

Understanding Culture

By

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These pages on Inculturation cannot but begin with an understanding of culture for whatever meaning one gives to inculturation. The fundamental and irreducible meaning of inculturation or at bottom line, as we say it today, is that it is some kind of change or adaptation between a culture, on the one hand, and the Gospel on the other hand. This will require, of course, a deeper explanation.

What we will have to tackle now is the understanding of the term "culture." But before delving on this topic proper of understanding what culture is, we will try to give the needed clarification of some terms rooted in the term culture and at the same time bearing some relationships with each other. Likewise, study their evolution which will lead to a better understanding of inculturation itself, in the context of theology.

In the first place, we shall see what is meant by *enculturation* and *acculturation* in the context of cultural anthropology.

Enculturation is the learning process by which man, throughout his life, acquires his own culture. This term was introduced by the 20th-century American anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits. He believed that the process is complex, beginning in infancy when the individual, usually at an unconscious level, learns such fundamentals as customs of eating, sleeping, and speaking, forming patterns of behaviour that persist throughout adult life. In the adult, the process involves conscious acceptance or rejection of new forms of behaviour, including new inventions or ideas. Thus, enculturation, in infancy, is a mechanism favoring cultural stability, whereas enculturation, in the mature individual, is important for

cultural change. The term is sometimes used synonymously with socialization. An example of this process of enculturation is education's cultural transmission role.

Acculturation consists in the processes of change in artifacts, customs, and beliefs that result from the contact of societies with different cultural traditions. The term is also used to refer to the results of such changes.

Two major types of acculturation may be distinguished based on two classes of conditions under which changes take place. A free "borrowing" and modification of cultural elements may occur when people of different cultures maintain an interchange without the exercise of military or political domination of one group by another. These new elements may be integrated into the existing culture in a process called incorporation. An example of this is the unconquered Navajo Indians, in frequent and varied contact with Spanish colonizers in the 18th century, selected elements of Spanish culture such as clothing and metalworking techniques that were integrated into their own culture in their own way.

The second type of acculturation is a directed change which takes place when one people establishes dominance over another through military conquest or political control. Directed change characterized the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean region and western Europe or the American conquest of the North American Indians.

Directed culture change, like incorporation, involves selection and modification, but the processes involved are more varied and the results more complex because they result from the interference in one culture system by members of another. The processes that operate under conditions of directed change include assimilation, the almost complete replacement of one culture by another; cultural fusion, a new synthesis of cultural elements differing from both precontact cultures; the reaction against aspects of the dominant culture.

Now coming to the term "**inculturation**", it can be said simply as "the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures," following the usage made of it by Pope John Paul II when he wrote about the work of evangelization which Sts. Cyril and Methodius carried out as pioneers in the lands inhabited by Slav peoples. He said that in their work is "contained both a model of what now bears the name "inculturation" – the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures – and at the same time the introduction of those cultures into the life of the Church."¹

The study of the origin and meaning of the term "inculturation" was published by Fr. Ary Roest Crolius, S.J., in 1978. In his findings, he said

¹John Paul II, Enc. "*Slavorum Apostoli*, 2-VII-85.

that it would seem that the first time the word appeared in print was in 1962 in an article by Fr. J. Masson, S.J.²

Between 1962 and 1977 approximately, there was a period of gestation, when the terms "acculturation", "enculturation" and "inculturation" were each trying to find its proper place, so to say. To sort out the difficulties, Fr. Crollius proposed the following:

"Enculturation" should be considered as a technical term in cultural anthropology to indicate the learning experience by which an individual is initiated and grows into his culture.

"Acculturation" could also retain its anthropological meaning as synonymous with "culture-contact."

"Inculturation" should be reserved then to denote the process by which the Church becomes inserted in a given culture.

Roest Crollius explains the aforesaid further: "The transposition from the anthropological 'enculturation' to the missiological 'inculturation' can be considered as an application of the principle of analogy. Just as we say that the individual becomes inserted into his own culture (becomes enculturated) we can speak of the Church becoming inserted into a given culture (becomes inculturated). Analogy does not only express a similitude but also a difference. The main difference between enculturation and inculturation is that, in the first case, the individual does not yet have a culture, and acquires his culture in the process of enculturation, whereas the Church, though it is not bound to any particular culture, does not enter into a given culture unless already linked with elements of another culture. And even, depending on the definition given to 'culture', we can say that several elements which belong to the very nature of the Church are of a cultural character. Therefore, from an anthropological point of view, the process of inculturation has also the characteristics of a process of acculturation."³

He explains further still: "Recapitulating, we can describe the process of inculturation in the following way: the inculturation of the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients, and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the universal Church."⁴

²A. Roest Crollius, *What is so new about Inculturation?*, Rome, 1978.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

Finally, he quotes the Message of the 1977 Synod of Bishops and adds: "This may well be the first time that the word 'inculturation' has been employed in a document meant for the entire Church". He says: "The Christian message must find its roots in human cultures and must also transform these cultures. In this sense we can say that catechesis is an instrument of 'inculturation'."⁶

The first time Pope John Paul II used the word in a Papal document appears to have been in April 1979 in his *Discourse to the Pontifical Biblical Commission*. Since then, he has had recourse to it on frequent occasions. The various organs of the Holy See have done likewise. By inculturation, the faith is introduced into a local culture. Another term which is sometimes used as a synonym of inculturation is **indigenization**.

An important aspect of the work of inculturation is to avoid a rupture between the faith and local culture taking place. Local cultural values should be integrated.⁶

John Paul II stresses that inculturation is not a simple certification and confirmation of local cultures. The faith does not just consolidate culture: it criticizes, purifies, converts.⁷ In Vatican II we read, of the Church, that "the effect of her work is that whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of people, these are not only preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man."⁸

In Zaire, speaking of inculturation, the Pope said that it comes as "the fruit of progressive maturing in the faith. This task requires much theological lucidity, spiritual discernment, wisdom and prudence, and not a little time as well."⁹

Before leaving this term inculturation, let me still add what the Church Documents say regarding the necessity of inculturation.

Is Inculturation Necessary?

"The Church (. . .) is aware that for her a tremendous missionary work still remains to be done. There are two billion people (. . .) who have never (. . .) heard the Gospel message (. . .) If the Church is to be in a

⁶*Message of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God, X-28-1977.*

⁷Meeting of John Paul II with the Intellectuals and University students, in Cameroon, 1985.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹LG, 17 & AG, 9b.

¹⁰Pope John Paul II in a meeting with the Bishops of Zaire, 1980.

position to offer all men the mystery of salvation (. . .) it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived."¹⁰ This passage of Vatican II, helps us understand that inculturation is not a luxury, an optional extra. It is essential to the make up of the Church, both as a historical fact, and from the nature of revelation and God's plan of salvation. The Church has always used, and continues to use, human cultural expressions to convey its Gospel. One need but consider its employment of classical philosophical terminology, terms such as person, hypostasis, *ousia*, nature, substance, etc.

But this usage is not just a simple historical fact. Inculturation is a basic component of the mystery of the Incarnation: God uses human language to communicate himself.¹¹

It is instructive to look at the praxis of the Bible when we think of inculturation. In Biblical communication we find two clear facts: first, God speaks his message; second, man listens. In delivering his message, God adapts to man, uses his language, respects his culture. But first and foremost God reveals his message to man, and man's duty is to listen and follow, and, having done so, to resist the temptation to revert to his old ways. The basic biblical message is that God calls, and man – responding to the divine call – gives up his old ways and takes on a new life (we see this happening both in the Old Testament, with such as Abraham and Moses; and in the New: Jesus asks his disciples to abandon all and follow him). Only after man has undergone this basic change, this conversion, does God make it clear that he is willing to build on human customs, understanding our ways, sanctifying them and approving them . . . but always on this condition: God is first and it is his revelation that liberates us from slavery. We therefore must avoid the temptation of accepting God's liberation and then promptly forgetting where it came therefore and attributing to ourselves and our culture a self-sufficiency they have never had. This temptation shows itself typically in a hankering after our old ways. When the Jews in the desert wanted to go back to Egypt, they were told very clearly they must not do so. (Exod. 16:3) The importance of receptiveness to God as man's first and basic step comes out clearly in the vision Paul received which led to the evangelization of Greece. A Macedonian appears, pleading: "Come over into Macedonia, and help us!" He recognizes they need God's help and does not lay down pre-conditions. (Acts 16:9)

One of the great roles of inculturation is to repair the damage done by the Tower of Babel. (Gen. 11:9) Ever since then, human culture has been an excuse for dividing men from God. Proper inculturation can rebuild the alliance with the Wisdom of God.¹²

¹⁰AG, 10.

¹¹Discourse of Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

¹²*Familiaris Consortio*, 10c.

Inculturation is considered then a good thing and this is worthwhile stressing, since some people see it simply as a necessary evil, something to be put up with. This standpoint is unacceptable. To say that the ideal would be an instantaneous and effortless communication of Christianity to mankind, would be like saying that the Messiah should have appeared suddenly from nowhere. Whereas in fact Christ became man, spending nine months in his Blessed Mother's womb, and then he grew like any other child in and into a family, in and into society. Inculturation, then, is a good thing. For the Church to neglect culture would be "like fleeing from her own responsibilities, an omission, given the 'wound' it would inflict on the Church's own evangelizing function."¹³

The Magisterium tells us that some of the areas which are particularly implicated in the task of inculturation are: a) catechesis, b) theological reflection, c) liturgy, d) sacred art, e) community forms of Christian living, f) ethics, g) marriage questions.¹⁴

After all that has been said about inculturation there remains another term **interculturalism**, coined by Bishop Joseph Blomjous in 1980. The word "inculturation" could create the impression of merely a transfer of faith from one culture to another, the insertion of the Christian message into a given culture. In short, it seems to suggest that the process of mission or evangelization is a one-way process, which impression is unfortunate. For the reality is that although the Christian message transforms a culture, it is also the case that Christianity is transformed by culture, not in a way that falsifies the message, but by the way in which the message is formulated and interpreted anew. When official Church statements declare, as they often do, that Christianity is enriched by the values of the culture that is being evangelized, it means that the Christian life is finding new scope and fuller understanding. It also means that the particular churches of other cultures which make up the Universal Church are invigorated and enriched by the missionary process of intercultural communication.¹⁵

In view of all the aforesaid, it seems that the better term would be that of "interculturalism" in order to express that the process of "inculturation" must be lived in partnership and mutuality.

The word "inculturation" is seen to correctly express both the sociological and theological reality, both at the individual and collective, cultural levels. Inculturation then can be seen as carried out in partnership by individuals who represent different cultures. This is true even though the final authentic symbiosis can only be the work of the indigenous people belonging to the evangelized culture. In a situation of

¹³*Redemptor Hominis*, III, 14.

¹⁴John Paul II's meeting with the Bishops of Zaire, 1980.

¹⁵*EN*, 63. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, pp. 13-14.

acculturation, missionaries begin to accommodate or adapt the Christian message, seeking local cultural expressions in order to make the message understood. They use elements from the local culture simply in order to communicate meaning and to enable their hearers to grasp that meaning according to their own cultural categories. In itself, this facilitates the process of inculturation carried out by the local people. It is naturally an enriching experience for the missionary, as any culturally 'bilingual' person can confirm.¹⁶

Understanding Culture Today

Culture was long confined to cultural works, whether written (literature and philosophy), graphic (painting and the plastic arts), or sound (music and popular song) – in short those works which by virtue of their cognitive value and their symbolic character, gave expression to the sensibility of ethnic groups, nations or peoples. A broader meaning was subsequently conferred on the concept when behaviour patterns in given situation were also taken into account. Eventually, the acknowledged conception of culture came to be enriched by a wide ranging socio-cultural view of things. Henceforward, the roots of cultural processes were to be perceived in a number of spheres. This was the standpoint which UNESCO adopted when it stated: "Narrow elitist definitions of culture, viewed as the system of fine arts and literature, a luxury reserved for the privileged few, must be superseded. Culture, in the full sense of the term, is a fundamental component of the vitality of any society; it is the sum total of a people's creative activities, its method of production and of appropriation of material assets, its form of organization, its beliefs and sufferings, its work and its leisure, its dreams and successes."¹⁷

This all-embracing approach to culture, which is not confined to "an academic and outmoded connotation, encompasses values inherent in thought, artistic expression, traditions and ways of life and combines a number of conditions necessary for the advancement of the individual and the community."¹⁸

In the practice of UNESCO, culture is considered as that which "involves a reflection of the past, though a living past because assimilated by the present generations, and as reflection and action, profoundly linked with the daily life of the peoples. It represents all those values of thought, artistic expression, traditions and ways of life which guide and inspire a community, endowing it with a personality of its own and maintaining its historical continuity while paving the way for its future."¹⁹

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷UNESCO, *Thinking Ahead*, p. 19.

¹⁸M. Bow, *Building the Future*, p. 203.

¹⁹Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. Final Report, Director General's Address, p. 79.

There are many other descriptions of culture such as the following:

In the widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.²⁰

The culture of a people expresses its spirit, its collective unconscious. Just as the trees of the forest help preserve the soil from erosion, so does the cultural roots of a people give a sense of identity and strength to withstand the oppression and exploitation of the powerful. It is in this cultural perspective that Mahatma Gandhi stated:

"I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any, I refuse to live in other people's house as an interloper, a beggar or a slave."²¹

Culture is the living embodiment of the experiences of a people transmitted from generation to generation. It is the uniquely specific way of a people's knowing, feeling and perceiving reality and interacting with it.

Human culture is the behaviour peculiar to mankind, together with material objects that are part of this behaviour. Culture consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, works of art, and so on.

Human culture taken as a whole may be described as the process of man's progressive liberation. Language, art, sciences, religion are various phases in the process. In all of them, man discovers and proves a new power - the power to build up a world of his own, an "ideal" world. Each of them opens a new horizon and shows a new aspect of humanity.

It is important to note that although religion is considered as one of the elements of culture, it is in fact the animating principle of culture. "The religious ideal is the highest value of a culture. Through it, the human values, far from being diluted and disvalued, are on the contrary, transfigured, deepened and ordered."²²

Human culture is undoubtedly divided into various activities proceeding along different lines and pursuing different ends. What is sought for is not a unity of effects, but a unity of action; not a unity of products but a unity of creative process.

²⁰1982 Mexico Declaration.

²¹Mahatma Gandhi cited by Felix Wilfred in "Asia on the Threshold of the 1990s, Emerging Trends on Sociological Processes at the Turn of the Century." *FABC Papers*, no. 55.

²²Martin Grabmann, *La Filosofía de la Cultura de Santo Tomás de Aquino*.

If the term "humanity" means anything at all, it means that in spite of all the differences and oppositions existing among various cultures, these are nevertheless working toward a common end. In the long run, there must be an outstanding feature, a universal character in which they all agree and harmonize.²³

It is noteworthy that *Gaudium et Spes* speaks in this same vein when it says:

"Heightened media of exchange between nations and different branches of society open up the riches of different cultures to each and every individual with the result that a more universal form of culture is gradually taking shape, and through it the unity of mankind is being fostered and expressed in the measure that the particular characteristics of each culture are preserved."²⁴

Culture must be made to bear on the integral perfection of the human person and on the good of the community and the whole society. Therefore, the human spirit must be cultivated in such a way that there results the ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgments and to develop a religious, moral and social sense.²⁵

Culture is a human activity open to the fullness of man. Attaining the truth is an aspect of culture which requires effort that is often painstaking. The Pope speaking to students in Manila admits that capturing the truth is not an easy task. It requires study and perseverance, plus a critical assessment of the environment in which one moves. Time is therefore needed to acquire true culture.

"It is culture that gives man the ability to reflect upon himself. It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings endowed with a critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations."²⁶

Culture and Cultures as Envisaged in the Church Documents

We are familiar with *Gaudium et Spes*' formulation of the meaning of Culture thus:

²³Ernst Cassiner, *An Essay on Man, an Introduction: A Philosophy of Human Culture*.

²⁴GS, 54.

²⁵GS, 59.

²⁶*Peace and Disarmament*. Documents of the world Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, pp. 276-77.

The word "Culture" in the general sense, refers to all those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical endowments. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and labor; he humanizes social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; he expresses through his works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of men throughout the ages; he communicates and preserves them to be an inspiration for the progress of many, even of all mankind.²⁷

In the Puebla Documents, the aforesaid is stated and commented thus:

The term "culture" means the specific way in which human beings belonging to a given people cultivate their relationship with nature, with each other, and with God in order to arrive at "a authentic and full humanity." It is a shared lifestyle that characterizes different peoples around the earth and so we can speak about a "plurality of cultures."²⁸

The Puebla document goes on to say the following in regard to culture:

So conceived, culture embraces the whole life of people. It is the whole web of values that inspire them and of disvalues that debilitate them; insofar as they are shared in common by all the members, they bring them together on the basis of a collective consciousness." (E.N., 18). Culture also embraces the forms in which these values or disvalues find configuration and expression – i.e., customs, language, societal institutions and structures – insofar as they are not impeded or suppressed by the intervention of other dominant cultures.²⁹

In his article on *Evangelization and Culture*, Msgr. Legaspi spoke of culture in the active sense as man's act of cultivating himself by developing all his potentials of body and soul, thus completing, refining and perfecting himself. To illustrate this he compared man to a rough diamond. Culture is the process of cutting, polishing and transforming it from a mere lump of crystallized carbon into sparkling jewel of fabulous price.

He adds that in the passive or objective sense, culture includes an interior and an exterior aspect. In its interior aspect, culture consists in a set of beliefs, values and attitudes resulting from an interplay of these beliefs and values. The exterior and visible aspect of a culture comprises the various customs, mores, patterns of behaviour, laws, institutions, artifacts and all those things which embody or give external expression to the interior set of beliefs, values and attitudes.

²⁷GS, 53

²⁸GS, 53; EN, 20), PUEBLA, 386.

²⁹PUEBLA, 387.

If the beliefs and values held by a people form the core of its culture, the *kernel* of this core is always of a *religious* nature. At Puebla, the bishops accurately observed the following:

The essential core of a culture lies in the way in which a people affirms or rejects a religious tie with God, that is, in its religious values or disvalues. These values have to do with the ultimate meaning of life. Their roots lie in the deeper zone where human beings formulate answers to the basic, ultimate questions that vex them. The answer may be a positively religious orientation on the one hand, or an atheistic orientation, on the other hand. Thus religion or irreligion is a source of inspiration, on the other hand. Thus religion or irreligion is a source of inspiration for all the other areas of a culture – family life, economics, politics, art, etc. They are either freed to seek out some transcendent meaning, or else they are locked up in their own immanent meaning.³⁰

Cultures are continually subjected to new developments and to mutual encounter and interpretation. In the course of their history they go through periods in which they are challenged by new values or disvalues, and by the need to effect new syntheses of their way of life.³¹

Pope John Paul speaks of culture thus:

Culture is a specific way of man's existing and 'being' . . . Culture is that through which man, becomes more man, 'is' more, has more access to 'being'. The fundamental distinction between what man is and what he has, between being and having, has its foundation there too . . . 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, becomes more fully a man in all the dimensions of his existence, in everything that characterizes his humanity.³²

Culture is a dynamism for the growth of man as man, which always remains the real criterion of true progress. That is why the Church turns to Revelation and seeks in Christ the perfect man, the ultimate word about man.³³

Before I close allow me to add here a note about culture as the leaven for personal and social growth and the need for community to bring human powers to their fullness.

Culture, as we have already seen, is what is expressed by a tribe, a people, a society, a nation, a commonwealth through its values, its art and

³⁰PUEBLA, 239.

³¹PUEBLA, 393.

³²*L'Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly Edition, 23 June 1980.

³³*L'Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly Edition, June 8, 1981.

literature, religious heritage and the like. Culture expresses its people in a concrete form. Culture then is the social matrix orchestrated to bring a person to the height of his powers.

People might surely debate about the height of culture as differing religious aims, contributions to the collective tribe, or the assertions of one's individuality versus the "other." However, it seems clear that the perfection of an individual and the culture have each their limits. It seems equally clear that culture is the leaven for personal and social growth.

Culture represents the conscious and unconscious intensification of values and experiences accessible to any individual at a given time and place. Culture is at once the individual's orienting environment and the limit human nature longs to transcend.

It is interesting to note that Aristotle saw contemplation as the highest power in human beings. He recognized the need for community to bring human powers to their fullness. Likewise, the multiplicity of influences needed to mature a man. Thus the limitations of family, although basic to growth, have to be overcome and he saw man's need for society – the city state or the commonwealth – to supply that climate needed to develop his fullest potential.

In that culture, man could exercise, through interaction with others, those virtues supportive of both his own and the other's growth. In the creation of the community whereby a person joins together with other persons in a common dialogue, for a common purpose, there is created that condition of possibility for fruitful maturing

If this building of community is placed within the faith perspective, then there is established the closest possible relationship of solidarity among persons through mutual love. The fullest development of all that is human can thereby be achieved with Christ, the Incarnate Son of God and Perfect man as both model and means: to imitate Him is for all men and women the inexhaustible source of personal and communitarian perfection.

Community Forms of Christian Living

The Church always looks for ways of living Christianity better, not only on a personal basis, but also in community. One of the first effects of Christian preaching was that the Apostles, in obedience to the new Commandment of fraternal love, (John 13:34) created a community where "there was one heart and soul in all." (Acts 4:32) Down the ages many ways of community living have been practised. One can cite the total renewal, under Christian influence, of family life in Rome and the gradual abolition of slavery. Another example is the long tradition of monastic living. But that is not the end of the story. The Church is constantly

renewing herself. One can think of Chesterton and the distributist experiments in England, residences for university students, schools (seen as communities of Christian life), the following up of the idea that the family is the *domestic church*, (Gal. 6:10) the family seen as the seedbed of vocations and so on. This community aspect also affects the liturgy. Speaking of "the many positive results of the liturgical reform;," *Inestimable Donum* cites "a growth in the community sense of liturgical life."³⁴

Evangelization of Culture and Cultures

After having seen what is meant by culture and cultures let me close by a brief discussion on the evangelization of cultures.

Christians must have, in the first place, a *mental perception of culture* as a human reality to be evangelized. They must be capable of listening to modern man or woman "in order to understand them and invent a new kind of dialogue that will permit them to carry the originality of the gospel message into the very heart of present-day mentalities."³⁵

Evangelization will then be understood in its full individual and societal sense. True enough, only persons can make an act of faith, undergo conversion, receive baptism and the other sacraments, contemplate and worship God. But it is equally true that evangelizing activity can go to the heart of cultures *through persons acting as intermediaries*: "We must evangelize not in a superficial or merely decorative sense but in an in-depth way that goes to the roots – human culture and cultures, understanding those terms in the broad, rich sense given to them in the *Gaudium et Spes*, always starting from the person and always returning to the relationship of persons with each other and with God."³⁶

Christians today are beginning to realize that culture has become the proper field of evangelization. Vast cultural fields have never accepted or rejected the light of the Gospel message. Respecting all human liberties, but feeling the urgings of their faith, Christians now sense the urgency of proclaiming the Good News to the world of today. As John Paul II puts it: "We cannot not evangelize. Countless regions and cultural milieus remain unaware of the Good News of Jesus Christ. I am thinking of cultures in vast areas of the world that remain at the margins of the Christian faith. But I also have in mind vast cultural areas in traditional Christian countries that today seem indifferent, if not resistant, to the gospel message."³⁷

³⁴ID, Intro.

³⁵John Paul II to the Pontifical Council for Culture, January 18, 1983.

³⁶*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

³⁷John Paul II to the PCC, 1985.

The gospel message does it work essentially on the level of values that characterize a culture and give it an ethical sense. Thus Christians would do well to find out seriously which cultural values are capable of being enriched, purified and perfected by the power of the gospel message. Every culture has tendencies and aspirations of its own that must be discovered and explored in terms of their ethical and spiritual dimensions. More concretely, this means that Christians are called upon to see how the gospel message can transform those dimensions of a culture that have to do with *collective thinking and doing*, the typical behaviour patterns of a milieu; the criteria of judgment; the dominant values and major interests; the habits and customs that leave their mark on worklife, leisure, and the practice of family, social, economic and political life. All these elements belong to what is known as the *ethos* of a culture can be appreciated, evaluated and given direction in the light of the gospel message. This is the evangelization of culture and cultures.³⁸

Let me now close with the often repeated words of Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which makes a call to progress from simply a geographical to a cultural view of evangelization:

"For the Church, it is a question of not only preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater number of peoples, but also of affecting, and as it were upsetting through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interests, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation."³⁹ □

³⁸Herve Carrier, *Gospel Message and Human Cultures*.

³⁹EN, 19.