospel, that is, the message of Christ and the Church, and man in his very humanity*. This link is in fact a creator of culture in its very foundation. To create culture, it is necessary to consider, to its last consequences and entirely, man as a particular and autonomous value, as the subject bearing the transcendence of the person.

Man must *be affirmed for himself*, and not for any other motive or reason: solely for himself! What is more, man must be loved because he is man; love must be claimed for man by reason of the particular dignity he possesses. The whole of the affirmations concerning man belongs to the very substance of Christ's message and of the mission of the Church, in spite of all that critics may have declared about this matter, and all that the different movements opposed to religion in general and to Christianity in particular may have done. In the course of history, we have already been more than once, and we still are, *witness of a process of a very significant phenomenon*.

Where *religious institutions* have been suppressed, where ideas and works born of religious inspiration, and in particular of Christian, inspiration, have been deprived of their citizenship, men find again these same elements *outside institutional ways*, through the confrontation operated, in truth and interior effort, between what constitutes their humanity and what is contained in the Christian message. Ladies and Gentlemen, you will kindly forgive my making this statement. Proposing it, I did not want to offend anyone at all. I beg you to understand that, in the name of what I am, *I could not abstain from giving this testimony*.

It also bears within it this truth—which cannot be passed over in silence—on culture, if we seek in it everything that is human, the elements in which man expresses himself or through which he wants to be the subject of his existence. And in so speaking, I wanted at the same time to *manifest* all the more my gratitude for the ties that unite UNESCO with the Apostolic See, these ties of which my presence today is intended as a particular expression.

11 A certain number of fundamental conclusions call be drawn from all that. In fact, the considerations I have just made show clearly that *the primary and essential task of culture* in general, and also of all culture, is *education*. Education consists in fact in enabling man to become more man, to “be” more and not just to “have” more and consequently, through everything he “has”, everything he possesses”, to “be” man more fully. For this purpose man must be able to “be more” not only “with others”, but also “for others”. Education is of fundamental importance for the formation of inter-human and social relations.

Here too, I touch upon a set of axioms on the basis of which the traditions of Christianity that have sprung from the Gospel meet the educative experience of so many well-disposed and deeply wise men, so numerous in all centuries of history. In our age, too, there is no lack of them, of these *men who reveal themselves as great*, simply through their *humanity which they are able to share* with others, in particular with the young. At

the same time, the symptoms of crisis of all kinds to which there succumb environments and societies which are among those best-off in other ways,—crises which affect above all young generations—vie which other in bearing witness that the work of man's education *is not carried out only with the help of institutions*, with the help of organized and material means, however excellent they may be. They also show that the most important thing is always man, man and his *moral authority* which comes from the truth of his principles and from the conformity of his actions with these principles.

12 As the world Organization most competent in all problems of culture, UNESCO cannot neglect this other question which is absolutely fundamental: what can be done in order that man's education may be carried out *above all in the family*? What is the state of public morality which will ensure the family, and above all the parents, the moral authority necessary for this purpose? What type of instruction? What forms of legislation sustain this authority or, on the contrary, weaken it or destroy it? The causes of success and failure in the formation of man by his family always lie both *within* the fundamental creative environment of culture which the family is, and also at a *higher level*, that of the competence of the State and the agencies on which these causes depend. These problems cannot but cause reflection and solicitude in the forum where the qualified representatives of the State meet. There is no doubt that the first and fundamental cultural fact is the spiritually mature man, that is, a fully educated man, a man capable of educating himself and others. Nor is there any doubt that the first and fundamental dimension of culture is healthy morality: *moral culture*.

13 Certainly, there are many particular questions in this field, but experience shows that everything is connected; and that these questions are set in systems that plainly depend upon one another. For example, in the process of education as a whole, and of scholastic education in particular, has there not been a *unilateral shift towards instruction in the narrow sense of the word*? If we consider the proportions assumed by this phenomenon, as well as the systematic increase of instruction which refers solely to what man possesses, is not man himself put more and more in the shade? That leads, then, to a real *alienation of education*: instead of working in favor of what man must "be", it works solely in favor of what man can take advantage of in the field of "having", of "possession".

The further stage of this alienation is to accustom man, by depriving him of his own subjectivity, to being the *object of multiple manipulations*: ideological or political manipulations which are carried out through public opinion; those that are operated through monopoly or control, through economic forces or political powers, and the media of social communication; finally, the manipulation which consists of teaching life as a specific manipulation of oneself. These dangers in the field of education seem to threaten above all societies with a more developed technical civilization. These societies are confronted with man's specific *crisis* which consists of a *growing lack of confidence with regard*

to his humanity, to the meaning of the fact of being a man, and to the affirmation and joy derived from it which are a source of creation. Modern civilization tries to impose on man a series of *apparent imperatives* which its spokesmen justify by recourse to the principle of development and progress.

Thus, for example, instead of respect for life, the “imperative” of getting rid of life and destroying it; instead of love which is the responsible communion of persons, the “imperative” of the maximum sexual enjoyment apart from any sense of responsibility; instead of the primacy of truth in actions, the primacy of behavior that is fashionable, of the subjective and immediate success. In all that there is indirectly expressed a great *systematic renunciation* of the healthy ambition of being a man. Let us be under no illusions: the system constructed on the basis of these false imperatives, these fundamental renunciations, may determine the future of man and the future of culture.

14 If, in the name of the future of culture, it must be proclaimed that man has the right to “be” more, and if for the same reason it is necessary to demand a healthy *primacy of the family* in the overall work of educating man to real humanity, *the law of the Nation* must be set along the same line; it, too, must be placed *at the basis of culture and education*. The Nation is, in fact, the great community of men who are united by various ties, but above all, precisely by culture.

The Nation exists “*through*” culture and “*for*” culture, and it is therefore the great educator of men in order that they may “be more” in the community. It is this community which possesses a history that goes beyond the history of the individual and the family. It is also in this community, with respect to which every family educates, that the family begins its work of education with what is the most simple thing, language, thus enabling man, who is taking his first steps, to learn to speak in order to become a member of the community of his family and of his Nation. In all that I am now proclaiming, which I will develop still further, my words express a particular experience, a *particular testimony* in its kind. I am the son of a Nation which has lived the greatest experiences of history, which its neighbors have condemned to death several times, but which has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity, and it has kept, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, its national sovereignty, not by relying on the resources of physical power, but solely *by relying on its culture*. This culture turned out in the circumstances to be more powerful than all other forces.

What I say here concerning the right of the Nation to the foundation of its culture and its future is not therefore the echo of any “nationalism”, but it is always a question of a stable element of human experience and of the *humanistic perspective of man’s development*. There exists a fundamental sovereignty of society which is manifested in the culture of the Nation. It is a question of the sovereignty through which, at the same time, man is supremely sovereign. When I express myself in this way, I’m also thinking, with deep interior emotion, of the *cultures of so many ancient peoples* which did not give way when confronted with the civilizations of the invaders: and they still remain for man the

source of his “being” as a man in the interior truth of his humanity. I am also thinking with admiration of the *cultures of the new societies*, those that are awakening to life in the community of their own Nation—just as my Nation awakened to life ten centuries ago—and that are struggling to maintain their own identity and their own values against the influences and pressure of models proposed from outside.

15 Addressing you, Ladies and Gentlemen, you who have been meeting in this place for over thirty years now in the name of the primacy of the cultural realities of man, human communities, peoples and Nations, I say to you with all the means at your disposal, watch over this fundamental sovereignty that every Nation possesses by nature of its own culture. Cherish it like the apple of your eye for the future of the great human family. Protect it! Do not allow this fundamental sovereignty to become the prey of some political or economic interest. Do not allow it to become a victim of totalitarian and imperialistic systems of hegemonies for which man counts only as an object of domination and not as the subject of his own human existence. For them too, the Nation—their own Nation or others—counts only as an object of domination and of bait for various interests, and not as the subject: the subject of sovereignty coming from the true culture which belongs to it as its own. Are there not on the map of Europe and the world, Nations which have a *marvelous historic sovereignty* derived from their culture, and which are nonetheless, deprived of their full sovereignty at the same time? Is this not an important point for the future of human culture, important above all in our age, when it is so urgent to eliminate the vestiges of colonialism?

16 This sovereignty which exists and which draws its origin from the specific culture of the Nation and society, from the primacy of the family in the work of education and finally from the personal dignity of every man, *must remain the fundamental criterion* of the manner of dealing with the problem, an important one for humanity today, namely, that of *the media of social communication* (of the information which is bound up with them, and also of what is called “mass culture”). Since these media are “social” media of communication, they cannot be *means of domination over others*, on the part of agents of political power as well as of financial powers which impose their programme and their model. They must become the means—and what an important means!—of *expression* of this *society* which uses them, and which also ensures their existence. They must take into account the real needs of this society. They must take into account the culture of the Nation and its history. They must *respect the responsibility of the family in the field of education*. They must take into consideration the good of man, his dignity. They cannot be subjected to the criterion of interest, of the sensational and of immediate success but, taking into account ethical requirements, they must serve the construction of a “more human” life.

17 *Genus humanum arte et ratione vivit*. Fundamentally, it is affirmed that *man is himself through truth, and becomes more himself through increasingly perfect*

knowledge of truth. I would like to pay tribute here, Ladies and Gentlemen, to all the merits of your Organization and at the same time to the commitment and to all the efforts of the States and Institutions which you represent, in regard to the *popularization of instruction* at all grades and all levels, as regards the elimination of illiteracy, which signifies the lack of all instruction, even the most elementary, a lack which is painful not only from the point of view of the elementary culture of individuals and environments, but also from the point of view of socio-economic progress.

There are distressing indications of delay in this field, bound up with a distribution of goods that is often radically unequal and unjust; think of the situations in which there exist, alongside a plutocratic oligarchy limited in numbers, multitudes of starving citizens living in want. This delay can be eliminated not by way of bloody struggles for power, but above all, by means of *systemic alphabetization* through the spread and popularization of instruction. An effort in this direction is necessary if we desire to carry out the necessary changes in the socio-economic field. Man, who “is more”, thanks also to what he “has” and to what he “possesses”, *must know how to possess*, that is, *to order and administer* the means he possesses, for his own good and for the common good. For this purpose, instruction is indispensable.

18 The problem of instruction has always been closely linked with the *mission of the Church*. In the course of the centuries, she founded schools at all levels; she gave birth to the medieval Universities in Europe: in Paris and in Bologna, in Salamanca and in Heidelberg, in Krakow and in Louvain. In our age, too, she offers the same contribution wherever her activity in this field is requested and respected. Allow me to claim in this place *for Catholic families* the right which belongs to all families to educate their children in schools which correspond to their own view of the world, and in particular the strict right of Christian parents not to see their children subjected, in schools, to programmes inspired by atheism. That is, indeed, one of the fundamental rights of man and of the family.

19 The system of education is organically connected with the system of the different orientations given to the way of *practicing and popularizing science*, a purpose which is served by high-level educational establishments, Universities and also, in view of the present development of specialization and scientific methods, specialized institutes. These are institutions of which it would be difficult to speak without deep emotion. They are the *work benches* at which man's vocation to knowledge, as well as the constitutive *link of humanity with truth* as the aim of knowledge, become a daily reality, become in a sense, the daily bread of so many teachers, venerated leaders of science, and around them, of young researchers dedicated to science and its applications, as also of the multitude of students who frequent these centers of science and knowledge.

We find ourselves here, as it were, *at the highest rungs of the ladder* which man has been climbing, since the beginning, towards knowledge of the reality of the world around

him, and towards knowledge of the mysteries of his humanity. This historical process has reached in our age *possibilities* previously unknown; it has opened to human intelligence horizons hitherto unsuspected. It would be difficult to go into detail here for, on the way to knowledge, the orientations of specializations are as numerous as the development of science is rich.

20Your Organization is a place of meeting, a meeting which embraces, in its widest sense, the whole field, so essential, of human culture. This audience is therefore the very place to *greet* all men of science, and to pay tribute particularly to those who are present here and who have obtained for their work the highest recognition and the most eminent world distinctions.

Allow me, consequently, to express also certain wishes which, I do not doubt, will reach the thought and hearts of the members of this august assembly. Just as we are edified in scientific work—edified and made deeply happy—by *this march of the disinterested knowledge of truth* which the scholar serves with the greatest dedication and sometimes at the risk of his health and even his life, we must be equally concerned by everything that is in contradiction with the principles of disinterestedness and objectivity, everything that would make *science an instrument* to reach aims that have nothing to do with it. Yes, we must be concerned about everything that proposes and presupposes only these non-scientific aims, demanding of men of science that they should put themselves in their service without permitting them to judge and decide in all independence of mind, the *human and ethical honesty* of these purposes, or threatening them with bearing the consequences when they refuse to contribute to them. Do these non-scientific aims of which I am speaking, this problem that I am raising, need proofs or comments?

You know what I am referring to; let it suffice to mention, the fact that among those who were brought before the international courts, at the end of the last world war, there were also men of science. Ladies and Gentlemen, I beg you to forgive me these words, but I would not be faithful to the duties of my office if I did not utter them, not in order to return to the past, but to defend *the future of science and human culture*; even more, to defend the future of man and the world! I think that Socrates who in his uncommon integrity, was able to sustain that knowledge is at the same time moral virtue, would have to climb down from his certainty if he could consider the experience of our time.

21We realize it, Ladies and Gentlemen, *the future of man and of the world is threatened, radically threatened*, in spite of the intentions, certainly noble ones, of men of learning, men of science. It is threatened because the marvelous results of their researches and their discoveries, especially in the field of the sciences of nature, have been and continue to be exploited—to the detriment of the ethical imperative—for purposes that have nothing to do with the requirements of science, and even for *purposes of destruction and death*, and that to a degree never known hitherto, causing really unimaginable damage. Whereas science is called to be in the service of man's life, it is too often

a fact that it is subjected to purposes that destroy the real dignity of man and of human life. That is the case when scientific research itself is directed towards these purposes or when its results are applied to purposes contrary to the good of mankind. That happens in the field of genetic manipulations and biological experimentations as well as in that of chemical, bacteriological or nuclear armaments.

Two considerations lead me to submit particularly to your reflection the nuclear threat which is weighting upon the world today and which, if it is not staved off, could lead to the destruction of the fruits of culture, the products of civilization elaborated throughout the centuries by successive generations of men who believed in the primacy of the spirit and who did not spare either their efforts or their fatigue.

The first consideration is the following. Geopolitical reasons, economic problems of world dimension, wounded national pride, the materialism of our age and the decadence of moral values have led our world to a situation of instability, to a frail balance which runs the risk of being destroyed any moment as a result of errors of judgment, information or interpretation.

Another consideration is added to this disquieting perspective. Can we be sure, nowadays, that the upsetting of the balance would not lead to a war that would not hesitate to have recourse to nuclear arms? Up to now it has been said that nuclear arms have constituted a force of dissuasion which has prevented a major war from breaking out, and it is probably true. But we may wonder at the same time if it will always be so. Nuclear arms, of whatever order of magnitude or of whatever type they may be, are being perfected more and more every year, and they are being added to the arsenal of a growing number of countries. How can we be sure that the use of nuclear arms, even for purposes of national defense or in limited conflicts, will not lead to *an inevitable escalation*, lending to a destruction that mankind can never envisage or accept? But it is not you, men of science and culture, that I must ask not to close your eyes to what a nuclear war can represent for the whole of humanity (cf. *Homily for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1980).

22 Ladies and Gentlemen, the world will not be able to continue for long along this way. A conviction, which is at the same time a *moral imperative*, forces itself upon anyone who has become aware of the situation and the stakes, and who is also inspired by the elementary sense of responsibilities that are incumbent on everyone: consciences must be mobilized!

The efforts of human consciences must be increased in proportion to the tension between good and evil to which men at the end of the twentieth century are subjected. We must convince ourselves of the priority of ethics over technology, of the primacy of the person over things, of the superiority of spirit over matter (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 16).

The cause of man will be served if science forms an alliance with conscience. The man of science will really help humanity if he keeps "the sense of man's transcendence over the world and of God's over man" (*Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, 10 November 1979, 4). Thus, seizing the opportunity of my presence at the headquarters of UNESCO

today, I, a son of humanity and Bishop of Rome, directly address you, men of science, you who are gathered here, you the highest authorities in all fields of modern science. And through you I address your colleagues and friends of all countries and all continents. I address you in the name of this terrible threat which weighs over mankind, and, at the same time, in the name of the future and the good of humanity all over the world.

I beseech you: *let us make every effort* to establish and respect the primacy of ethics, in all fields of science. Let us do our utmost particularly to preserve the human family from the horrible perspective of nuclear war. I touched upon this subject before the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, in New York, on 2 October of last year. I am speaking about it today to you. I appeal to your intelligence and your heart, above passions, ideologies and frontiers. I appeal to all those who through their political or economic power, would be and are often led to impose on scientist *the conditions of their work and its orientation*. Above all I appeal to every scientist individually and to the whole international scientific community.

All together you are an enormous power: the power of intelligences and consciences! Show yourselves to be more powerful than the most powerful in our modern world! Make up your mind to give proof of the most noble solidarity with mankind: the solidarity funded on the dignity of the human person. Construct peace, beginning with the foundation: *respect for all the rights of man*, those which are connected with his material and economic dimension as well as those which are connected with the spiritual and interior dimension of his existence in this world. May wisdom inspire you! May love guide you, this love which will suffocate the growing threat of hatred and destruction! Men of science, commit all your moral authority to save mankind from nuclear destruction.

23 Today I have been given the possibility of realizing *one of the deepest desires of my heart*. I been given the possibility of penetrating, here, within the Areopagus which is that of the whole world. I have been given the possibility of saying to all, to you, members of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, to you who are working for the good and for the reconciliation of men and peoples through all fields of culture, science and information, to say to you and to cry to you from the inmost depths of my soul: Yes! The future of man depends on culture! Yes! The peace of the world depends on *the primacy of the Spirit*! Yes! The peaceful future of mankind depends on *love*! Your personal contribution, Ladies and Gentlemen, is important, it is vital. It lies in the correct approach to the problems, to the solutions of which you dedicate your service. My final word is the following: Do not stop. Continue. Continue always.

The Church and Culture

18 January 1983

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

1 It is with special joy that I welcome, for the first time, and officially, the Pontifical Council for Culture. First of all, I would like to thank the members of the international Council whom I recently appointed and who responded so quickly to the invitation to meet in Rome in order to discuss the orientation and the future activities of the Pontifical Council for Culture. Your presence on this Council is an honor and a source of hope for the Church. Your acknowledged reputations in widely diverse areas of culture, of the sciences, of the humanities, of the media, in universities, and in sacred disciplines, allow one to anticipate fruitful work from this new Council that I decided to create, taking my inspiration from the directives of the Second Vatican Council.

2 The Second Vatican Council has given a new dynamism in the domain of culture, especially in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. Today it is indeed an arduous task to understand the extreme variety of cultures, of customs, of traditions, and of civilizations. At first sight, the challenge can seem to be beyond us, but is not this very challenge proportionate to

our faith and our hope? During the Second Vatican Council, the Church recognized that a dramatic gap had established itself between the Church and culture. The modern world is fascinated by its conquests, and its scientific and technological achievements. But, too often the modern world gives itself over to ideologies, to ethical criteria dictated by practicality, to behavior which is in contradiction to the Gospels, or which, at least, calmly discounts Christian values.

3 Therefore, it is in the name of the Christian faith that the Second Vatican Council committed the whole Church to listen to modern man in order to understand him and to invent a new kind of dialogue which would permit the originality of the Gospel message to be carried to the heart of contemporary mentalities.

We must then rediscover the apostolic creativity and the prophetic power of the first disciples in order to face new cultures. Christ's word must appear in all of its freshness to the young generations whose attitudes are sometimes so difficult to understand for the traditionally-minded, but who are far from being closed to spiritual values.

4 Many times I have affirmed that the dialogue between the Church and the cultures of the world has assumed a vital importance for the future of the Church and of the world. If I may be allowed today to do so, I should like to return to this subject in order to emphasize two principal and complementary aspects which correspond to the two areas in which the Church is active: that of the evangelization of cultures and that of the defense of man and of his cultural advancement. Both of these tasks demand that new pathways of dialogue between the Church and the cultures of our period be forged.

This dialogue is absolutely indispensable for the Church, because otherwise evangelization will remain a dead letter. Saint Paul did not hesitate to say: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" At the end of the twentieth century, as in the Apostle's time, the Church must be all things to all people, embracing today's cultures sympathetically. There are still classes and mentalities, countries, and entire areas to be evangelized, which presupposes a long and courageous process of inculturation so that the Gospel can penetrate the soul of living cultures fulfilling their highest expectations and making them grow proportionately in Christian faith, hope and charity. The Church, through its missionaries, has already accomplished incomparable work on all continents, but this missionary work is never completed, because sometimes cultures have only been affected superficially, and in any case, as cultures continually change, they demand a renewed approach. Let us even add that this noble term of mission applies henceforth to old civilizations marked by Christianity, but which are now threatened with indifference, agnosticism, or even irreligion. In addition, new sectors of culture are appearing, with diverse objectives, methods, and languages. Intercultural dialogue is therefore a must for Christians in all countries.

5 In order to evangelize effectively, it is necessary to adopt resolutely an attitude of exchange and of comprehension in order to sympathize with the cultural identity of nationalities, of ethnic groups, and of varied sectors of modern society. Moreover, it

is necessary to work for a greater closeness among cultures, so that the universal values of man will be accepted everywhere in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity. Consequently, evangelization presupposes the penetration of the specific identity of each culture and also favors exchanges among cultures, opening all of them to universal values and, I would even say, to the values of Catholicity.

It was in thinking of this heavy responsibility that I wanted to create the Pontifical Council for Culture, in order to give the whole Church, both its leaders and the faithful, a strong incentive to become aware of the duty that is incumbent upon all to listen carefully to modern man, not in order to approve all of his behavior, but rather in order to discover first of all his latent hopes and aspirations. This is why I have invited bishops, those who work in the various services of the Holy See, international Catholic organizations, universities, and all men of faith and of culture to commit themselves with conviction to a dialogue among cultures, bringing to this dialogue the salvific word of the Gospel.

6 We must, in addition, remember that Christians have much to receive in this dynamic relationship between the Church and the contemporary world. The Ecumenical Council of Vatican II emphasized this point and it is appropriate to remember it. The Church has been greatly enriched by acquisitions from so many civilizations. The secular experience of so many nationalities, the progress of science, the hidden treasures of diverse cultures, through which the nature of man becomes more fully visible, and through which new paths toward the truth open up, all of that is an indisputable advantage for the Church as the Council recognized (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 44). And this enrichment continues.

Indeed, think of the results of scientific research which have led to a better knowledge of the universe, to a deeper understanding of the mystery of man; think of the advantages that the new means of communication and contact among men have procured for society and for the Church; think of the capacity of producing innumerable economic and cultural goods, and especially of promoting the education of the masses, and of healing formerly incurable diseases. What admirable achievements! All of this is to man's credit. And all of this has greatly benefited the Church itself, in its life, its organization, its work, and its own labor. Thus, it is understandable that the people of God, in solidarity with the world in which they live, would recognize the discoveries and accomplishments of our contemporaries and participate in them as much as is possible so that man himself may grow and develop to the full extent of his potentiality. This presupposes a great capacity to accept and to admire, but also a clear sense of discernment. And now, I would like to elaborate upon this last point.

7 In urging us to evangelize, our faith inspires us to love man himself. And, man, today, more than ever before, needs to be defended against the threats which weigh upon his development. The love we draw from the spring of the Gospel, in the wake of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, brings us to proclaim that man mer-

its honor and love for himself and must be respected in his dignity. Thus, brothers must learn again to speak to each other as brothers, to respect each other, to understand each other, so that man himself may survive and grow in dignity, liberty, and honor. To the extent that the modern world stifles dialogue among cultures, it heads towards conflicts which run the risk of being fatal for the future of human civilization. Beyond prejudices and cultural barriers, of racial, linguistic, religious, and ideological separation, human beings must recognize themselves as brothers and sisters, and accept each other in their diversity.

8 The lack of understanding among men makes them run a fatal risk. But man is also threatened in his biological being by the irreparable deterioration of the environment, by the risk of genetic manipulations, attacks against unborn life and by torture, which is currently still seriously widespread. Our love for man must give us the courage to denounce ideas which reduce the human being to a thing that one can manipulate, humiliate, or arbitrarily eliminate.

Man is also insidiously threatened in his moral being, because he is subject to hedonistic currents which exacerbate his instincts and fascinate him with illusions of consumption without discrimination. Public opinion is manipulated by the deceitful suggestions of powerful advertising, the one-dimensional values of which ought to make us critical and vigilant.

In addition, man is currently humiliated by economic systems that exploit entire collectivities. Furthermore, man is also the victim of certain political or ideological regimes that imprison the soul of the people. As Christians, we cannot keep silent and we must denounce this cultural oppression which prevents people and ethnic groups from being themselves in conformity with their profound vocation. It is through these cultural values that the individual or collective man lives a truly human life and one cannot tolerate that his reasons for living be destroyed. History will judge our period severely to the extent that it has stifled, corrupted, and brutally enslaved cultures in so many areas of the world.

9 It is in this sense that I was eager to proclaim to UNESCO, before the assembly of all nations, what I am permitting myself to repeat to you today: "It is essential to affirm man for himself, and not for any other motive or reason: uniquely for himself! Moreover, it is necessary to love man because he is man, it is necessary to demand love for man because of the particular dignity that he possesses.

These affirmations concerning man belong to the very substance of Christ's message and of the mission of the Church, despite everything that critics have been able to declare on the matter, and everything that the diverse currents opposed to religion in general and to Christianity in particular may have done" (*Address to UNESCO*, June 2, 1980, 10). This message is fundamental for making possible the work of the Church in the contemporary world. This is why I wrote in the conclusion of the encyclical *Redemptor hominis* that

“man is and is always becoming the “way” for the daily life of the Church” (21). Yes, man is “the way of the Church”, because without this respect for man and his dignity, how could one announce to him the words of life and of truth?

10 Thus, it is in remembering these two principles of orientation, evangelization of cultures and defense of man, that the Pontifical Council for Culture will pursue its own work. On the one hand, it is required that the evangelizer familiarize himself with the sociocultural environments in which he must announce the word of God; more important, the Gospel is itself a leavening agent for culture to the extent that it reaches man in his manner of thinking, behaving, working, enjoying himself, that is, as it reaches him in his cultural specificity. On the other hand, our faith gives us confidence in man—in man created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ—in man whom we want to defend and to love for himself, conscious as we are that he is man only because of his culture, that is, because of his freedom to grow integrally and with all of his specific abilities. Your task is difficult but splendid. Together you must contribute, to blazing new paths for the Church’s dialogue with the contemporary world. How can one speak to the heart and to the intelligence of modern man in order to announce to him the salvific word? How can one make our contemporaries more sensitive to the intrinsic value of the human being, to the dignity of each individual, to the hidden wealth in each culture?

Your role is great, because you must help the Church to become a creator of culture in its relationship with the modern world. We would be unfaithful to our mission to evangelize the present generations, if we left Christians without an understanding of new cultures. We would also be unfaithful to the spirit of charity which must animate us, if we didn’t see in what respects man is today threatened in his humanity, and if we did not proclaim, by our words and actions, the necessity of defending individual and collective man, of saving him from the oppressions and enslavements which humiliate him.

11 In your work you are invited to collaborate with all men of good will. You will discover that the spirit of good is mysteriously at work in so many of our contemporaries, even in some of those who do not claim affiliation with any religion, but who seek to accomplish honestly and with courage their human vocation. Think of so many fathers and mothers, so many teachers and students, of workers dedicated to their tasks, of so many men and women devoted to the cause of peace, the common good, international cooperation and justice. Think also of all of the researchers who devote themselves with moral constancy and rigor to their useful work for society, of all the eager artists and creators of beauty. Do not hesitate to enter into dialogue with all of these persons of good will, many of whom perhaps secretly hope for the testimony and support of the Church in order better to defend and promote the true progress of man.

12 I warmly thank you for having come to work with us. In the name of the Church, the Pope is counting a great deal upon you; because as I said in the letter by which I created it, your Council “will bring regularly to the Holy See the echo of the great

cultural aspirations throughout the world, delving into the expectations of contemporary civilizations and exploring new paths of cultural dialogue”. Your Council will have above all else the value of witnessing. You must show Christians and the world the deep interest that the Church has in the progress of culture and in a fruitful dialogue among cultures, as in their beneficial encounter with the Gospel. Your role cannot be defined once and for all and a priori: experience will teach you the most efficacious means of action and those best adapted to the circumstances.

Keep in regular contact with the Executive Committee of the Council—whom I congratulate and encourage—participate in their actions and in their research, propose your initiatives to them, and inform them of your experiences. What is evidently requested of the Council for Culture, is to implement its activity by means of dialogue, inspiration, testimony, and research. There is in those activities a particularly fruitful manner for the Church to be present in the world and to reveal to it the always new message of Christ the Redeemer.

With the approach of the Jubilee of the Redemption, I pray Christ to inspire you, to help you, so that your work will serve his plan, his Work of Salvation. And, with all my heart, I thank you in advance for your cooperation, I bless you, in the name of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

The World's Changing Cultural Horizon

12 January 1990

*Your Eminences,
Dear Friends,*

I am happy to welcome you here. Together with Cardinal Paul Poupard and his collaborators, you are once again conveying to the Holy See echoes of the great cultural changes that are shaking the world. You thereby assist the Church to discern better the signs of the times and the new ways of inculturating the Gospel and evangelizing cultures. In this regard, the year which has just come to an end was rich in exceptional events which rightly hold our attention in this last decade of our millennium.

A common sentiment seems to dominate the great human family today. Everyone wonders what future to construct in peace and solidarity, in this transition from one cultural era to another. The great ideologies have shown their bankruptcy before the harsh trail of events. Self-styled scientific systems of social renewal, indeed of human self-redemption, myths of revolutionary fulfillment of man have been revealed to the eyes of the entire world for what they were: tragic utopias which entailed a regression without precedent in the tormented history of humanity. In the midst of their brothers and sisters, the heroic resistance of Christian communities against inhuman totalitarianism has aroused admiration. The world of today is rediscovering that, far

from being the opium of the people, faith in Christ is the best guarantee and the stimulus of their liberty.

2 Walls have crumbled. Borders have opened. However, enormous barriers still stand between the hopes of justice and their realization, between wealth and wretched poverty, while rivalries are reborn as long as the struggle to possess overrides the respect for the person. An earthly messianism has crumbled and the thirst for a new justice is springing up in the world. A great hope has been born of freedom, responsibility, solidarity, spirituality. Everyone is calling for a new fully human civilization in this privileged hour in which we are living. This immense hope of humanity must not be disappointed: we all have to respond to the expectations of a new human culture. This task requires your reflection and calls for your proposals.

There is no lack of new risks of deception and disappointment. Secular ethics has tasted its limits and has proved impotent before the formidable experiments which are being conducted on human beings viewed as mere laboratory objects. The person feels radically threatened in the face of policies which arbitrarily decide over the right to life or the moment of death, while the laws of the economic system weigh heavily on family life. Science manifests its inability to answer the great questions of the meaning of life, love, society, and death. Statesmen themselves seem to hesitate on the paths to be taken to construct this world of brotherhood and solidarity which all our contemporaries are calling for, both within nations and at the level of the continents.

It is the task of women and men of culture to think through this future in the light of the Christian faith which inspires them. Tomorrow's society will have to be different, in a world which no longer tolerates inhuman governmental structures. From East to West, from North to South, the movement of history is calling into question an order that rested primarily on force and fear. This openness towards a new equilibrium requires wise reflection and daring foresight.

3 The whole of Europe is wondering about its future, while the collapse of totalitarian systems calls for a profound renewal of politics and is causing a vigorous return of the spiritual aspirations of peoples. Europe is being forced to seek to redefine its identity beyond political systems and military alliances. It is rediscovering itself as a continent of culture, a land watered by the Christian faith of two thousand years and at the same time nourished by a secular humanism with contradictory cross currents. In this moment of crisis, Europe might be tempted to turn in on itself, momentarily forgetting the bonds that unite it to the vast world. But great voices, from East to West, are inviting it to draw on the full dimensions of its historic vocation in this hour which is at once dramatic and imposing. It is your job, in your own way, to help it rediscover its roots and build its future, measuring up to its ideal and generosity. By their enthusiasm the young people whom I met with joy on the paths of Santiago de Compostela revealed that this ideal was alive in them.

4 On the other shore of the Mediterranean is Africa; scarred by trouble and strife, and often by famine, it is drawing closer to us, while vigorously proclaiming its own identity and its specific place in the concert of nations. The coming Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, in communion with the universal Church, will permit this continent of the future to show how in our times the Gospel is an incomparable leaven of culture in the integral development in solidarity of individuals and peoples. At the heart of the Church, Africa can create cultures rooted in thousands of years of ancestral wisdom and renewed by the strength of the Gospel leaven which the Christian communities bring.

5 Latin America is preparing to celebrate with fervor the fifth centenary of its evangelization. The Fourth General Conference of its bishops has already been announced for 1992; it will be directed entirely towards a new stage of evangelization of its peoples and cultures, and will give a new impulse to this continent of hope. Between anguish and hope, the future of the society and of the Church is here at stake, notably among the poor. Between South America, engaged in a process of renewal, and North America, rich in incomparable economic potential, Central America intends to live its vocation at the confluence and crucible of cultures. Christians, who are in the great majority in the entire American continent, have for this reason a cultural and spiritual vocation that is proportionate to their enormous opportunities.

The Pontifical Council for Culture will be able, for its part, to help them assume their full responsibility in this promising process, overcoming the temptations to egoism and to narcissistic nationalism. I am happy that new members of your Council are starting to contribute to the fulfillment of this indispensable task.

6 The contrasts which are beginning to appear along the vast shores of the Pacific are attracting the attention of the whole world. An unprecedented economic growth is giving this geographical area a new role in human history, with enormous clout in international affairs. At the same time, in many regions, entire populations are struggling to free themselves from extreme and inhuman poverty. China is searching for a new destiny that will measure up to its millenary culture. There is no doubt that its human riches and its desire for a renewed communion with modern cultures will enable it to contribute new energies to this world. I await the day when you will be able to make use of its invaluable contribution to enrich your dialogue between cultures and the Gospel.

7 Dear Friends, these are the themes that are nourishing your reflections at the close of a century which has experienced too much horror and terror, and which once again aspires to a fully human culture.

If the future is uncertain, one certitude remains in our minds. This future will be what people make of it, with their responsible freedom, sustained by the grace of God. For us Christians, the human being whom we wish to help to grow at the heart of all the cultures is a person of incomparable dignity, an image and likeness of God, of that God who took

on a human countenance in Jesus Christ. Man can seem hesitant today, at times hindered by his own past, anxious about his future, but it is also true that a new person is emerging with a new stature on the world scene. His profound aspiration is to affirm himself in liberty, to move forward with responsibility, to act on behalf of solidarity.

At this crossroads of history in search of hope, the Church brings him the ever new sap of the Gospel, creator of culture, fountain of humanity and at the same time, promise of eternity. Its secret is Love. This is the primordial need of every human culture. The name of this Love is Jesus, Son of Mary. Dear friends, bring him, as she did, with confidence, to all the paths of mankind, to the heart of the new cultures which we have to construct in people. Be convinced of this: the strength of the Gospel is capable of transforming the cultures of our times by its leaven of justice and of charity in truth and solidarity. Faith which becomes culture is the source of hope. Strong in this hope and happy to see you thus at work, I ask the Lord to bless you.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Letting the Gospel Take Root in Every Culture

10 January 1992

*Your Eminences,
Dear Friends,*

1I receive you with joy and extend my greetings of welcome. I am happy to greet you and to express my appreciation for your dedication to the Church and her mission of evangelization. I thank you for the expertise which you put at the service of the Holy See, under the leadership of Cardinal Paul Poupard, together with Cardinals Eugenio de Arujo Sales and Hyacinthe Thiandoum of the Executive Committee, helped by collaborators who guarantee quality work here in Rome. Some months from now, the Pontifical Council for Culture, one of the newest dicasteries of the Roman Curia, will celebrate its 10th anniversary. During this first decade, you have shown through your work that culture is a constitutive element of the life of Christian communities, as of every society that is truly human. Following the guidelines given on 20 May 1982 in the Letter of foundation, which were confirmed in the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (articles 166–168), here you are, freely engaged in reflection and in action.

2You have progressively developed a fruitful collaboration with the different dicasteries of the Roman Curia and with many organizations, such as the Pontifical Committee

for Historical Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. I wish that your collaboration with the local Churches will intensify in order to promote appropriate initiatives to spur on the evangelization of culture and the inculturation of the faith. Your bulletin, “Church and Cultures”, radiates the light of the numerous and varied accomplishments of international importance that you have attained.

You collaborate with international Catholic organizations, with UNESCO and with the Council of Europe. You have participated in numerous exhibitions—and have also sponsored some—and have developed expert reflections on the means of social communication, the arts, publications, Catholic universities, the role of women in cultural development, the inculturation of the faith in Africa and Asia, the evangelization of America and the building of the new Europe.

3 For several years a new Europe has been taking shape, through darkness and light, through joy and pain. The collapse of ideological and authoritarian walls has caused joy and a reawakening of great hope, but already other walls once again divide the continent. Because of this, I am grateful to you for having organized, at my request and in preparation for the Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, the pre-Synodal Symposium, Christianity and Culture in Europe: Cultural Memory, Present Consciousness, Future Projects. You have helped the Bishops, and with them the entire Church, to revive our Christian memory of the millennia and to better discern the cultural foundations for the rebirth of a spiritually reunited Europe, in which we want to be “witnesses of Christ who has set us free” (cf. Gal 5:1).

On the eve of the Third Millennium, the apostolic mission of the Church commits her to a new evangelization in which culture assumes fundamental importance. This was underlined by the Fathers of the recent Synod: the number of Christians is increasing, but at the same time, the pressures of a culture without spiritual roots is growing. De-christianization has generated societies which lack a reference to God. The demise of atheistic Marxism-Leninism, the system of political totalitarianism in Europe, is far from resolving the tragedies that this system has caused in the last 75 years. How many have been affected in one way or another by this totalitarian system: its leaders, its supporters, as well as its staunch adversaries, have become its victims. Those who sacrificed their families, their energy and their dignity for a communist utopia are beginning to realize they have been dragged into a lie that has very deeply hurt human nature. Others have found freedom, for which they have not been prepared, and the use of this freedom remains hypothetical, since they live in precarious political, social and economic conditions and are experiencing a confused cultural situation, with a violent reawakening of nationalist rivalry.

At the conclusion of the Pre-Synodal Symposium you asked: To what and to whom will those whose utopian hopes have recently disappeared turn? The spiritual void that threatens society is above all a cultural void and it is the moral conscience, renewed by the Gospel of Christ, which can truly fill it. Only then, in creative fidelity to its own heritage

bequeathed by the past and ever alive, will Europe be able to face the future with plans that will be a real encounter between the Word of Life and culture in search of love and truth for the human person. I take the opportunity which has been offered to me today to express again to all those who helped organize this Symposium my gratitude for their collaboration in the Synod's work.

4 1992 marks the fifth centenary of the evangelization of America. I have especially wanted "Christian culture" to be one of the major focal points of this anniversary, in which the Church will truly proclaim the Gospel of Christ to people, to the extent that she speaks to each person in his culture and that the faith of Christians shows its ability to enrich developing cultures, bearers of hope for the future. Nearly half the world's Catholics are in Latin America. The challenge of the new evangelization is very closely linked to a renewed dialogue between culture and faith. For this reason, the Pontifical Council for Culture, together with CELAM, will continue to offer its experience to Episcopal Conferences that request help along these lines.

5 The forthcoming Synod of Bishops for Africa will give central importance to the great challenge of implanting the Gospel in African cultures. Already the preparatory documents are very closely studying the relationship between evangelization and inculturation. For more than a century missionaries have generously given their energy and have often even sacrificed their lives so that the saving Gospel might reach Africa at the very heart of its being. Inculturation is a slow process that covers all the dimensions of missionary life.

An overall look at humanity shows us that this mission is still in its initial phase and that we must devote all our efforts to its service (cf *Redemptoris Missio*, 52 and 1). On the eve of this Synod, threatened by syncretism and sects, the Churches of Africa will find a new impulse to proclaim the Gospel and to accept it through their culture, within the framework of catechesis, the formation of priests and catechists, liturgy and the life of Christian communities. All this needs time: every process of authentic inculturation of the faith is an act of "tradition", which must find its inspiration and its norms in the one Tradition. This presupposes a theological and anthropological study of the message of redemption and at the same time a living and irreplaceable witness of Christian communities which are happy to share their ardent love for Christ.

6 An urgent task awaits you: to re-establish the bonds which have been strained and sometimes broken between the cultural values of our time and their lasting, Christian foundation. The political changes, the economic upheavals and the cultural changes have contributed greatly to this painful but clear moral awakening. After decades of totalitarian oppression men and women offer an agonizing witness: it is to their moral conscience, the guardian of their deepest identity, that they owe their personal survival. Today there are many young and not so young people in industrialized nations who in every way cry out their discontent that what they "have" suffocates what they "are",

while many others do not “have” what they need merely “to be”. Everywhere people are demanding respect for their culture and their right to a fully human life. It is therefore through culture that the saying of Pascal is verified “Man surpasses man, infinitely”.

7A new cultural situation results especially from the development of science and technology. Aware of the renewed reflection that this demands from the Church, you are the inspiration for a Symposium in Tokyo on the theme, “Science, technology and spiritual values. An Asian approach to modernization”; and another right here in the Vatican in collaboration with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the theme, “Science in the context of human culture”. The fragmentation of knowledge, as well as its technological application, makes it more difficult to see the human person organically and harmoniously in his ontological unity.

The Church is no stranger to scientific culture; rather, she rejoices at discoveries and technology which help improve the conditions and quality of life of our contemporaries. The Church tirelessly recalls the unique character and the dignity of the human being against every temptation to abuse the power that technological progress offers. I hope that you will continue the dialogue that was begun in recent years with the representatives of scientific culture, the exact sciences and the behavioral sciences. Scientific and technological progress calls for a renewed conscience and moral commitment at the heart of culture to make it more human, so that people of every culture can equitably benefit from it, in a lasting search for solidarity.

8The fundamental aspirations of man are laden with meaning. They express in various and sometimes confusing ways the vocation “to be” written by God in the heart of every person. Amid the uncertainties and anxieties of our time, your mission calls you to offer the best of yourselves to develop an authentic culture of hope, founded on the revelation and salvation of Jesus Christ. Freedom is fully exercised only through the acceptance of the truth and love which God offers to every person. For Christians this is an immense challenge to witness to the love of Jesus Christ who has set us free, the source and the fulfillment of every culture.

9The challenge of the twenty-first century is to humanize society and its institutions through the Gospel; to restore to the family, to cities and to villages a soul worthy of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. The Church can count on men and women of culture to help peoples rediscover their memory, to revive their consciences and to prepare their future.

The Christian leaven will enrich living cultures and their values and bring them to full flower. In this way, hearts will be penetrated and cultures renewed by Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Jn 14:6) who “has brought complete newness by bringing himself”, as Irenaeus of Lyons wrote (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, 34, I). This shows the importance of education and the need for teachers who are authentic educators. This also means that Christian researchers and scholars are necessary, whose scientific ability is recognized

and appreciated, in order to give meaning to the discoveries of science and the inventions of technology. The world has need of priests, religious and laity who are seriously formed by the knowledge of the Church's doctrinal heritage, rich in its bimillennary cultural patrimony, an ever fruitful source for artists and poets who are able to help the people of God to live the inexhaustible mystery of Christ, celebrated in beauty, meditated in prayer and incarnated in holiness.

10 Your Eminences, dear friends, may this meeting with the Successor of Peter confirm you in the awareness of your mission. Culture is of man, by man and for man. The vocation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, your vocation, in this turn of the century and of the millennium, is that of creating a new culture of love and of hope inspired by the truth that frees us in Christ Jesus. This is the goal of inculturation, this is the priority for the new evangelization. The rooting of the Gospel within cultures is a requirement for missionary activity, as I recently recalled in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. Be its authentic artisans in deep communion with the Holy See and with the entire Church, within the local Churches, under the guidance of their Pastors.

With my warm greetings to you and your loved ones, I assure you of my gratitude and my prayers for the fruitfulness of your work. As a sign of my affection, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

The New Pontifical Council for Culture's Tasks: Dialogue with Non-Believers and the Inculturation of Faith

18 March 1994

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Friends,*

I welcome You this morning with joy, members, counselors and co-workers of the Pontifical Council for Culture. You have gathered under the presidency of Cardinal Paul Poupard for the first plenary session of the dicastery in its present form, after the merging of the former Pontifical Councils for Dialogue with Non-Believers and for Culture prescribed by the *Motu Proprio Inde a Pontificatus* of 25 March 1993.

You know that from the beginning of my Pontificate I have insisted on the crucial significance of the links between the Church and culture. In my letter on the occasion of the foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, I recalled: “a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived” (cf. *Address to the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment*, 16 January 1982; cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 28 June 1982, p. 7).

Two points should be made: most of the countries with a Christian tradition are experiencing a serious rift between the Gospel message and large areas of their culture, while an acute problem in the young Churches is the relationships between

local cultures and the Gospel. This situation already points the way ahead for your task of evangelizing cultures and inculturating faith. I should like to clarify a few points which I consider particularly important.

2 The phenomenon of non-belief, together with its practical consequences—the secularization of social and private life, religious indifference or even the unequivocal rejection of all religion—remains one of the most urgent matters for your reflection and your pastoral concern. It would be appropriate to seek its historical, cultural, social and intellectual causes, and at the same time to promote a respectful and open dialogue with those who do not believe in God or who profess no religion; organizing meetings and exchanges with them, as you have done in the past, cannot but be productive.

3 *The inculturation of the faith* is the other major task of your Dicastery. Specialized research centers will help you to carry it out. But it must not be forgotten that this “must involve the whole people of God, and not a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic *sensus fidei*” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 54). Through a lengthy process of reflection the Church gradually becomes aware of all the wealth of the deposit of faith through the life of God’s people: the process of inculturation is a transition from implicit lived experience to explicit consciousness. Similarly, baptized persons, who live Christ’s mystery in the Holy Spirit under the guidance of their pastors, are led little by little to discern within the various cultures those elements that are compatible with the Catholic faith and to reject others. This slow maturing process demands great patience and wisdom, great openness of heart, an informed sense of Tradition and a healthy apostolic daring, like that of the Apostles, the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church.

4 In creating the Pontifical Council for Culture, it was my intention to give “the whole Church a common impulse in the continuously renewed encounter between the salvific message of the Gospel and the multiplicity of cultures”.

I also gave it the mandate “to become a participant in the cultural concerns which the departments of the Holy See encounter in the evangelization of cultures, and to ensure co-operation between the cultural institutions of the Holy See” (Letter, 20 May 1982, *L’Osservatore Romano* English ed., 28 June 1982, p. 7). In this perspective I commissioned you to oversee and co-ordinate the activity of the Pontifical Academies, in conformity with their aims and statutes, and to remain in regular contact with the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, “to assure a harmony of purpose and a fruitful mutual co-operation” (*Motu proprio Inde a Pontificatus*, art. 4, III, 25 March 1993; *L’Osservatore Romano* English ed. 12 May 1993, p. 3).

5 In order to accomplish your task better, you are called to establish closer links with the Episcopal Conferences and especially with the cultural commissions which should exist within all the Conferences, as you have recently requested. These commissions are meant to promote Christian culture in the different countries and to dialogue

with cultures that are strangers to Christianity. The many Catholic cultural centres throughout the world, whose work you support and seek to spread, are certainly privileged institutions for the promotion of Christian culture and dialogue with non-Christian cultural environments. In this regard, the first international meeting which you have just organized at Chantilly bodes well for further fruitful exchanges.

6 On the same lines, you co-operate with International Catholic Organizations, especially those that bring intellectuals, scientists and artists together, and undertake “appropriate initiatives concerning the dialogue between faith and cultures, and intercultural dialogue” (cf. *Motu proprio Inde a Pontificatus*, art. 3).

In addition, you follow the policy and the cultural activity of governments and international organizations, such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe’s Council for Cultural Co-operation and other bodies, in your concern to give a fully human dimension to their cultural policies.

7 Your intervention, whether direct or indirect in the areas where the great policies and thought of the third millennium are forged, aims at giving a new impulse to Christian contributions in the field of culture, which has its place in the contemporary world as a whole. In this vast enterprise, as urgent as it is necessary, you are to continue a dialogue that appears very promising, with the representatives of agnostic trends or with nonbelievers, whether their inspiration is derived from ancient civilizations or from more recent intellectual endeavors.

8 Christianity “is a creator of culture in its very foundation” (Speech to UNESCO, 2 June 1980, n. 10; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 23 June 1980, p. 10). In the Christian world, a truly prestigious culture has flourished throughout the centuries, as much in the area of literature and philosophy as in the sciences and the arts. The very concept of beauty in ancient Europe is largely the result of the Christian culture of its peoples, and its landscape reflects this inspiration. The centre around which this culture has developed is the heart of our faith, the eucharistic mystery. Cathedrals, humble country churches, religious music, architecture, sculpture and painting all radiate the mystery of the *verum Corpus, natum de Maria Virgine*, towards which everything converges in a movement of wonder. As for music, I am glad to commemorate Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina this year, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of his death. It would seem that, after a troubled period, the Church regained a voice made peaceful through contemplation of the Eucharistic mystery, like the calm breathing of a soul that knows it is loved by God.

Christian culture admirably reflects man’s relationship with God, made new in the redemption. It opens us to the contemplation of the Lord, true God and true man. This culture is enhanced by the love that Christ pours into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5) and by the experience of disciples called to emulate their Master. Such sources have given rise to an intense awareness of the meaning of life, a strength of character that blossoms in the

heart of Christian families and a sense of finesse unknown in the past. Grace awakens, frees, purifies, orders and expands the creative powers of man. While it invites asceticism and renunciation, it does so in order to free the heart, a freedom eminently conducive to artistic creation as well as to thought and action based on truth.

9 In this culture, therefore, the influence of the saints is decisive: through the light that they emanate, through their inner freedom, through the power of their personality, they have made a mark on the artistic thought and expression of entire periods of our history. It is enough to mention St. Francis of Assisi. He had a poet's temperament, something which is amply confirmed by his words, his attitude, his innate sense of symbolic gesture. Although his concerns were far removed from the world of literature, he was, nevertheless, the creator of a new culture, both in thought and in art. A St. Bonaventure or a Giotto could not have developed had it not been for him.

This, dear friends, is where the true requirements of Christian culture dwell. This marvelous creation of man can flow only from contemplating the mystery of Christ and from listening to his word, put into practice with total sincerity and unreserved commitment, following the example of the Virgin Mary. Faith frees thought and opens new horizons to the language of poetry and literature, to philosophy, to theology, and to other forms of creativity proper to the human genius.

You are called to develop and to promote this culture: some of you will attend to dialogue with nonbelievers, while others will search for new expressions of Christian life, all through a more vigorous cultural presence of the Church in this world which is seeking beauty and truth, unity and love.

My Apostolic Blessing and my affectionate gratitude, accompany you as you carry out these beautiful, noble and necessary tasks.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

The Gospel is Good News for Cultures

14 March 1997

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Friends,*

I welcome you with joy this morning at the end of your plenary session. I thank your President, Cardinal Paul Poupard, for recalling the spirit in which your work has been conducted. You reflected on the question of how to help the Church ensure a stronger presence of the Gospel at the heart of cultures, as the new Millennium approaches.

This meeting gives me an opportunity to say again to you: “The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith” (Letter Establishing the Pontifical Council for Culture, 20 May 1982). This is what Christians faithful to the Gospel have achieved in the most varied cultural situations in the course of two Millennia. The Church has frequently put down roots among peoples whose culture she penetrates and moulds according to Gospel principles.

Faith in Christ who became incarnate in history does not only transform individuals inwardly, but also regenerates people and their cultures. Thus at the end of antiquity, Christians, who lived in a culture to which they were greatly indebted, transformed it from within and instilled a new spirit in it. When this culture was threatened, the Church—with Athanasius, John Chrysostom,

Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great and many others—passed on the heritage of Jerusalem, Athens and Rome to give birth to an authentic Christian civilization. Despite the imperfections inherent in any human achievement, this brought about a successful synthesis between faith and culture.

2In our day, this synthesis is often lacking and the rupture between the Gospel and culture is “without a doubt the drama of our time” (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20). This is a tragedy for the faith because, in a society where Christianity seems absent from social life and faith is relegated to the private sphere, access to religious values becomes more difficult, especially for the poor and the young or, in other words, for the vast majority of people who are unconsciously becoming secularized under pressure from the models of thought and action spread by the prevailing culture. The absence of a culture to support them prevents the young from living it to the full.

This situation is also a tragedy for culture, which is undergoing a deep crisis because of the rupture with faith. The chief symptom of this crisis is the feeling of anxiety which comes from the awareness of finitude in a world without God, where one makes the self an absolute, and earthly affairs the only values of life. In a culture without transcendence, man succumbs to the lure of money and power, pleasure and success. He also encounters the dissatisfaction caused by materialism, the loss of the meaning of moral values and concern about the future.

3But at the heart of this disillusionment there remains a thirst for the absolute, a desire for goodness, a hunger for truth, a need for personal fulfillment. This shows the breadth of the Pontifical Council for Culture’s task: to help the Church achieve a new synthesis of faith and culture for the greatest benefit of all. As this century draws to a close, it is essential to reaffirm the fruitfulness of faith for the development of a culture. Only a faith that is the source of radical spiritual decisions can have an effect on an era’s culture. Thus the attitude of St Benedict, the Roman patrician who left behind a society in decline and withdrew in solitude, asceticism and prayer, was decisive for the growth of Christian civilization.

4In its approach to cultures, Christianity presents the message of salvation received by the Apostles and the first disciples, reflected on and deepened by the Fathers of the Church and the theologians, lived by the Christian people, especially the saints, and expressed by its great theological, philosophical, literary and artistic geniuses. We must proclaim this message to our contemporaries in all its richness and beauty.

To do this, each particular Church must have a cultural plan, as is already the case in some countries. During this Plenary assembly, you devoted considerable time to examining not only the challenges but also the demands of an authentic pastoral approach to culture, which is crucial for the new evangelization. Coming from various cultural backgrounds, you inform the Holy See of the expectations of the local Churches and the reports of your Christian communities.

Among the tasks incumbent on you I stress certain points that require the greatest attention from your Council, such as the foundation of Catholic cultural centers or a presence in the world of the media and science, in order to transmit Christianity's cultural heritage. In all these efforts be particularly close to young people and artists.

5 Faith in Christ gives cultures a new dimension, that of hope in God's kingdom. It is the vocation of Christians to instill in the heart of cultures this hope for a new earth and a new heaven. For when hope fades, cultures die. Far from threatening or impoverishing cultures, the Gospel increases their joy and beauty, freedom and meaning, truth and goodness.

We are all called to pass on this message by words which proclaim it, a life which witnesses to it, a culture which radiates it. For the Gospel brings culture to its perfection, and authentic culture is open to the Gospel. The task of uniting them will involve constant commitment. I established the Pontifical Council for Culture to help the Church promote the saving interchange in which the inculturation of the Gospel goes hand in hand with the evangelization of cultures. May God help you accomplish your exciting mission!

As I commend the future of the Pontifical Council for Culture and that of all its members to Mary, Mother of the Church and Christ's first teacher, I cordially grant you my Apostolic Blessing.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Christ Makes All Cultures New

19 November 1999

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Friends,*

1 I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and I am delighted with the theme you have chosen for this session: *For a new Christian humanism on the threshold of the new millennium*, an essential theme for humanity's future, for it invites an awareness that the human person holds a central place in the various spheres of society. Moreover, anthropological research is a necessary dimension of all pastoral care and an indispensable condition for a profound evangelization. I thank Cardinal Paul Poupard for his kind words expressing your sentiments.

2 A few weeks before the opening of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, a time of exceptional grace, the mission of proclaiming Christ becomes more urgent; many of our contemporaries, especially young people, are overwhelmed and disoriented by the multiplicity of ideas about the human person, about life and death, about the world and its meaning, and have great difficulty in perceiving who they really are.

Too often the ideas about humanity conveyed by modern society have become real systems of thought that have a tendency

to deviate from the truth and to exclude God, believing that this is the way to assert our primacy in the name of his alleged freedom and our full, free development; by so doing, these ideologies deprive human beings of their constitutive dimension as persons created in the image and likeness of God. Today this profound distortion is becoming a real threat to people, for it leads them to consider the human person without any reference to transcendence.

It is an essential task for the Church in her dialogue with cultures to lead our contemporaries to discover a sound anthropology, so that they can know Christ, true God and true man. I am grateful to you for helping the local Churches, through your reflections, to meet this challenge, “to renew from within and transform in the light of Revelation the visions of men and society that shape cultures”, as the recent document published by the Pontifical Council for Culture stresses (*Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, 25).

The risen Christ is Good News for everyone, because he has “the power to get to the core of every culture and to purify it, to make it fruitful, to enrich it and to make it blossom like the boundless love of Christ” (ibid., 3). This is how to create and develop a Christian anthropology for our times which can be the basis of a culture, as our ancestors did (cf. Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 59). Such an anthropology will take into account the rich values of contemporary human cultures and imbue them with Christian values. Has not the diversity of the Churches of East and West testified from the beginning to a fruitful inculturation of philosophy, theology, liturgy, juridical traditions and artistic creations? Just as, in the early centuries of the Church, philosophy, with St Justin, turned to Christ, for Christianity is “the only sure and beneficial philosophy” (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 8, 1), in the same way it is our duty to offer a Christian philosophy and anthropology today which will prepare the way to the discovery of the greatness and beauty of Christ, the Word of God. And certainly, the attraction of the beautiful, of the aesthetic, will bring our contemporaries to ethics, that is, to leading a happy and worthy life.

3 Christian humanism can be offered to every culture, it reveals man to himself in the knowledge of his own value, gives him access to the very source of his existence, the Father Creator, and to living his filial identity in the only Son, “first-born of all creation” (Col 1:15), with a heart expanded by the breath of his Spirit of love. “With the richness of the salvation wrought by Christ, the walls separating the different cultures collapsed” (Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 70). The folly of the Cross, of which St Paul speaks (cf. 1 Cor 1: 18), is a wisdom and power that surpass all cultural boundaries and can be taught to all nations.

Christian humanism can integrate the best achievements of science and technology for humanity’s greatest happiness. It also wards off threats to our dignity as persons who are the subject of rights and duties, and to our very life, so seriously challenged today from conception to the natural end of our days on earth. For if the human person leads a human life thanks to culture, there is no truly human culture that is not of the human person, through the human person and for the human person, that is, for every individual

and for all men and women. The most genuine humanism is revealed to us by the Bible in God's plan of love for us, a design which became even more wonderful through the Redeemer. "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

The multiplicity of anthropological approaches, which are a treasure for all humanity, can also give rise to scepticism and religious indifference; this is a challenge that should be faced with intelligence and courage. The Church does not fear legitimate diversity, which reveals the wealth of the human soul. On the contrary, she relies on this diversity to inculturate the Gospel message. I have been able to see this during my various journeys on all the continents.

4A few weeks before the opening of the Holy Door, the symbol of Christ whose open heart is ready to welcome into his Church all men and women of all cultures, I fervently hope that the Pontifical Council for Culture will continue its efforts, research and programmes, especially by supporting the local Churches and encouraging the discovery of the Lord of history by those who are immersed in relativism and indifference, the new faces of unbelief. This is one way of giving them the hope they need to build their personal lives, to play their part in constructing society and to turn to Christ, the Alpha and Omega.

I invite you in particular to support all those Christian communities which are less well off, so that they can pay new attention to the highly diversified world of young people and their teachers, of scientists and researchers, of artists, poets, writers and all who are involved in cultural life; in this way the Church can face the great challenges of contemporary culture. This is just as true in the West as in mission lands.

I would again like to express my gratitude to you for your work, and as I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary who gave her "yes" to God without reserve, and to the great doctors of the Church, I willingly impart to you and to all your loved ones a special Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of my confidence and esteem.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Handing on Faith at the Heart of Cultures

16 March 2002

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Friends,*

I I am glad to welcome you at the end of your Dicastery's Plenary Assembly, during which you chose to make a fresh start on the basis of the Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in order to make your contribution to the mission of the Church in the Third Millennium (cf. 40). Your meeting coincides with the Pontifical Council for Culture's 20th anniversary. As I give thanks for the work achieved by the members and collaborators of the Pontifical Council over the past 20 years, I greet Cardinal Poupard, and thank him for the kind words he addressed to me on behalf of you all.

I thank all of you for working together so generously at the service of the universal mission of the Successor of Saint Peter, and encourage you to be ever more zealous in pursuing your relations with cultures, building bridges between people, witnessing to Christ and helping our brothers and sisters to be open to the Gospel (cf. the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 166–168). What will actually make that happen is an open dialogue with all men and women of good will. While our backgrounds and traditions differ and we may be believers or unbelievers, we are

united by our common humanity and called to share in the life of Christ, the Redeemer of man.

2The Pontifical Council for Culture was created with the aim of “giving the whole Church a common impulse in the continuously renewed encounter between the salvific message of the Gospel and the multiplicity of cultures, in the diversity of cultures to which she must carry her fruits of grace” (Letter to Cardinal Casaroli, establishing the new Pontifical Council for Culture, 20 May 1982—cf. *Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 28 June 1982, p. 7), in line with the reflection and decisions of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, the Fathers strongly emphasized the centrality of culture in human life and its importance if Gospel values are to be absorbed and the message of the Bible is to spread in the realm of morals, science and the arts.

In this same spirit, the goal of merging the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers and the Pontifical Council for Culture into one Pontifical Council, on 25 March 1993, was to promote “the study of the problem of unbelief and religious indifference found in various forms in different cultural milieus... in order to offer adequate support to the Church’s pastoral activity in evangelizing cultures and inculturating the Gospel” (*Motu Proprio Inde a Pontificatus*).

Handing on the Gospel message in today’s world is particularly arduous, mainly because our contemporaries are immersed in cultural contexts that are often alien to an inner spiritual dimension, in situations in which a materialist outlook prevails. One cannot escape the fact that, more than in any other historical period, there is a breakdown in the process of handing on moral and religious values between generations

This leads to a kind of incongruity between the Church and the contemporary world. Seen from this point of view, the Council’s role as an observatory is particularly important. On the one hand, it can identify developments in different cultures and the anthropological questions to which they give rise. On the other, it can envisage possible relations between the cultures and Christian faith, in order to suggest new ways of evangelizing that live up to the expectations of our contemporaries. In fact, we have to reach out to people where they are, with their worries and questions, to help them find the moral and spiritual landmarks they need to live lives worthy of our specific vocation, and to find in Christ’s call the hope that does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5,5), as we follow the method used by the Apostle Paul at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17,22–34). Clearly, nothing takes us further in dealing with people than taking their culture seriously. There is no better way to communicate and evangelize.

3Among the great stumbling-blocks of our day are the difficulties families and teachers face as they strive to pass on to younger generations the human, moral and spiritual values that will enable them to be men and women who will want an active role in society and to live a life worthy of their dignity as persons. In the same vein, handing on the Christian message and its values, which help people to be coherent in

the decisions they make and in the way they live, is a challenge that all ecclesial communities are called to take up, especially in the field of catechesis and in the formation of catechumens.

In other ages—in Saint Augustine’s time, for example, or, more recently, throughout the twentieth century, when one could use the contributions of so many Christian philosophers—we learned to base what we said and the way we approached evangelization on sound anthropology and sound philosophy. In fact, it is only when philosophy opens up to Christ that the Gospel really will start to spread to all nations.

Everyone involved in running educational systems now urgently needs to make a serious study of anthropology in order to understand who the human person is and what he or she lives by. Families really need to be backed up by educators who will respect their values and help them to reflect on the fundamental questions young people are asking, even if this seems to go against what contemporary society proposes. In every age there have been men and women with the prophetic courage to make the truth shine forth. This same attitude is still needed today.

The phenomenon of globalization, which is a cultural fact of life today, is at once a difficulty and an opportunity. While it has a tendency to obliterate the specific identities of different communities and reduce them to folklore memories of ancient traditions bereft of their original meaning and cultural and religious value, globalization also helps to break down barriers between cultures and gives people the chance to meet and to get to know each other.

At the same time, it obliges national leaders and people of good will to do their utmost to ensure that what is proper to individuals and cultures is respected, to guarantee the good of persons and nations, and to practice brotherhood and solidarity.

Society as a whole is facing formidable questions about man and his future, especially in areas like bioethics, the use of the earth’s resources, and decisions on economic and political issues, so that the full dignity of human beings may be recognized and they may continue to play an active part in society and be the ultimate criterion for society’s decisions.

The Church in no way seeks to take the place of those who are responsible for public affairs. She does hope to have a place in these debates, to keep people’s minds open to the light of the full meaning of what it is to be human, something that is etched into a person’s very nature.

4 The Pontifical Council for Culture must continue its work and offer its help to bishops, to Catholic communities and to all the institutions that desire it, so that Christians will have the means to witness to their faith and their hope in a consistent and responsible fashion, and so that all people of good will may be involved in building a society that fosters the integrity of every person. The future of the human person and of cultures, the proclamation of the Gospel and the life of the Church depend on it.

May you contribute to a new awareness of the place of culture in the future of the

human person and society, and in evangelization, so that men and women may be freer and use their freedom in a responsible way! As you end your meeting, I entrust your mission to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to everyone who works with you and to your loved ones.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Open up to Christ the Cultures Marked by Unbelief or Religious Indifference

13 March 2004

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and
Dear Members of the Pontifical Council for Culture,*

1At the end of your Plenary Assembly dedicated to reflection on “The Christian faith at the dawn of the new millennium and the challenge of non-belief and religious indifference”, I greet you with joy. I thank Cardinal Poupard for his words. The challenge you have focused on is an essential concern of the Church on all the continents.

2In communication with the local Churches, you are mapping out a new geography of non-belief and religious indifference across the world, noting an interruption in the process of the transmission of the Christian faith and values. At the same time, we perceive the search for meaning by our contemporaries, witnessed to through cultural phenomena especially in the new religious movements with a strong presence in South America, Africa and Asia: the desire of all men and women to understand the deep meaning of their lives, to respond to the fundamental questions on the origin and the end of life and to journey towards the happiness to which they aspire. Over and above the crises of civilizations and the forms of philosophical and moral relativism, it is up to Pastors and faithful to identify

and examine the essential questions and aspirations of our contemporaries, to enter into dialogue with individuals and peoples, and to find original and inculturated ways of presenting the Gospel message and the person of Christ the Redeemer. Culture and art have a wealth of resources to draw from in order to pass on the Christian message. To convey it, however, they require knowledge so that it can be interpreted and understood.

At a time when the great Europe is rediscovering strong ties, it is important to uphold the world of culture, arts and letters, so that it may contribute to building a society that is not founded on materialism but on moral and spiritual values.

3 The spread of ideologies in various social sectors demands a new intellectual thrust from Christians in order to propose strong reflections that will reveal to the younger generations the truth about man and God, and will invite them to acquire an ever more refined knowledge of the faith. It is by means of philosophical and catechetical formation that the young will be able to discern the truth. A serious rational process is a bulwark against all that has to do with ideologies. It develops the taste to penetrate ever deeper so that philosophy and reason may be open to Christ. This is what happened in all periods of the Church's history, and particularly in the Patristic period when the newborn Christian culture was able to enter into dialogue with other cultures, especially Latin and Greek. Such a reflection will also become an invitation to move from a rational to a spiritual approach, to arrive at a personal encounter with Christ and to build up the inner being.

4 It is up to you, therefore, to discern the great cultural changes and their positive aspects, so as to help Pastors find appropriate responses to them and to open men and women to the newness of Christ's Word. At the end of our encounter, I express my gratitude to you for your collaboration and, as I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to you all.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Reciprocal Openness between the Cultures is a Privileged Context for Dialogue

15 June 2007

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I meet you with great pleasure today, on an especially significant occasion. Indeed, you are intending to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, created by the Servant of God John Paul II on 20 May 1982 with his Letter addressed to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the then Secretary of State.

I greet all those present and I thank you, Cardinal Paul Poupard, in the first place, for your courteous words interpreting the common sentiments. I address to you, venerable Brother who has headed the Pontifical Council since 1988, a special thought of gratitude and appreciation for the important work you have carried out during this long period. At the Dicastery's service, you have devoted and profitably continue to devote your human and spiritual gifts, always witnessing enthusiastically to the attention which prompts the Church to establish dialogue with the cultural movements of our time.

Your participation in numerous congresses and international meetings, many of which were organized by the Pontifical Council for Culture, has enabled you to be ever more thoroughly acquainted with the interest the Holy See takes in the vast and

variegated world of culture. I thank you once again for all this and extend my gratitude to the Secretary, Officials and Consultors of the Dicastery.

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council paid great attention to culture, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* dedicated a special chapter to it (cf. 53–62). The Council Fathers were concerned to point out the perspective in which the Church views and addresses the promotion of culture, considering this task as one of the “more urgent problems deeply affecting the human race” (ibid., 46).

In her relations with the world of culture, the Church always places man at the centre, both as the author of cultural activity and the one to whom it is destined. The Servant of God Paul VI had very much at heart the Church’s dialogue with culture and personally took charge of it during the years of his Pontificate.

The Servant of God John Paul II, who had taken part in the Council and made his own special contribution to the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, followed in his footsteps.

On 2 June 1980, in his memorable Discourse to UNESCO, he witnessed in the first person how much he had at heart to meet man on the cultural plane in order to transmit the Gospel Message to him. Two years later he established the Pontifical Council for Culture, destined to give a new impetus to the Church’s commitment to assist the plurality of cultures’ encounter with the Gospel in the different parts of the world (cf. Letter to Cardinal Casaroli, 20 May 1982; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 28 June, p. 7).

In instituting this new Dicastery, my venerable Predecessor emphasized that it was to pursue its aims by establishing dialogue with all, without distinction of culture or religion, “in a joint search for cultural communication with all men of good will” (ibid.).

This aspect of the service carried out by the Pontifical Council for Culture has been confirmed in the past 25 years, since the world has become even more interdependent due to the formidable development of the means of communication and the consequent extension of the social relations network.

It is therefore even more urgent for the Church to promote cultural development, targeting the human and spiritual quality of its messages and content, since culture today is also inevitably affected by the globalization which, unless constantly accompanied by vigilant discernment, can turn against man, ending by impoverishing him instead of enriching him. And what great challenges evangelization has to face in this field!

Twenty-five years after the creation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, it is therefore appropriate to reflect on the reasons and goals that motivated its birth in the social and cultural context of our time. To this end, the Pontifical Council has desired to organize a Study Convention, on the one hand, as a pause for meditation on the existing relationship between evangelization and culture, and on the other, to take stock of this relationship as it appears today in Asia, America and Africa.

How is it possible not to find a special cause of satisfaction in seeing that the three “continental” reports have been entrusted to three Cardinals who are respectively Asian, Latin American and African? Is this not an eloquent confirmation of how the Catholic Church has journeyed on, blown by the “Wind” of Pentecost, as a Community capable of

conversing with the entire family of peoples, indeed, shining out among it as a “prophetic sign of unity and peace” (Roman Missal, Eucharistic Prayer V—D)?

Dear brothers and sisters, the history of the Church is also inseparably the history of culture and art. Works such as the *Summa Theologiae* by St Thomas Aquinas, the *Divine Comedy*, Chartres Cathedral, the Sistine Chapel or Johann Sebastian Bach’s Cantatas are unparalleled syntheses of Christian faith and human expression.

However, if these are, so to speak, the peaks of such syntheses between faith and culture, their convergence is brought about daily in the life and work of all the baptized, in that hidden art which is the love story of each one with the living God and with his brethren, in the joy and effort of following Jesus Christ in the daily routine of life.

Today more than ever, reciprocal openness between the cultures is a privileged context for dialogue between people committed to seeking an authentic humanism, over and above the divergences that separate them. In the cultural arena too, Christianity must offer to all a most powerful force of renewal and exaltation, that is, the Love of God who makes himself human love.

Precisely in his Letter establishing the Pontifical Council for Culture, Pope John Paul II wrote: “Love is like a great force hidden deep within cultures in order to urge them to overcome their incurable finiteness by opening themselves to him who is their Source and End, and to give them, when they do open themselves to his grace, enriching fullness” (Letter, 20 May 1982).

May the Holy See, thanks to the service carried out especially by your Dicastery, continue to promote throughout the Church that evangelical culture which is the leaven, salt and light of the Kingdom in humanity’s midst.

Dear brothers and sisters, once again I express my deep gratitude for the work done by the Pontifical Council for Culture and I assure all of you who are present here of my remembrance in prayer, and as I invoke the heavenly intercession of Mary Most Holy, *Sedes Sapientiae*, I willingly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Your Eminence, to your venerable confreres, and to all those who in various capacities are involved in the dialogue between the Gospel and contemporary cultures.

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Secularization in the Church Distorts the Christian Faith and the Lifestyle of Believers

8 March 2008

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture. I congratulate you on your work and on the theme chosen for this Assembly: “The Church and the challenge of secularization”. This is a fundamental issue for the future of humanity and of the Church. Secularization that often turns into secularism, abandoning the positive acceptance of secularity, harshly tries the Christian life of the faithful and Pastors alike, and during your Assembly you have additionally interpreted and transformed it into a providential challenge in order to propose convincing answers to the questions and hopes of man, our contemporary.

I thank Archbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, who has been President of the Dicastery for only a few months, for his cordial words on your behalf illustrating the pattern of your work. I am also grateful to all of you for your commitment to ensuring that the Church enters into dialogue with the cultural movements of our age and that the Holy See’s interest for the vast and varied world of culture may be increasingly known. Today more than ever, in fact, reciprocal intercultural openness is a privileged terrain for dialogue between men and women involved in the search

for authentic humanism, over and above differences that separate them. Secularization, which presents itself in cultures by imposing a world and humanity without reference to transcendence, is invading every aspect of daily life and developing a mentality in which God is effectively absent, wholly or partially, from human life and awareness. This secularization is not only an external threat to believers, but has been manifest for some time in the heart of the Church herself.

It profoundly distorts the Christian faith from within, and consequently, the lifestyle and daily behavior of believers. They live in the world and are often marked, if not conditioned, by the cultural imagery that impresses contradictory and impelling models regarding the practical denial of God: there is no longer any need for God, to think of him or to return to him. Furthermore, the prevalent hedonistic and consumeristic mindset fosters in the faithful and in Pastors a tendency to superficiality and selfishness that is harmful to ecclesial life.

The “death of God” proclaimed by many intellectuals in recent decades is giving way to a barren cult of the individual. In this cultural context there is a risk of drifting into spiritual atrophy and emptiness of heart, sometimes characterized by surrogate forms of religious affiliation and vague spiritualism.

It is proving more urgent than ever to react to this tendency by means of an appeal to the lofty values of existence that give life meaning and can soothe the restlessness of the human heart in search of happiness: the dignity of the human person and his or her freedom, equality among all men and women, the meaning of life and death and of what awaits us after the end of our earthly existence. In this perspective my Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, aware of the radical and rapid changes in society, constantly recalled the urgent need to come to terms with human beings in the sphere of culture in order to pass on to them the Gospel Message. For this very reason he established the Pontifical Council for Culture in order to give a new impetus to the Church’s action by introducing the Gospel to the plurality of cultures in the various parts of the world (cf. Letter to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, 20 May 1982; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, 28 June, pp. 7, 20). The intellectual sensitivity and pastoral charity of Pope John Paul II encouraged him to highlight the fact that the Industrial Revolution and scientific discoveries made it possible to answer questions that formerly were partially answered only by religion. The result was that contemporary man often had the impression that he no longer needs anyone in order to understand, explain and dominate the universe; he feels the centre of everything, the measure of everything.

More recently, through new information technologies, globalization has often also resulted in disseminating in all cultures many of the materialistic and individualistic elements of the West. The formula “*Etsi Deus non daretur*” is increasingly becoming a way of living that originates in a sort of “arrogance” of reason—a reality nonetheless created and loved by God—that deems itself self-sufficient and closes itself to contemplation and the quest for a superior Truth. The light of reason, exalted but in fact impoverished by the Enlightenment, has radically replaced the light of faith, the light of God (cf. Benedict

XVI, *Address*, La Sapienza University, 17 January 2008). Thus, in this context the Church has great challenges with which to deal. The commitment of the Pontifical Council for Culture to a fruitful dialogue between science and faith is therefore especially important. This comparison has been long awaited by the Church but also by the scientific community, and I encourage you to persevere in it. Through it, faith implies reason and perfection, and reason, enlightened by faith, finds the strength to rise to the knowledge of God and spiritual realities. In this sense secularization does not foster the ultimate goal of science which is at the service of man, “*imago Dei*”. May this dialogue continue in the distinction of the specific characteristics of science and faith. Indeed, each has its own methods, contexts and subjects of research, its own aims and limitations, and must respect and recognize the other’s legitimate possibility of exercising autonomy in accordance with its own principles (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 36); both are called to serve man and humanity, encouraging the integral development and growth of each one and all.

I above all exhort Pastors of God’s flock to a tireless and generous mission in order to confront with Gospel proclamation and witness, in the arena of dialogue and the encounter with cultures, the disturbing phenomenon of secularization that enfeebles the person and hinders him in his innate longing for the whole Truth. Thus, may Christ’s disciples, thanks to the service carried out particularly by your Dicastery, continue to proclaim Christ in the heart of cultures, because he is the light that illumines reason, man and the world. We also set before us the warning addressed to the angel of the Church in Ephesus: “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance... But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Rv 2:2,4). Let us make our own the cry of the Spirit and of the Church: “Come!” (Rv 22:17), and let our hearts be pervaded by the Lord’s response: “Surely, I am coming soon” (Rv 22:20). He is our hope, the light for our way, our strength to proclaim salvation with apostolic courage, reaching to the heart of all cultures. May God help you in carrying out your arduous but exalting mission!

As I entrust to Mary, Mother of the Church and Star of the New Evangelization, the future of the Pontifical Council for Culture and that of all its members, I wholeheartedly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Additional Texts

Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

17 May 1970, nos. 7–8

7 A profound knowledge of human religions and cultures makes the missionary commitment more demanding. In the past, the difficulties of travel and the hardships of life in distant and unknown regions made the mission almost an adventure, sometimes a heroic adventure, worthy of being lived for Christ. Today, the hardship and adventure has for the most part disappeared. Nevertheless, missionaries are now expected to have a more intimate, and perhaps a more difficult, availability for a fraternal encounter with peoples of other cultures and religions. They are expected to nurture a profound affection, engage in an ongoing study of the people's mentality and show generosity in subordinated service. Obviously, this availability and encounter are not ends in themselves, but instruments for making Christ's presence effective.

8 "To make disciples" means to put people in a direct and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship does not imply that a person must renounce the spiritual and moral values of his own tradition and culture; on the contrary, it makes it possible to deepen and perfect these values by

recognizing God as the common Father who “loved the world so much that gave his only son” for the salvation of all (Jn 3:16).

Consequently, anyone who bears this message cannot impose his own culture as if it were a part of the message. Even though he is necessarily conditioned by his own culture, he must in some way strip himself of it in order to convey to the peoples only the “word” of God. Like Jesus, he must be always able to assert “my word is not my own: it is the word of the one who sent me” (Jn 14:24). If the missionary is able to make himself accepted as the bearer of a word that is God’s, and not his own, he will succeed in making his action fruitful in total respect for the local culture.

The specific formation must therefore prepare the missionary for an authentic adaptation, which consists in insertion into the local culture, just as Jesus became incarnate by participating in the culture and the life of the people of his times, in order to renew and perfect them through the leaven of his presence.

John Paul II Institutes Pontifical Council for Culture

18 May 1982

Your Eminence,

Since the beginning of my pontificate, I have considered the Church's dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area, one in which the destiny of the world at the end of this twentieth century is at stake. There in fact does exist a fundamental dimension capable of strengthening or shaking to their foundations the systems into which mankind as a whole is organized, and of liberating human existence, individually and collectively, from the threats which hang over it. This fundamental dimension is man, in his totality. Now man lives a fully human life thanks to culture. "Yes, the future of man depends on culture", as I said in my speech to UNESCO on 2 June 1980, speaking to an audience which was so very different in its backgrounds and convictions. And I added, "We rediscover ourselves on the ground of culture, the fundamental reality which unites us... We rediscover ourselves through that which is all around man and, in a certain sense, in man".

For these reasons, beginning from 15 November 1979, it has been my wish to consult about the fundamental problem of the Holy See's responsibility with regard to culture with all the members of the Sacred College meeting in Rome, and afterwards, on 17 December 1980, with all the Heads of Departments, in order

to discuss with them the opinions received in the consultations of which I had asked Cardinal Gabriel-Marie Garrone to take charge.

Finally, at my request, the Cardinal chaired a Council which was set up on 25 November 1981 and was requested to study in practical terms, over several months, how best to ensure the relations of the Church and the Holy See with culture, in all its different expressions.

I would like to express to the Cardinal my deep gratitude for the exemplary work performed by him to this end, with the generous support of bodies with close relations with the world of culture: the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, the Secretariat for Non-Believers, the Pontifical Academy of Science, and the Research Centre of the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

The time has come to profit from these labors. For this reason, it seems to me opportune to found a special permanent body for the purpose of promoting the great objectives which the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council proposed regarding the relations between the Church and culture. In fact, the Council emphasized, by giving it a whole section in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the fundamental importance of culture for the full development of man, the manifold links between the message of salvation and culture, the reciprocal enrichment of the Church and the different cultures as they have shared history with different civilizations, as well as the necessity for believers to understand in depth the way of thinking and feeling of the other men of their time, as these are expressed in their respective culture (*Gaudium et Spes*, 53–62).

In the wake of the Council, the Session of the Synod of Bishops held in autumn 1974 clearly realized the role of the different cultures in the evangelization of peoples. And my predecessor Paul VI, gathering together the fruits of its labors in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, declared: “The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture and are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20).

When I too came to gather together the rich heritage of the Ecumenical Council, the Synod of Bishops and my esteemed predecessor Paul VI, I declared in Paris, on 1 and 2 June 1980, to the Catholic Institute and later to the extraordinary assembly of UNESCO, that there is an organic and constitutive link existing between Christianity and culture—with man, therefore, in his humanity. This link between the Gospel and culture, as I said in my address to that learned body of men and women of culture and science from all over the world, “is in fact the creator of culture at its very foundations”. And if culture is that by which man as man becomes more man, what is at stake in this case is the very destiny of man. Hence the importance for the Church, whose concern it is, of a careful and far-sighted pastoral activity with regard to culture, and in a particular way

with regard to what is called living culture, that is, the whole of the principles and values which make up the ethos of a people: “The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith... A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not faithfully lived out”, as I said on 16 January 1982 (Discourse to the participants at the National Congress of the Movement of Cultural Commitment) .

To be sure, many bodies within the Church have been working for a long time in this field (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* Easter 1979), and there have been innumerable Christians who, according to the Council, have striven, along with many believers and non-believers, so that “all the individuals and social groups of a particular people will be able to attain a full development of their cultural life in harmony with their capabilities and their traditions” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 60). Even when ideologies which are agnostic and hostile to the Christian tradition, or even openly atheistic, are the inspiration of certain influential thinkers, then all the greater is the urgency for the Church to join in a dialogue with cultures so that modern man may discover that God, far from being man’s rival, gives him the gift of self-fulfillment, in his image and likeness.

In fact, man knows how to go infinitely beyond himself, as is clearly demonstrated by the efforts made by so many creative geniuses in order to catch and fix, in works of art and thought, transcendent values of beauty and truth, more or less fleetingly intuited as an expression of the absolute. In this way, the meeting of cultures is nowadays a privileged area of dialogue between men committed to the search for a new humanism for our time, beyond the differences which separate them: as Paul VI said in the name of all the Fathers of the Ecumenical Council, of which I too was a member, “We too, more than anyone else, have a care for man” (Closing discourse, 7 December 1965). And he told the General Assembly of the United Nations, “The Church is an expert in humanity” (4 October 1965), that humanity which she serves with love. Love is like a great force hidden deep within cultures in order to urge them to overcome their incurable finiteness by opening themselves to him who is their Source and End, and to give them, when they do open themselves to his grace, enriching fullness.

Moreover, it is urgent that our contemporaries, and Catholics in particular, question themselves seriously about the conditions which are at the basis of the development of peoples. It is more and more clear that cultural progress is intimately bound up with the construction of a world with more justice and brotherhood. As I said in Hiroshima on 25 February 1981 to the representatives of science and culture gathered in the University of the United Nations, “The construction of a more just mankind and a more united international community is not a dream or a vain ideal. It is a moral imperative, a sacred duty, which the intellectual and spiritual genius of man can set about by way of a new mobilization of each person’s talents and energies and by exploiting man’s cultural and technical resources” (*L’Osservatore Romano*, 26 February 1981).

Consequently, by virtue of my apostolic mission, I feel the responsibility laid upon me, at the centre of the Universal Church’s collegiality and in contact and agreement with the

local Churches, of intensifying the relations of the Holy See with every manifestation of culture. This will also ensure a new relationship, in fruitful international collaboration, within the family of nations or great “communities of men united by different bonds, but above all and essentially, by culture” (Discourse to UNESCO, 2 June 1980).

For this reason, I have decided to found and institute a Council for Culture, capable of giving the whole Church a common impulse in the continuously renewed encounter between the salvific message of the Gospel and the multiplicity of cultures, in the diversity of cultures to which she must carry her fruits of grace.

And so, Your Eminence, since I know that you closely share my concerns, after having given deep thought to the reasons just expressed and having prayerfully considered its opportuneness, I put you in charge of presiding over the organization of this Pontifical Council for Culture, which includes a Presidential Committee and an Executive Committee, as well as an International Council made up of qualified representatives of Catholic culture throughout the world, which will meet at least once a year. Through you, the Pontifical Council will remain linked directly to me, as a new and original service which reflection and experience will little by little allow to be given a suitable structure, since the Church does not stand outside culture but inside it, as a leaven, on account of the organic and constitutive link which joins them closely together.

The Council will pursue its ends in an ecumenical and brotherly spirit, promoting also dialogue with non-Christian religions, and with individuals or groups who do not profess any religion, in a joint search for cultural communication with all men of good will.

It will regularly report to the Holy See on the major cultural aspirations of today's world, researching the expectations of contemporary civilizations and exploring new ways of cultural dialogue; this will allow the Pontifical Council for Culture to carry out better the tasks for which it has been instituted and which, in outline, are:

- 1) To give witness, to the Church and to the world, to the deep interest which the Holy See has, by its specific mission, in the progress of culture and fruitful dialogue between cultures, as well as in their beneficial encounter with the Gospel.

- 2) To become a participant in the cultural concerns which the Departments of the Holy See encounter in their work, in such a way as to facilitate the coordination of their tasks in the evangelization of cultures, and to ensure co-operation between the cultural institutions of the Holy See.

- 3) To enter into dialogue with the Episcopal Conferences, with the aim, among others, of drawing benefit for the whole Church from the researches, initiatives, accomplishments and productions which allow the local Churches to take an active part in their own cultural environment.

- 4) To collaborate with international Catholic organizations of a university, historical, philosophical, theological, scientific, artistic and intellectual nature, and to promote their reciprocal co-operation.

- 5) In a fashion appropriate to it, and always excepting the specific competencies of other bodies in the Curia in this matter, to keep up with the activities of international

bodies, beginning with UNESCO and the Cultural Co-operation Council of the Council of Europe, which are interested in culture, the philosophy of science and the human sciences, and to ensure the effective participation of the Holy See in international congresses concerned with science, culture and education.

6) To keep up with the policies and cultural activities of the different governments of the world which are legitimately concerned to give a fully human dimension to the promotion of the common good of the men for whom they have responsibility.

7) To facilitate Church-culture dialogue at the level of universities and research centers, organizations of artists and specialists, researchers and scholars, and to promote worthwhile meetings between these cultural groups.

8) To welcome to Rome representatives of culture interested in a better understanding of the Church's activities in this field, and in benefiting the Holy See with their rich experience, by offering them in Rome a meeting-place for dialogue.

These broad orientations, put gradually into effect under your supreme management and as possibilities permit, but with a clear and constant commitment, will most certainly be a witness and an incentive.

It is with great confidence and high hopes, Your Eminence, that I entrust such an important charge to you, and at the same time I invoke upon this enterprise, which is nowadays so opportune and necessary, the abundance of divine aid.

With my special Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome, at the Basilica of Saint Peter, on the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, 20 May 1982, the fourth year of my Pontificate.

Apostolic Letter Given Motu Proprio “*Inde a Pontificatus*”. The Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers are United

25 March 1993

Since the beginning of my Pontificate, accepting the wealth of stimulating ideas offered by the Second Vatican Council, I have wanted to develop the church's dialogue with the contemporary world. In particular, I have sought to foster the encounter with non-believers in the privileged area of culture, a fundamental dimension of the spirit, which places people in a relationship with one another and unites them in what is most truly theirs, namely, their common humanity.

To this end, convinced that the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith, in 1982 I created the Pontifical Council for Culture with the intention of strengthening the Church's pastoral presence in this specific, vital area, in which the world's destiny is at stake at the approach of the third millennium; at the same time, I wanted to promote dialogue with non-Christian religions and with individuals and groups not claiming any religion, in the common search for a cultural communication with all people of good will (Letter to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of State, 20 May 1982; *Insegnamenti*, vol. V/2, 1982, 1777 ff.).

In recent years a deeper awareness has been gained concerning the close relationship between the work of the Pontifical Council and the activity performed by the Pontifical Commission for Preserving the Church's Patrimony of Art and History, which I established on 28 June 1988; although the latter has had but a brief period of activity, it has demonstrated its necessity. Indeed, by its very nature faith tends to express itself in artistic forms and historical testimony having an intrinsic evangelizing power and cultural value, to which the Church is called to pay the greatest attention.

It has also been deemed opportune to improve the Holy See's outstanding presence in the area of culture by renewing and linking the Pontifical Academies.

After carefully considering these matters, I have decided to derogate from the provisions of the Constitution *Pastor Bonus* and to unite the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers, joining them in a single entity that will be called the Pontifical Council for Culture, and with which the Pontifical Commission for Preserving the Church's Patrimony of Art and History will maintain periodic contacts.

The new entity will be governed by the following norms:

Art. 1

The Council promotes the meeting between the saving message of the Gospel and the cultures of our time, often marked by disbelief or religious indifference, in order that they may be increasingly open to the Christian faith, which creates culture and is an inspirational source of science, literature and the arts.

Art. 2

The Council expresses the Church's pastoral concern in the face of the serious phenomena of the rift between the Gospel and cultures. It therefore promotes the study of the problem of unbelief and religious indifference found in various forms in different cultural milieus, inquiring into the causes and the consequences for Christian faith, in order to offer adequate support to the Church's pastoral activity in evangelizing cultures and inculturating the Gospel.

Art. 3

In order to foster the Church's and the Holy See's relations with the world of culture, the Council undertakes appropriate initiatives concerning the dialogue between faith and cultures, and intercultural dialogue. It oversees the initiatives begun by the Church's various institutions and offers its cooperation to the corresponding organs of the Episcopal Conferences.

Art. 4

The council also establishes dialogue with those who do not believe in God or who pro-

fess no religion, provided these are open to sincere cooperation. It organizes and participates in study congresses in this field by means of experts.

I. The Pontifical Council for Culture will have two sections:

- 1 Faith and Culture
- 2 Dialogue with Cultures

The section for Faith and Culture will continue the activity which the Pontifical Council for Culture has performed until now.

The section for Dialogue with Cultures will continue the activity heretofore performed by the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers.

The new institution will be presided over by a Cardinal President who will be assisted by a Secretary and an Undersecretary. In case of necessity, two Undersecretaries are to be appointed, one for each section.

II. Except in what concerns the special Statutes of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Social Sciences to be established, the Pontifical Council for Culture oversees and coordinates the activities of the Pontifical Academies.

III. The Pontifical Commission for Preserving the Church's Patrimony of Art and History shall henceforth be called the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Patrimony of the Church. Retaining its own area of competence established by articles 100–103 of my Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, it will no longer constitute part of the Congregation for the Clergy, but will be autonomous, having its own President, who will be a member of the Pontifical Council for Culture, with which it will maintain periodic contacts in order to assure a harmony of purpose and a fruitful mutual cooperation. Furthermore, it will consult with the Pontifical Council for Culture in regard to the Academies whose activities concern the Church's cultural possessions.

I hereby ordain that everything established with the present Motu Proprio shall have full and lasting value, anything to the contrary notwithstanding, even though it may be deserving of special mention.

Given at Rome, at St Peter's Basilica, 25 March 1993, the fifteenth year of my Pontificate.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

CARDINAL JOSEPH RATZINGER
Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures

1993

In his last words, the risen Lord sends his apostles to the ends of the earth: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations; baptize them... and teach them everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19f; cf. Acts 1:8).

Christianity entered the world conscious of a universal mission. From the first, the followers of Jesus Christ recognized their duty to pass on their faith to all men. They saw in the faith a good which did not belong to them alone, but one to which all had a claim. It would have been disloyal not to carry what had been given to them to the farthest corners of the earth.

The point of departure of Christian universalism was not the drive to power, but the certainty of having received the saving knowledge and redeeming love which all men had a claim to, and were yearning for, in the inmost recesses of their beings. Mission was not perceived as expansion for the wielding of power, but as the obligatory transmission of what was intended for everyone and which everyone needed.

Doubts have arisen today about the universality of Christian faith. Many no longer see the history of worldwide mission as

the history of the diffusion of liberating truth and love, but as a history of alienation and violation. The new consciousness expressed here demands that Christians consider radically who they are and who they are not, what they believe and what they do not believe, what they have to give and what is not theirs to give.

Within the frame of this address, I can only attempt a small step in such a large undertaking. My intention is to consider the right and capacity of Christian faith to communicate itself to other cultures, to assimilate them and to impart itself to them. Basically, this would include all questions concerning the foundation of Christian existence: Why believe anyway? Is there truth for man, truth which is accessible and belongs to everyone, or are we destined, through various symbols, ever just to catch a glimpse of a mystery which is never really unveiled to us? Is speaking about the truth of faith presumption or duty? Even these questions cannot be confronted head-on and discussed in their entire magnitude. We have only to keep them in the back of our minds as the setting for our discussion of faith and culture.

1. CULTURE, INCULTURATION, THE MEETING OF CULTURES

Our first questions must be: What is culture? How does it stand in relation to religion; and in what way can it be in contact with religious forms which were originally foreign to it? First, we might note that it was modern Europe which first originated a concept of culture in which culture appears as its own domain distinct from, or even in opposition to, religion. In all known historical cultures, religion is the essential element of culture; indeed it is its determining core. It is religion which determines the structure of values and thereby forms its inner logic.

But if this is the case, inculturation of the Christian faith in other cultures appears all the more difficult. For it is difficult to see how a culture, living and breathing the religion with which it is interwoven, can be transplanted into another religion without both of them going to ruin. If you remove from a culture its own religion which begets it, then you rob it of its heart. Should you implant in it a new heart, the Christian heart, it seems inescapable that the organism which is not ordered to it will reject the foreign body. A positive outcome of the operation is hard to envision.

The operation can only have sense if Christian faith and the other religion, together with the culture which lives from it, do not stand in utter difference to each other. It only makes sense if they are interiorly open to one another, or to put it differently, if they naturally tend to draw near and unite. Inculturation, therefore, presupposes the potential universality of each culture. It presumes that in all cultures the same human nature is at work. It presumes that seeking union is a common truth of the human condition abiding in cultures.

To put it in yet a different way: The program of inculturation only then makes sense if no injustice is done to a culture when, due to the universal human disposition toward the truth, it is opened up and further developed by a new cultural power. It would follow too

that whatever in culture excludes such opening and exchange marks what is deficient in the culture, for exclusion of the other goes against man's nature. The sign of a high culture is its openness, its capacity to give and receive, its power to develop, to allow itself to be purified and become more conformed to truth and to man.

Let us attempt now a kind of definition of culture. We might say culture is the historically developed common form of expression of the insights and values which characterize the life of a community. Let us try to consider now more closely the individual elements of this definition in order to understand better the possible intercommunication of cultures which the term inculturation must mean.

a) First of all, culture has to do with knowledge and values. It is an attempt to understand the world and man's existence in the world, but it is not an attempt of a purely theoretical kind. Rather it is ordered to the fundamental interests of human existence.

Understanding should show us how to be human, how man is to take his proper place in this world and respond to it in order to realize himself in his search for success and happiness. Moreover, in the great cultures this question again is not posed individualistically, as if each individual could think up a model for coming to terms with the world and life. Man can succeed only with others; the question of right knowledge is thus also a question about the right formation of the community. The community, for its part, is the prerequisite for individual fulfillment. In culture we are dealing with an understanding, which is knowledge, which gives rise to praxis, that is to say, we are dealing with a knowledge which encompasses the indispensable dimension of values or morals. We must add something else which was self-evident to the ancient world. The question of man and the world always contains the prior and actually foundational question of God. One can neither understand the world, nor live uprightly, if the question of the divine goes unanswered. Indeed, it gets to the root of the great cultures to say that they interpret the world so as to order it to the divine.

b) Culture in the classical sense thus includes going beyond the visible and apparent to actual causes, and thus culture at its core means an opening to the divine. Related to this, as we have already seen, is the notion that the individual transcends himself in culture and finds himself carried along in a larger social subject whose insights he can borrow, continue and develop further. Culture is always bound to a social subject which, on the one hand, takes up the experiences of the individual and, on the other, helps shape them. The common subject conserves and develops insights which exceed the capacity of the individual, insights which can be termed pre-rational and super-rational. In so doing, cultures appeal to the wisdom of the "ancients," who stood nearer to the gods; they appeal to primordial traditions which have the character of revelation; that is to say, they do not stem from men's probing and deliberating but from an original contact with the ground of all things. In other words, cultures appeal to a communication from the divine.¹

1. Cf. Josef Pieper, *Überlieferung: Begriff und Anspruch*, Munich 1970; and *Über die platonischen Mythen*, Munich 1965.

The crisis of a culture ensues then when the culture is no longer able to bring this super-rational heritage into a convincing connection to new, critical knowledge. In such a case, inherited truth becomes questionable; what was once truth becomes mere habit and loses its vitality.

c) Something else comes to the fore here. Society marches onward, and therefore culture also has to do with history. On its journey through time, culture develops through its encounter with new reality and the arrival of new insights. Not sealed off, culture stands in the dynamic stream of time, which contains a confluence of currents moving toward unity.

A culture's historicity means its ability to progress, and this depends on its ability to be open and to allow transformation through encounter. To be sure, one can distinguish between cosmic/static and historical cultures. The ancient cultures are said to depict the mystery of the cosmos as ever the same, while the Judeo-Christian cultural world, in particular, understands the way with God as history. History is thus fundamental to it.

Such a distinction between static and dynamic cultures is to a certain extent quite correct, but it does not tell the whole tale, because even the cosmically directed cultures point to death and rebirth, to being human as the way. As Christians we would say they contain within them an adventistic dynamic, but this is a topic to which we will need to return.²

Our small efforts here to clarify basic categories of the concept of culture help us to understand better how cultures can meet and intermingle. We can now say that a culture's attachment to a cultural individuality, to a particular cultural expression, is the basis for the multiplicity of cultures and their respective characteristics. Conversely, we can ascertain that culture's historicity, its movement in and through time, embraces its openness. An individual culture does not just live its own experience of God, world and man. Rather, by necessity it encounters on its way and must come to terms with other cultures with their typically different experiences.

Hence, to the extent to which it is open or closed, internally broad or narrow, a culture comes to deepen and refine its own insights and values. This can lead to a profound evolution of its earlier cultural configuration, and such a transformation need not be in the least a question of alienation or violation. A successful transformation is explained by the potential universality of all cultures made concrete in a given culture's assimilation of the other and its own internal transformation. Such a procedure can even lead to the resolution of the latent alienation of man from truth and himself which a culture may harbor. It can mean the healing pass-over of a culture. Only appearing to die, the culture actually rises, coming fully into its own for the first time.

For this reason, we should no longer speak of inculturation but of the meeting of cultures or interculturality, to coin a new phrase. For inculturation presumes that a faith

2. Th. Haecker especially emphasized the concept of the adventistic in pre-Christian "paganism." Cf. Th. Haecker, *Vergil: Vater des Abendlandes* (Leipzig, 1931).

stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse. But such a notion is first of all artificial and unrealistic, for with the exception of modern technological civilization, there is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture devoid of faith. It is above all difficult to envision how two organisms, foreign to each other, should all of a sudden become a viable whole in a transplantation which stunts both of them. Only if all cultures are potentially universal and open to each other can interculturality lead to flourishing new forms.

Up until now, we have been concerned primarily with what could be called phenomenological considerations, that is to say, we have noted how cultures work and develop. In so doing, we have argued to the potential universality of all cultures as the fundamental idea of a history which aims at unification. But then we ask ourselves: Why is this so? Why are all cultures only particular and therefore different from one another? Why are they, however, at the same time open to all other cultures and capable of reciprocal refinement and combination?

I do not wish to address the positivistic solutions to these questions—and these of course exist. It seems to me that precisely here reference to metaphysics cannot be avoided. The meeting of cultures is possible because man, despite all the differences of his history and social constructs, remains one and the same being. This one being, man, however, is himself touched in the depth of his existence by truth. The fundamental openness of each person to the other can only be explained by the hidden fact that our souls have been touched by truth; and this explains the essential agreement which exists even between cultures most removed from each other.

On the other hand, diversity leading to isolation can be accounted for by the finiteness of the human spirit. No one grasps the whole; the myriad insights and forms build a kind of mosaic displaying their complementarity and interrelatedness. In order to be whole, everybody needs each other. Man approaches the unity and wholeness of his being only in the reciprocity of all great cultural achievements.

To be sure, we must acknowledge that this optimistic diagnosis is not the whole story. The potential universality of cultures again and again comes up against almost insurmountable obstacles when we try to translate it into practical universality, for it is not only a question of the dynamic force of what we share in common. We must also consider the element of separation, the barriers and contradictions, the impossibility of crossing over because the dividing waters are too deep.

We spoke before of the unity of the human being, of his being touched by God in a hidden way through truth. We realize too, however, that there is also a negative factor in human existence, an alienation, which hinders knowledge and cuts men off at least partially from the truth and thereby from one another. In this undeniable factor of alienation lies the poverty of our efforts to promote the meeting of cultures.

While we might deduce from this fact that it is wrong to accuse all earthly religions of idolatry, it would be also incorrect to regard all religions only positively. We should not

all of a sudden forget the critique of religion which not only Feuerbach and Marx burned into our souls, but also such great theologians as Karl Barth and Bonhoeffer.

2. FAITH AND CULTURE

Now we come to the second part of our considerations. We have discussed thus far the essence of culture and the conditions of cultural encounter and intermingling giving rise to new cultural forms. From the realm of principles, we must now venture into that of facts. But before we do so, we need to summarize once again the essential results of our reflections and ask ourselves what can unite cultures so that they do not become merely superficially attached to each other but that their meeting becomes the occasion for mutual enrichment and refinement.

The medium that brings them together can only be the shared truth about man, which necessarily brings into play the truth about God and reality as a whole. The more human a culture is, the greater it is, the more it will speak to truth which was formerly closed to it and the more it will be able to assimilate truth and itself be assimilated by truth.

At this juncture the Christian faith's special self-understanding becomes manifest. Christian faith, if it is alert and honest, knows quite well that there is a good deal of the human at work in its particular cultural expressions, much of which is in need of purification and opening up. But Christian faith is also certain that in its core it is the self-disclosure of truth itself and therefore is redemption. For man's real poverty is the darkness to truth. This darkness falsifies our actions and pits us against one another, precisely because we are tainted, alienated from ourselves, cut off from the ground of our being, which is God.

The communication of truth brings deliverance from alienation and division. It illumines the universal standard which does no violence to any culture but leads each to its own center, since each culture is finally the expectation of truth. This does not mean uniformity. Just the opposite. Only when this occurs can opposition become complementarity because each culture, based on a common standard, can now bear its particular fruit.

This is the great mandate with which Christian faith came into the world; it underlies the inner obligation to send all peoples to the school of Jesus because he is truth in person and thus the way of mankind. For the time being, we do not wish to join the dispute over the legitimacy of this mandate, but we shall need to return to this issue. For now let us put the following question: What conclusions should we draw from the aforesaid for the concrete relationship of Christian faith to the world's cultures?

First, we must state that faith itself is culture. There is no such thing as naked faith or mere religion. Simply stated, insofar as faith tells man who he is and how he should begin being human, faith creates culture; faith is itself culture. Faith's word is not an abstraction; it is one which has matured through a long history and through intercultural mingling in which it formed an entire structure of life, the interaction of man with himself, his neigh-

bor, the world and God. This means too that faith is its own subject, a living and cultural community which we call the people of God.

The historical character of faith as subject comes perhaps most clearly to expression in this concept. Does then faith stand as one culture among others such that one would have to choose whether to belong to this people as a cultural community or to another? No. At this point, what is special and proper to a culture becomes evident. The cultural subject people of God differs from the classical cultures which are defined by tribe, people or the boundaries of a common region insofar as the people of God exists in different cultures which for their part, even as far as the Christian is concerned, do not cease to be the first and unmediated culture. Even as a Christian, one remains a Frenchman, a German, an American, an Indian, etc.

In the pre-Christian world, also in the great cultures of India, China and Japan, the identity and indivisibility of the cultural subject perdures. Double membership is in general impossible, with the exception, of course, of Buddhism, which is able to unite with other cultures as a kind of inner principle. But the doubling of cultures first arises in any consistent way with Christianity, such that man now lives in two cultural worlds, his historical culture and in the new one of faith, both of which permeate him.

This interaction will never be an entirely accomplished synthesis; it includes the necessity of continuing efforts toward reconciliation and refinement. Again and again man must learn the transcendence toward wholeness and universality which is proper not to a specific people, but precisely to the people of God, which embraces all men. Again and again, on the other hand, what is held in common must be received into the realm of the particular and be lived or even suffered in actual history.

Something very important follows from this. One might think that the culture is the affair of the individual historical country (Germany, France, America, etc.), while faith for its part is in search of cultural expression. The individual cultures would allocate, as it were, a cultural body to faith. Accordingly, faith would always have to live from borrowed cultures, which remain in the end somehow external and capable of being cast off. Above all, one borrowed cultural form would not speak to someone who lives in another culture. Universality would thereby finally become fictitious.

Such thinking is at root Manichaeian. Culture is debased, becoming a mere exchangeable shell. Faith is reduced to disincarnated spirit ultimately void of reality. To be sure, such a view is typical of the post-Enlightenment mentality. Culture is reduced to mere form; religion, to inexpressible mere feeling or pure thought. The fruitful tension is lost which one would expect to characterize per se the coexistence of two subjects.

If culture is more than a mere form or aesthetic principle, if it is rather the ordering of values in a historical living form and cannot prescind from the question of God, then we cannot circumvent the fact that the church is its own cultural subject for the faithful. This cultural subject church, people of God, does not coincide with any of the individual historical subjects even in times of apparently full Christianization, as one thought one

had attained in Europe. Rather the church significantly maintains her own overarching form.

If this is so, when the faith and its culture meet another culture hitherto foreign to it, it cannot be a question of dissolving the duality of the cultures to the advantage of the one or the other. Gaining a Christianity deprived of its concrete human complexion at the cost of losing one's own cultural heritage would be as mistaken as surrendering faith's own cultural physiognomy. Indeed the tension is fruitful; it renews faith and heals culture. It would therefore be nonsensical to offer a sort of pre-cultural or decultured Christianity which would rob itself of its own historical force and degrade itself to an empty collection of ideas.

We may not forget that Christianity already in the New Testament bears the fruit of an entire cultural history, a history of acceptance and rejection, of encounter and change. Israel's history of faith, which has been taken up into Christianity, found its own form through confrontation with the Egyptian, Hittite, Sumerian, Babylonian, Persian and Greek cultures.

All of these cultures were at the same time religions, comprehensive historical forms of living. Israel painfully adopted and transformed them in the course of her struggle with God, in struggle with the great prophets, in order to make ready an ever purer vessel for the newness of the revelation of the one God. These other cultures came thereby to their own lasting fulfillment. They would all have sunk into the distant past had they not been refined and elevated in the faith of the Bible, thereby attaining permanence.

To be sure, Israel's history of faith begins with the call to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house" (Gn 12: 1); it begins with a cultural break. Such a break with its own antecedent history, such a going forth, will always stand at the beginning of a new hour of the history of faith. But this new beginning reveals itself to be a healing power which creates a new center and which deigns to draw to itself everything truly human, everything truly godly. "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:31)—these words of the risen Lord also apply here. The cross is first of all break, expulsion, elevation away from the earth, but precisely thereby it becomes a new center of magnetic pull, drawing world history upward and becoming a gathering of the divided.

Whoever joins the church must be aware that he is entering a cultural subject with its own historically developed and multi-tiered inter-culturality. One cannot become a Christian apart from a certain exodus, a break from one's previous life in all its aspects. Faith is not a private way to God; it leads into the people of God and its history.

God bound himself to a history which is now also his, and one which we cannot cast off. Christ remains man in eternity; he conserves his body in eternity. Being man and being body inevitably include however a history and culture, a quite particular history and culture, whether we like it or not. We cannot repeat the event of the incarnation to suit ourselves in the sense of taking away Christ's flesh and offering him another. Christ remains himself, indeed according to his body. But he draws us to himself.

This means, since the people of God is not a particular cultural entity but rather has been drawn from all peoples, therefore even its first cultural identity, rising from the break, has its place. But not just that. This first identity is necessary to allow the incarnation of Christ, the incarnation of the Logos, to reach its fullness. The tension of the many subjects in the one subject belongs essentially to the uncompleted drama of the incarnation of the Son. This tension is the real inner dynamism of history; it stands to be sure always under the sign of the cross; that is to say, it always has to contend with the counter-stress of closed-mindedness and refusal.

3. CHRISTIAN FAITH AND NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS IN THE CURRENT HISTORICAL SITUATION

All of this follows if Jesus of Nazareth really is the incarnate meaning of history, the Logos, the self-manifestation of truth itself. It is then clear that this truth is the place where everyone can be reconciled and nothing loses its own worth and dignity. But at this point objections are heard today. To claim a religion's concrete statements of faith to be true is considered today not only presumption but also a sign of being unenlightened. Hans Kelsen expressed the spirit of our era when he maintained that Pilate's question "What is truth?" is the only appropriate standpoint *vis-à-vis* the great moral and religious problems of mankind. Truth is replaced by majority decision, he says, precisely because there can be no commonly binding accessible standard for man.³

Thus the multiplicity of cultures becomes a proof of their relativity. Culture is put in opposition to truth. This relativism, a basic sentiment of enlightened man reaching today far into theology, is the gravest problem of our time. It is also the fundamental reason why praxis has replaced truth and thereby shifted the axes of religions. We do not know what is true, but we do know what we must do, namely, usher in a better society, the "kingdom," as it is frequently said, taking a word from the Bible and applying it in a profane, utopian sense.

Church-centeredness, Christ-centeredness, God-centeredness, all of these seem to give way to kingdom-centeredness, the centering on the kingdom as the common task of all religions, under which point of view and standard they are supposed to meet.⁴ So there is no reason any longer to approach them in their core, to bring them into relationship with each other in their moral and religious messages. On the contrary, the religions thereby become distorted in their deepest being, in that they are expected to serve as a means to a future structuring which is really foreign to them and empties them of content. The dogma of relativism also works in another direction. Christian universalism

3. Cf. V. Possenti, *Le società liberali al bivio: lineamenti di filosofia della società* (Torino: Marietti 1991), 315–45, esp. 345f.

4. Cf. the indications of J. Dupuis, "The Kingdom of God and World Religions," in *Vidyajyoti, Journal of Theological Reflection*, 1987/51: 530–44.

concretely carried out in mission is no longer the dutiful passing on of a good, namely, truth and love intended for everyone. Rather mission becomes the arrogant presumption of a culture which thinks itself superior to the others and so would deprive them of what is good and proper to them.

The conclusions drawn from this relativism differ from culture to culture even if they are related in their basic thrust. In Latin America today there is a movement under way which calls itself *teologia india*, the title referring to the indigenous peoples. The movement mourns the passing of the old religions of that continent and would like to revive them in some fashion.

The religions are seen as the ways of the different peoples to God and thus basically as equally valid paths to salvation. Each people has the right to its way; Latin America must finally be liberated from the alienation which it experienced when Western Christianity was imposed upon it.

The situation is a little different in Africa, where in contrast to Latin America, the original tribal religions are still vigorous. But even here a reverse movement can be seen, due to the self-doubt afflicting Christianity today and the reduction of its religious substance to mere moral imperatives. Why should Africa give up its religious identities to the advantage of a religion whose proclamation and implantation in retrospect appear to not a few to be only another self-alienating aspect of the colonialism imposed upon them?

Whoever looks more closely can easily see that there can be no simple return to the past. For it is not only the case that the convergence of mankind toward a single community with a common life and destiny is unstoppable because such an inclination is grounded in man's essence, but also because the diffusion of technological civilization is irrevocable. It is a romantic dream to want to preserve pre-technological islands in the sea of humanity. You cannot enclose men and cultures in a kind of spiritual nature reserve.

Virtually no one, whether in Latin America, Africa or Asia, seriously wants to exclude himself from natural science and technology, which originated in the West. But since technology, like natural science, appears to be neutral, the thought suggests itself: Why not accept the achievements of the modern age while at the same time, however, keeping the indigenous religions? This seemingly so enlightened notion, however, does not work. For in reality modern civilization is not mere multiplication of knowledge and know-how. It deeply encroaches upon the basic understanding of man, the world and God. It changes standards and behavior. It alters the interpretation of the world at its base. The religious cosmos is necessarily moved by it. The arrival of these new possibilities of existence is like an earthquake which shakes the intellectual landscape at its very foundations.

In any case, it occurs more and more frequently that Christian faith is discarded as a European cultural heritage and the former religions are religiously reinstated, while at the same time technology, though nonetheless Western, is passionately adopted and exploited. This division of Western heritage into the useful, which one accepts, and the foreign, which one rejects, does not lead to the salvation of ancient cultures. It can now be seen that what is great and forward-looking, I would say the adventistic dimension

of the ancient religions, meets its downfall because it seems incompatible with the new knowledge of the world and man, while magic in the broadest sense of the word, everything which promises power over the world, remains intact and becomes for the first time life-determining. The religions thus lose their dignity because what is best in them is eliminated and what was dangerous in them alone remains.

The situation of Asia *vis-à-vis* Christianity is different still from the situation in either Latin America or black Africa. For here we are not dealing with pre-literary tribal cultures, but with high religious cultures which also have produced a great legacy of sacred texts and writings of philosophical and theological reflection.

In Africa, Christianity encountered the indigenous religions at a moment in which they themselves, in youthful vigor, were still in search of the ultimate word. One can recognize a certain analogy to the situation of the Mediterranean world in the moment of its encounter with Christ, even if the analogy contains much dissimilarity as well as similarity, as all analogies do. Christianity's early proclamation to the Greco-Roman world confronted religions which were moribund; they had lost their inner credibility and vitality. People were searching for something new. One need not hesitate to say that there was a longing for monotheism, for one God over all the gods.

Philosophy saw him from afar but could not chart a course to him; remaining philosophy, it was unable to replace religion. The Christian proclamation was here the interiorly awaited answer which could apprehend philosophical thought and fill it with religious reality.

In Africa, there was and is a similar need for the self-transcendence of the tribal religions. These too are not adequate to the needs of the historical moment; Islam and Christianity are trying to answer the question raised by the religions themselves.

The situation is different in India, China and Japan insofar as the traditional religions themselves have produced philosophical reasoning which interprets the world as a whole and, in so doing, assigns a rational place in the structure of life and culture for religion. Hence Christianity could not be experienced here as it was in the Mediterranean region or even in black Africa as a new stage of life in its own pilgrimage already pointing in the same direction. Rather Christianity appeared more as a foreign culture and religion establishing itself next to one's own and threatening to supplant it.

Conversions to Christianity have for this reason largely remained marginal in comparison to the whole of society. Nonetheless, the confrontation between the Christian and Asian religious worlds was not without effect, but rather ushered in a deep process of transformation, especially in Indian religiosity. Neo-Hinduism, as represented for example by Radhakrishnan, rests on the fusion of traditional Indian traditions with a late form of Western Christianity. One can no doubt see it as a synthesis of culture and religion, but perhaps it would even be better categorized as a type of philosophy of religion in which modern Western relativism combines with traditional Eastern spirituality, offering a kind of rational basis for religious and cultic perspectives which, to be sure, have largely lost their original sense in this new vision.

If this is a case of a synthesis in which the Indian moment remains determinative, one could see, say in Panikkar, a union accenting more the Christian component. But here too we are dealing with a philosophy of religion rather than religion. Between, or perhaps better, beyond such attempts, the path must be found for the true encounter of cultures and religions, an encounter not characterized by loss of faith or truth, but by a deeper contact with truth which makes possible giving all that which went before its full and deep significance.

Such a synthesis of truth cannot be invented at a desk or else it will never transcend the status of philosophy or mere theory. Rather a process of lived faith is necessary which creates the capacity for encounter in truth and thus, as the psalm says, “places in a wide place” (31:9). But it naturally must be guided and ordered to the thinking of faith. That is the great task confronting theology in Asia today, a task which concerns at the same time the entire universal church.

Our gathering here in Hong Kong should be an encouragement to undertake this work and at the same time help us to clarify the necessary principles involved. The church fathers can ever show us the way to attain the right principles since they faced a quite similar task in their encounter with the religions of the Mediterranean area with its endemic philosophies of religion. For although the faith in the gods and thus the immediate sense of the ancient cults had disintegrated, new philosophical justifications of the pagan religions were devised which show very similar characteristics to the philosophies of religion of our century, for example, to Radhakrishnan.

I shall mention only two striking examples. The Roman rhetorician Symmachus (c. 345–402), who passionately defended the preservation of the ancient Roman religion, provides us the first. He became especially famous for petitioning Caesar to reinstate the goddess of victory in the Roman senate. The key line of his memorandum justifying his request reads: “*Uno itinere non potest venire ad tam grande secretum*”—“one cannot succeed to such a great mystery by only one road.” This passage is a classical expression of the Roman idea of religion. The divine mystery is so great that no human way can exhaust it; no religion may encompass it. It can only be approached from different sides and must be represented in various forms.

Symmachus did not want to abolish Christianity; he but wanted to integrate it into his notion of religion. Christianity should learn to see itself as one way to see, seek and speak about God, recognizing that there are also other ways. Even Christianity may not presume to exhaust the great mystery.

Perhaps the problem can be seen even more clearly in the case of the emperor Julian the Apostate (332–363), who wanted to suppress once again “intolerant” Christianity and re-establish the ancient cults, all this against the backdrop of neo-Platonic philosophy. Julian criticized the Old Testament and the Christian faith from the same standpoint as Symmachus. His main complaint against Christianity and his single objection to Judaism involve the First Commandment: “Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.” He could not and would not recognize the uniqueness of the one God. Even the God of Israel, the

God of Jesus Christ, is for him one appearance of the divine, but one which does not deplete the “great mystery.” For this reason, the God of the Old Testament and the God of Christians must tolerate other gods besides him. For this reason, the Nazarene cannot be recognized as the one incarnate Logos who is the only mediator of all mankind.

In the dispute with enlightened philosophical polytheism, the fathers have identified the supporting foundations of biblical faith; relativizing them annuls this faith and robs it of its identity. What remains after its abandonment would be select elements of biblical tradition, but not the faith of the Bible itself. I shall attempt very briefly to indicate these basic elements as derived by the fathers from Sacred Scripture.

a) The first great commandment is at once the first article of faith and faith’s foundational principle of identity: “The Lord, our God, is one Lord.” All “gods” are not God. Therefore only the one God can be adored in truth; to worship other gods is idolatry. Without this fundamental decision there is no Christianity. One finds oneself outside the Christian faith where it is forgotten or relativized. Christology, ecclesiology, worship and sacrament can only be correctly treated when this decision is made. Christianity revolutionized the ancient world with this confession of faith. The ancient world had proceeded from the exact opposite principle, as the Emperor Julian had again formulated it at the end of antiquity.

The one God is by no means an unknown theme in the history of religion. One can indeed say that the vast majority of religions are acquainted with him. Hence they know that the gods are not the final power but only relative powers. The religions are in general also aware that the “gods” are not “God.” At the same time, the one God is, to be sure, frequently without a cult or at least is unimportant cultically because he is too distant from the life of man. Hence cultic practice addresses the gods, so that in the religions God, for all practical purposes, is often concealed almost entirely behind the gods.

Christian faith was for the Mediterranean world and then again for Latin America and Africa liberation from the gods because now the one God had shown himself and had become “God with us.” The pivotal words with which Jesus rebukes Satan, the tempter of mankind, read: “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve” (Mt 4:10; Lk 4:8; Dt 5:9; 6:13). Without accepting this command one cannot stand on the side of Jesus Christ in the religion professed by the Bible.

b) Christian existence starts with this fundamental decision and has rested on it ever since. Where the difference between worship and idolatry disappears, Christianity is undone. The Bible and the language of the fathers calls the required decision conversion (*metanoia*). A theology which omits the concept of conversion would overlook the decisive category of biblical religion. Christian faith is a new beginning and not merely a new cultural variant in an ever developing religious framework.

For this reason, the fathers stressed emphatically the newness of Christianity. The act of conversion is essential to the special understanding of the truth of Christians. In a large number of religions, as we have seen, the reality of the one God was certainly not unknown, but this one God remains too distant. His mystery is inaccessible. Thus the

concrete contents of religion can only be symbolic in nature. They are not truth but relative appearances beside which other appearances are possible.

The Christian faith recognizes in the God of Israel, in the God of Jesus Christ, the one true God, truth itself manifesting itself. Therefore Christian conversion is according to its essence faith in the fact of truth's own revelation. While mystery is not thereby abolished, relativism, to be sure, is excluded, for relativism cuts man off from truth, making him a slave. Man's real poverty is darkness to truth. He becomes free for the first time when he is obliged to serve truth alone.

Yet another point is important in this consideration. The fathers first of all emphasized very strongly the character of conversion as decision, and accordingly, the character of faith as exodus. When this point was secure, they emphasized more and more also the second aspect, namely, that conversion is transformation, not destruction. Conversion does not destroy the religions and cultures but transforms them.

With this insight, the fathers came more and more to oppose the iconoclasm of narrow-minded Christian fanatics. Temples were no longer dismantled but converted to churches. The inner continuity between the religions and Christian faith became visible. It came to a resurrection of what was best in the former religions. It was not a relativistic philosophy of religion which gave them continued existence; in fact, it was this that had made them ineffective in the first place. Faith gave the religions the space in which their truth could develop and become fruitful. Both aspects of the act of conversion are important, but only after the first step has succeeded, namely the decisive turning to the one God, can the second, transforming conservation, ensure.

c) The mystery of Jesus Christ is to be understood only in this context of the First Commandment and the act of conversion which it demands. For Jesus, who did not abolish the Old Testament but fulfilled it, the First Commandment remained the supporting foundation of everything further; the Shema Israel constituted the underlying content of faith: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord."

I make bold to assert that the centrality of this passage for all Old Testament literature is also the essential reason for the unique place of the Old Testament in the Christian faith. Since the whole Old Testament is built around this one sentence, it is for this reason a "canon," Sacred Scripture, for Christians. Only for this reason it attests to Jesus and vice versa. Jesus is the key to the Old Testament because he makes this sentence concrete in his very flesh.

Unfortunately, lack of time does not permit us to present the Christological question as it should be presented. For this reason, I should like all the more to refer to the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, in which the essential issues are very vividly and clearly stated. This encyclical must form the standard for all further work on the theology of religions and mission. It cannot be studied and received intensively enough. I must settle here for a brief allusion.

The problem which arises in India, but also elsewhere, comes to expression in Panikkar's famous phrase: "Jesus is Christ, but Christ is not (only) Jesus." In order to see the full

extent of the question, we should replace the word Christ with Logos or Son of God, since Christ is a salvation-historical title in which the full metaphysical depth of the mystery of Jesus does not yet come to light.

In his historical life, Jesus was reticent about the use of this title. The post-Easter tradition explains the title more and more decidedly by the title Son, which finally replaces it, and which then again John interprets in depth by the concept Logos. This process of the development of revelation is already, however, very prominent in the synoptic tradition. Peter's confession reads quite simply in Mark: "You are the Christ [the Messiah]." Matthew reads: "You are the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God" (Mk 8:29; Mt 16:16). Jesus says expressly to Peter that the latter did not learn this confession from flesh and blood, that is, from either his culture or his religious heritage, but that "my Father who is in heaven has revealed" this to him (Mt 16:17).

Hence this confession, the fundamental confession of the entire church of all times and places, is expressly removed from mere human traditions and qualified as revelation in the strict sense of the term. Every interpretation which falls short of it is a return to the merely human. Christianity stands or falls with this confession. It can no longer be separated from Israel's basic confession: "The Lord, our God, is one Lord." The only God shows himself to us in his only Son and wishes to be worshiped as the only God in him. This answers in principle the question of the reversibility of the Christological formulas.

When Panikkar denies the simple reversibility, he is correct insofar as the two natures, the divine and the human, remain distinct. Jesus' human nature has its beginning in time; the divine nature of the Logos is eternal. Both are so different, as creator and creature are different, and therefore are not exchangeable. Nevertheless, in the incarnation, the eternal Logos has so bound himself to Jesus such that the reversibility of the formulas results from his person. The Logos can no longer be thought of apart from his connection to the man Jesus. The Logos has drawn Jesus to himself and so united himself to him that they are only one person in the duality of natures.

Whoever comes into contact with the Logos touches Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is more than the sacrament of the Logos. He is the Logos himself, who in the man Jesus is a historical subject. Certainly God touches man in many ways even outside of the sacraments. But he touches him always through the man Jesus, who is his self-mediation into history and our mediation into eternity. Christ is not a mere theophany, an appearance of God, but rather in him the being of God himself enters into unity with the being of man.

If we—with Peter, with the entire New Testament, with the entire church—confess Jesus as Christ, the Son of the living God, then we do not only wish to say that this Jesus has become the highest manifestation of the divine for us, while others elsewhere may well have found their own unique saviors. Faith, in the sense of the New Testament, means precisely that we are being torn away from our subjective or merely human-cultural estimations, that he who takes us by the hand is the one who passes over the sea of time without sinking because he is the Lord of time. Faith as "theological" act transcends all experience. It is an act of assent which we can only make to the living God, who is

truth in person. We may not confer this obedience on any relative reality. This is what Peter means when he says to the leaders and elders of the people of Israel: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In his letters from prison, Paul develops the cosmic significance of Christ and thereby opens up for us an "inclusive" Christology in the sense of what we said earlier about conversion. Faith in Jesus Christ becomes a new principle of life and opens up a new space for living. The old is not destroyed but finds its definitive form and full meaning. This transforming conservation as the fathers splendidly practiced it in the encounter between biblical faith and its cultures is the real content of "inculturation," of encounter and cross-fertilization of cultures and religions under the mediating power of faith.

It is here that the great tasks of the present historical moment lie. Without a doubt, Christian mission must understand and receive the religions in a much deeper way than it has until now. On the other hand, the religions, in order to live authentically, need to recognize their own adventistic character propelling them forward to Christ. If we proceed in this sense toward an intercultural search for clues to the one common truth, we will find something unexpected.

The elements Christianity has in common with the ancient cultures of mankind are greater than those it has in common with the relativistic-rationalistic world. The latter has severed itself from the common sustaining basic insights of mankind and led man into an existential vacuum threatening his ruin if no answer is forthcoming. For the knowledge of man's dependence on God and eternity, the knowledge of sin, repentance and forgiveness, the knowledge of communion with God and eternal life, and finally the knowledge of basic moral precepts as they have taken shape in the Decalogue, all this knowledge permeates the cultures. It is not relativism which is confirmed. On the contrary, it is the unity of the human condition, the unity of man who has been touched by a truth greater than himself.

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20 The sower knows that the seed falls on specific soils and that it must absorb all the elements that enable it to bear fruit.¹ He also knows that some of these elements can prejudice the germination of the seed and indeed the very harvest itself.

The Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* underlines the importance of science and technology for the birth and development of modern culture. The scientific mentality, which derives from them, profoundly modifies “culture and ways of thinking,”² with consequent human and religious repercussions. Modern man is deeply influenced by this scientific and experimental method.

Nevertheless, there is today a growing realization that such a mentality is incapable of explaining everything. Scientists themselves acknowledge that the rigor of experimental method must be complemented by some other method of knowing, if a profound understanding of the human being is ever to be attained.

1. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 22.

2. *Gaudium et Spes*, 5.

Linguistic theory, for example, shows that symbolic thought affords an approach to the mystery of the human person which would otherwise remain inaccessible.

A rationalism which does not dichotomize man but which integrates his affective dimension, unifies him and gives fuller meaning to his life, is thus indispensable.

21 Together with this “more universal form of culture”,³ there is a growing desire to esteem anew autochthonous cultures. The question posed by the Second Vatican Council is still valid: “What is to be done to prevent increased exchange between cultures (which ought to lead to genuine and fruitful dialogue between groups and nations) from disturbing the life of communities, overthrowing traditional wisdom and endangering the character proper to each people?”⁴

— In many places there is an acute awareness that traditional cultures are being assailed by powerful external forces and by alien imitations of imported life-styles, with the result that the identity and values proper to peoples are thus being gradually eroded.

— Similarly acknowledged is the widespread influence of the communications media, which out of economic or ideological interest, often imposes a vision of life which does not respect the cultural distinctiveness of the peoples whom they address.

Thus, with inculturation, evangelization encounters one of its greatest challenges. In the light of the Gospel, the Church must appropriate all the positive values of culture and of cultures⁵ and reject those elements which impede development of the true potential of persons and peoples.

26 There is also a certain number of baptized Christians who, desiring to promote dialogue with various cultures and other religious confessions, or on account of a certain reticence on their part to live in contemporary society as believers, fail to give explicit and courageous witness in their lives to the faith of Jesus Christ.

These concrete situations of the Christian faith call urgently on the sower to develop a *new evangelization*,⁶ especially in those Churches of long-standing Christian tradition where secularism has made greater inroads. In this new context of evangelization, missionary proclamation and catechesis, especially of the young and of adults, is an evident priority.

109 The Word of God became man, a concrete man, in space and time and rooted in a specific culture: “Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived.”⁷

This is the original “inculturation” of the word of God and is the model of all evan-

3. Ibid., 54.

4. Ibid., 56.

5. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

6. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 33–34.

7. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 10, 22.

gelization by the Church, “called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures”.⁸

“Inculturation”⁹ of the faith, whereby in a wonderful exchange are comprised, “all the riches of the nations which have been given to Christ as an inheritance”,¹⁰ it is a profound and global process and a slow journey.¹¹ It is not simply an external adaptation designed to make the Christian message more attractive or superficially decorative. On the contrary, it means the penetration of the deepest strata of persons and peoples by the Gospel which touches them deeply, “going to the very centre and roots”¹² of their cultures.

In this work of inculturation, however, the Christian community must discern, on the one hand, which riches to “take”¹³ up as compatible with the faith; on the other, it must seek to “purify”¹⁴ and “transform”¹⁵ those criteria, modes of thought and lifestyles which are contrary to the Kingdom of God. Such discernment is governed by two basic principles: “compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church”.¹⁶ All of the people of God must be involved in this process which “...needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community’s Christian experience”.¹⁷

202 “We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures”.¹⁸ The principles governing the adaptation and inculturation of catechesis have already been discussed. It suffices to reaffirm that the catechetical discourse has as its necessary and eminent guide “the rule of faith”, illuminated by the Magisterium of the Church and further investigated by theology.

It must always be remembered that the history of catechesis, particularly in the patristic period, from several perspectives, is the history of the inculturation of the faith, and as such it merits careful study and meditation. It is, at the same time, an open-ended history which will continue to require long periods of ongoing assimilation of the Gospel. In this chapter, some methodological directions will be expounded concerning this task, as demanding as it is necessary, ever easy and open to the risks of syncretism and other misunderstandings. It can indeed be said on this subject, which is particularly important

8. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

9. The term “inculturation” is taken from diverse documents of the *Magisterium*. See *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53; *Redemptoris Missio*, 52–54. The concept of culture, either in a general or an ethnological or sociological sense is clarified in *Gaudium et Spes*, 53. Cf. also *Christifideles Laici*, 44.

10. *Ad Gentes*, 22; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 13 and 17; *Gaudium et Spes*, 53–62; Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, General Catechetical Directory, *Ad normam decreti*, 37.

11. Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 52 which speaks of the “long time” required for inculturation.

12. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20, 63, *Redemptoris Missio*, 52.

13. *Lumen Gentium* 13 uses the expression “To foster and to take (*fovet et assumit*)”.

14. *Lumen Gentium* 13 expresses it in this way: “She purifies, strengthens and elevates them (*sanare, elevare et consummare*)”.

15. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19 affirms: “To acquire and almost to overturn”.

16. *Redemptoris Missio*, 54.

17. *Ibidem*.

18. Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

today, that there exists a need for greater systematic and universal reflection on catechetical experience.

203 These duties form an organic whole and are briefly expressed as follows:
— to know in depth the culture of persons and the extent of its penetration into their lives;

— to recognize a cultural dimension in the Gospel itself, while affirming, on the one hand, that this does not spring from some human cultural humus, and recognizing, on the other, that the Gospel cannot be isolated from the cultures in which it was initially inserted and in which it has found expression through the centuries;

— to proclaim the profound change, the conversion, which the Gospel, as a “transforming and regenerating”¹⁹ force works in culture;

— to witness to the transcendence and the non-exhaustion of the Gospel with regard to culture, while at the same time discerning those seeds of the Gospel which may be present in culture;

— to promote a new expression of the Gospel in accordance with evangelized culture, looking to a language of the faith which is the common patrimony of the faithful and thus a fundamental element of communion;

— To maintain integrally the content of the faith and ensure that the doctrinal formulations of tradition are explained and illustrated, while taking into account the cultural and historical circumstances of those being instructed, and to avoid defacing or falsifying the contents.

204 Catechesis, while avoiding all manipulation of culture, is not limited to a mere juxtaposition of the Gospel with culture in some “decorative manner”. Rather it proposes the Gospel “in a vital way, profoundly, by going to the very roots of culture and the cultures of mankind”.²⁰ This defines a dynamic process consisting of various interactive elements: a listening in the culture of the people, to discern an echo (omen, invocation, sign) of the word of God; a discernment of what has an authentic Gospel value or is at least open to the Gospel; a purification of what bears the mark of sin (passions, structures of evil) or of human frailty; an impact on people through stimulating an attitude of radical conversion to God, of dialogue, and of patient interior maturation.

19. Ibidem.

20. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

CARDINAL PAUL POUPARD
Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture

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1 “From the time the Gospel was first preached, the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with cultures” (*Fides et Ratio*, 70), for “it is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 53).

In this way, the Good News which is Christ’s Gospel for all men and the whole human person, “both child and parent of the culture in which they are immersed” (*Fides et Ratio*, 71), reaches them in their own culture, which absorbs their manner of living the faith and is in turn gradually shaped by it. “Today, as the Gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation” (*Ibid.*, 72).

At the same time, some traditionally Christian cultures or cultures imbued with thousand-year-old religious traditions are being shattered. Thus, it is not only a question of grafting the faith onto these cultures, but also of revitalizing a de-Christianized world whose only Christian references are of a cultural

nature. On the threshold of the Third Millennium, the Church throughout the world is faced with new cultural situations, new fields of evangelization.

Faced with the challenges of “our times [which] are both momentous and fascinating” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 38), the Pontifical Council for Culture would like to share some convictions and practical suggestions. They are the result of several exchanges on a renewed pastoral approach to culture; thanks particularly to fruitful collaboration with Bishops, as diocesan pastors, and their co-workers in this field of apostolic work as a privileged point of encounter with Christ’s message.

For all culture “is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God.”¹ The decisive challenge of a pastoral approach to culture, for “a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived.”²

The suggestions offered respect Pope John Paul II’s urgent request to the Pontifical Council for Culture: “You must help the Church to respond to these fundamental questions for the cultures of today: how is the message of the Church accessible to the new cultures, to contemporary forms of understanding and of sensitivity? How can the Church of Christ make itself understood by the modern spirit, so proud of its achievements and at the same time so uneasy for the future of the human family?”³

FAITH AND CULTURE: SOME GUIDELINES

2The Church is the messenger of Christ, the Redeemer of man. She keeps in mind the cultural dimension of the person and of human communities. The Second Vatican Council, particularly the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* and the *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, the Synods of Bishops on the evangelization of the modern world and catechesis in our times, extended by the Apostolic Exhortations *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Paul VI and *Catechesi Tradendae* by John Paul II, offer precious teachings in this respect, further specified by subsequent special Assemblies, continent by continent, of the Synod of Bishops and the Holy Father’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations. The inculturation of the faith was the object of a detailed reflection on the part of the Pontifical Biblical Commission⁴ and the International Theological Commission.⁵

1. John Paul II, Discours à l’Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies, 5 October 1995, n. 9; *Documentation Catholique*, XCII (1995) 920.

2. John Paul II, Letter instituting the Pontifical Council for Culture, 20 May 1982, AAS LXXIV (1982) 683–88.

3. John Paul II, *Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 15 January 1985.

4. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Foi et Culture à la lumière de a Bible*, Leumann, Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1981.

5. International theological commission, *Faith and Inculturation*, in *Origins*, vol. 18, no. 47, pp. 800–807.

The Extraordinary Synod of 1985 for the Twentieth Anniversary of the Conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, cited by John Paul II in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, presents it as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures” (52). In many addresses during his apostolic trips, like those to the General Conferences of Latin American Bishops in Puebla and Santo Domingo,⁶ Pope John Paul II has updated and specified this new dimension of the Church’s pastoral work in our times, for it to reach human beings in their culture.

The careful examination of the different fields of culture proposed in this document show the breadth of what is meant by culture, this particular way in which persons and peoples cultivate their relationship with nature and their brothers and sisters, with themselves and with God, so as to attain a fully human existence (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 53). Culture only exists through man, by man and for man. It is the whole of human activity, human intelligence and emotions, the human quest for meaning, human customs and ethics.

Culture is so natural to man that human nature can only be revealed through culture. In a pastoral approach to culture, what is at stake is for human beings to be restored in fullness to having been created “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26), tearing them away from the anthropocentric temptation of considering themselves independent from the Creator. Therefore, and this observation is crucial to a pastoral approach to culture, “it must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates that there is something in man which transcends those cultures. This ‘something’ is precisely human nature: this nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition of ensuring that man does not become prisoner of any of his cultures, but asserts his personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of his being” (*Veritatis Splendor*, 53).

In its essential relation to truth and good, culture cannot only spring from the experience of needs, centres of interest or basic requirements. “The first and fundamental dimension of culture”, as John Paul II stressed to UNESCO, “is healthy morality, moral culture”.⁷ “When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being’s characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent” (*Fides et Ratio*, 70). Marked as they are by the very tensions aimed at achieving their fulfillment and the human dynamics of their history (Cf. *Ibid.* 71), cultures share also in sin and, by this very fact, require the necessary discernment of Christians. When the Word of God takes on human nature in all things but sin (Heb 4:15), he purifies it and brings it to fulfillment in the Holy Spirit. Revealing himself in this way, God opens his heart to mankind “by deeds

6. Puebla, *la evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América Latina*, 1979, n. 385–436; Santo Domingo, *Nueva evangelización, promoción humana, cultura cristiana*, 1992, n. 228.

7. John Paul II, *Address to UNESCO*, 2 June 1980, 12.

and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other” and lets men discover in human terms the mysteries of his love “in order to invite and receive them into his own company” (*Dei Verbum*, 2).

BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL TO DIFFERENT CULTURES

3In order to reveal himself, from the rich panoply of age-old cultures born of human genius, God chose for himself a People whose original culture he penetrated, purified and made fertile. The history of the Covenant is that of the rise of a culture that God himself inspired in his People. Sacred Scripture is the instrument willed and used by God to reveal himself, that which raises it to a supracultural plane. “To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their powers and faculties” (*Dei Verbum*, 11). In Sacred Scripture, the Word of God, which constitutes the original inculturation of the faith in the God of Abraham, the God of Jesus Christ, “the words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language” (*Ibid.*, 13). The message of the Revelation, inscribed in the sacred History, always presents itself in the guise of a cultural package from which it is inseparable, and of which it is an integral part. The Bible, the Word of God expressed in the words of men, constitutes the archetype of the fruitful encounter between the Word of God and culture.

In this respect, the call of Abraham is significant: “Leave your country, your family and your father’s house” (Gen 12:1). “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, living in tents... For he looked forward to the city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:8–10). The history of the people of God begins with an adherence of faith which is also a cultural split and culminates with what can be seen as another, the crucifixion of Christ. He was lifted up from the earth, but at the same time became the focal point which directs the history of the world upwards and gathers in unity the scattered children of God: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:32).

The cultural break with which Abraham’s vocation began, he who was the “father of believers”, conveys what happens in the depths of the human heart when God erupts in the existence of human beings, revealing himself and arousing the commitment of their whole being. Abraham was spiritually and culturally uprooted to be, in faith, planted by God in the Promised Land. Indeed, this break emphasizes the fundamental difference of nature that exists between faith and culture. Unlike idols, which are the product of a culture, the God of Abraham is totally different. It is by revelation that he enters Abraham’s life. The cyclical time of the ancient religions becomes obsolete: with Abraham and the Jewish people, a new time begins and becomes the history of man walking towards God. It is not a people making itself a god, but God giving birth to a people, a people of God.

The culture of the Bible has a unique place. It is the culture of the people of God at the heart of which he became incarnate. The promise made to Abraham culminates in the glorification of Christ crucified. The Father of Believers, intent on the fulfillment of the Promise, announces the sacrifice of the Son of God on the wood of the Cross. In Christ, who came to recapitulate the whole of creation, the love of God calls all men to share in the condition of sonship. God who is totally different from us, manifests Himself in Jesus Christ as totally one with us: “the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men” (*Dei Verbum*, 13). But faith has the power to get to the core of every culture and to purify it, to make it fruitful, to enrich it and to make it blossom like the boundless love of Christ.

The reception of Christ’s message thus gives rise to a culture whose two fundamental components are, in a completely new way, the person and love. Christ’s redeeming love unveils, beyond human persons’ natural limitations, their deep value, which blossoms under the effects of Grace, God’s gift. Christ is the source of this civilization of love, for which men, since the original fall in the Garden of Eden, are nostalgic, and which John Paul II, like Paul VI, incessantly calls us to make into a practical reality with all people of good will. For the fundamental bond of the Gospel, that is of Christ and of the Church, with man in his human nature is a creator of culture in its very foundation.

By living the Gospel, as two millenniums of history demonstrate, the Church illuminates the meaning and the value of life, broadens the horizons of reason and strengthens the foundations of human morality. Lived authentically, the Christian faith reveals in all its depth the dignity of the human person and the sublime nature of man’s vocation (Cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 10). Pioneers like Saint Justin and Saint Clement of Alexandria, Origen and the Cappadocian Fathers bear witness to this. This fruitful encounter of the Gospel with the different philosophies through the ages is evoked by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (cf. 36–48). “Faith’s encounter with different cultures has created something new” (Ibid., 70), in this way it creates an original culture, in the most varied contexts.

EVANGELIZATION AND INCULTURATION

4 Evangelization as such consists in the explicit proclamation of the mystery of Christ’s salvation and of his message, for “God... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Tim 2:4). “Everyone, therefore, ought to be converted to Christ, who is known through the preaching of the Church, and they ought, by baptism, to become incorporated into him, and into the Church which is his body” (*Ad Gentes*, 7). The newness which springs forth constantly from God’s Revelation through “deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other” (*Dei Verbum*, 2), communicated by the Spirit of Christ working within the Church, shows the truth about God and the salvation of man.

The proclamation of Christ “who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of the Revelation” (Ibid.), highlights the *semina Verbi* hidden and sometimes buried in the heart of cultures, and opens them to the infinite capacity He creates and which He fills gradually with the marvelous condescension of eternal wisdom (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 13), transforming their search for meaning into a quest for transcendence, and these stepping-stones into moorings for the acceptance of the Gospel. By explicitly witnessing their faith, Jesus’ disciples impregnate the plurality of cultures with the Gospel.

— *For the Church, evangelizing means* bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new... It is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.

— What matters is to evangelize man’s culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*, always taking the person as one’s starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

— The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

— The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18–20). In order to do this, it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel in the language and culture of men.

This Good News addresses human persons in their complex wholeness, spiritual and moral, economic and political, cultural and social. The Church therefore does not hesitate to speak of the evangelization of cultures, that is to say mentalities, customs and behavior. “The new evangelization requires a lucid, serious and ordered effort for the evangelization of culture” (*Ecclesia in America*, 70).

While cultures are subject to change and decay, the primacy of Christ is an unquenchable source of life (cf. Col 1:8–12; Eph 1:8) and of communion. As bearers of the absolute novelty of Christ to the heart of different cultures, Gospel missionaries incessantly exceed the limits of each individual culture, without allowing themselves to be ensnared by the

earthly visions of a better world. “Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world (cf. Jn 18:36), the Church or people of God which establishes this kingdom does not take away anything from the temporal welfare of any people. Rather she fosters and takes to herself, insofar as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens and elevates them” (*Lumen Gentium*, 13).

An evangelizer, whose faith is itself linked to a culture, must always give clear witness to Christ’s unique role, to the sacramental nature of his Church, and to the love his disciples have for every person and for “everything that is true, everything that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honor, and everything that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise” (Phil 4:8), which implies rejecting everything that is a source of sin and fruit of sin in the heart of cultures.

5 “A further problem that is strongly felt these days is the demand for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the message of faith” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 55). The evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the Gospel go hand in hand, in a reciprocal relationship which presupposes constant discernment in the light of the Gospel, to facilitate the identification of values and counter-values in a given culture, so as to build on the former and vigorously combat the latter.

“Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 52).

“Necessary and essential” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 55), inculturation, the very opposite of backward-looking archeologism and worldly mimicry, is “called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures”. In this encounter, not only are the cultures deprived of nothing, but they are actually stimulated to open themselves to the newness of the Gospel’s truth and to find in it an incentive for further development. (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 71).

In tune with the objective demands of faith and its mission to evangelize, the Church takes account of the essential fact that the meeting of faith and culture is a meeting of things which are not of the same order. The inculturation of faith and the evangelization of culture go together as an inseparable pair, in which there is no hint of syncretism:⁸ this is the genuine meaning of inculturation.

“In the face of all the different and at times contrasting cultures present in the various parts of the world, inculturation seeks to obey Christ’s command to preach the Gospel to all nations even unto the ends of the earth. Such obedience does not signify either

8. Cf. *Indiferentismo y sincretismo. Desafíos y propuestas pastorales para la Nueva Evangelización de América Latina*, Simposio, San José de Costa Rica, 19–23, January 1992, Bogotá, Celam, 1992.

syncretism or a simple adaptation of the announcement of the Gospel, but rather the fact that the Gospel penetrates the very life of cultures, becomes incarnate in them, overcoming those cultural elements that are incompatible with the faith and Christian living and raising their values to the mystery of salvation which comes from Christ” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 55).

Successive Synods of Bishops, including both the African and European ones, and the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Santo Domingo, insist on the particular importance for evangelization, for inculturation to be understood in the light of the great mysteries of salvation: Christ’s Incarnation, his birth at Christmas, the mystery of his Passion, the Redemption at Easter, and Pentecost—which allows everyone, by the power of the Spirit, to hear the marvels of God in his own tongue.⁹

The nations gathered in the Upper Room at Pentecost did not hear in their respective tongues a discourse about their own human cultures, but they were amazed to hear, each in their own tongue, the Apostles proclaim the marvels of God. “On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted... nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries... On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 53). “While it demands of all who hear it the adherence of faith, the proclamation of the Gospel in different cultures allows people to preserve their own identity... to foster whatever is implicit in them to the point where it will be fully explicit in the light of truth” (*Fides et Ratio*, 71).

“Given the close and organic relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and the Word that the Church proclaims, the inculturation of the revealed message cannot but follow the ‘logic’ proper to the Mystery of the Redemption... This emptying of self, this kenosis necessary for exaltation, which is the way of Christ and of each of his disciples (cf. Phil 2:6–9), sheds light on the encounter of cultures with Christ and his Gospel. ‘Every culture needs to be transformed by Gospel values in the light of the Paschal Mystery’” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 61). The dominant wave of secularism spreading through the different cultures, harnessing the suggestive power of the media, frequently idealizes lifestyles that are opposed to the culture of the Beatitudes and the imitation of Christ; poor, chaste, obedient and humble of heart. Indeed, there are some major works of culture that are inspired by sin and can incite sin.

“By proposing the Good News, the Church denounces the presence of sin in cultures and delivers them of it. She stigmatizes the counter-values and exorcises them. She thus provides a critical element to cultures... critical of idolatries, in other words of the values that are held up as idols or of the pseudo-values that a culture hold as absolute”.¹⁰

9. Cf. IV Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano. *Santo Domingo*, op. cit., n. 230.

10. Cf. III Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, *Puebla*, op. cit., n. 405.

A PASTORAL APPROACH TO CULTURE

6In service to the proclamation of the Good News and thus to man's destiny in God's plan, the pastoral approach to culture emanates from the very mission of the Church in our times, in the renewed awareness of its demands as expressed by the Second Vatican Council and the Synods of Bishops. The awareness of the cultural dimension of human existence brings with it a particular attention for this field of pastoral work. Anchored as it is in Christian anthropology and ethics, this pastoral approach gives rise to a Christian cultural project which gives Christ, the Redeemer of man, centre of the universe and of history (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 1) the scope of completely renewing the lives of men "by opening the vast fields of culture to His saving power"⁽¹¹⁾. In this sphere, the means are practically infinite, for the pastoral approach to culture focuses on real situations so as to open them to the universal message of the Gospel.

In service to evangelization, which constitutes the Church's essential mission, her grace, her very vocation and her deepest identity (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14), pastoral work, in seeking "the means that are most suitable and effective for communicating the Gospel message to the men and women of our times" (Ibid., 40) uses complementary means: "Evangelization is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative. These elements may appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive. In fact they are complementary and mutually enriching. Each one must always be seen in relationship with the others" (Ibid., 24).

An inculturated evangelization thanks to concerted pastoral efforts enables the Christian community to receive, celebrate, live and translate its faith into its own culture, in "compatibility with the Gospel and in communion with the universal Church" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 54). At the same time, it affirms the absolute newness of Revelation in Jesus Christ and the need for conversion which is manifestly the result of meeting the Savior: "Now, I am making the whole of creation new" (Rev 21:5).

This shows the importance of the specific tasks of understanding in loyalty to the faith and of pastoral discernment that are incumbent on theologians and pastors. The sympathy with which they are bound to approach the various cultures using "the concepts and language of different peoples" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 44) so as to express Christ's message cannot go without a stringent discernment, in view of the great and serious problems which emerge from an objective analysis of contemporary cultural phenomena, whose weight cannot be ignored by the pastors. What is at stake is the conversion of persons and, through them, of cultures, the Christianization of the ethos of peoples (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20).

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