Introduction

Even a few years ago, reflections on culture would have been considered an idle curiosity concerned with some dances and songs, ornaments and decorations, art exhibitions and music recitals. Today, on the contrary, culture is recognized as the most decisive force in every area of human life, whether it be politics or economics, technology or social development, education or religious self-expression. Blindness to culture in the past has led to serious troubles: buses have been burnt, houses destroyed, and lives snuffed out over culture-related problems like violation of caste norms, choice of script, inter-community marriages, or disrespect for religious symbols. The reason is evident: culture is closely linked with a community’s deeper level identities, their long-term aspirations and anxieties, their mental and spiritual orientation, their historic memories and ground for their ethnic pride. Culture has something to do with a community’s collective psyche, ambitions, motivations; even prejudices and fears.
When development projects do not take off, when resistance builds up even against evidently helpful proposals, when there is too little enthusiasm in a community or a neighbourhood for certain economically promising ideas, we usually attribute its cause to the inefficiency of the person(s) immediately responsible or to the contentious nature of the communities concerned. That may be true. But it may also be due to the cultural blindness of the project-operators, which means that their cultural perceptions were weak. They did not take note of the cultural codes in the community concerned and of cultural prejudices existing. In other words, there was an absence of cultural sensitivity.

Unfortunately, many social activists today are blind to the dimension of culture. As, in an earlier era, most colonial powers were more concerned about the economic advantages they could derive from their colonies than with the cultural distinctiveness and greatness of different ethnic groups among their subjects, so too, today’s ideologues of ‘justice’ or of ‘modernity’ give too little attention to the cultures of the communities that they mean to assist. Similarly, ardent promoters of science and technology often ignore culture. Representatives of the global economy go further; they seek to homogenize people damaging many feebler cultures in the process in order to suit their markets. The electronic media is even more successful in homogenizing worldviews and cultural tastes, while presenting fragments of cultures in an unrelated manner to win attention. Consciously or unconsciously, such culturally insensitive media push the cause of mental regimentation in a very subtle manner. Both the philosophies of liberation (justice-fighters, feminists, environmentalists) and of free enterprise (promoters of consumerism, competition) often overlook culture. Leaders of several other radical movements of our times are totally unperceptive of cultural compulsions.
Therefore, it is not a surprise that a great number of Evangelizers, in their over-zeal or ignorance are not aware of the need to convey the saving Message of Christ to a community in their own cultural idiom to make the Gospel intelligible and acceptable, thus adding to its cultural assets and enhancing its self-respect and legitimate collective pride. In fact, if the gift of the Gospel is offered to a community in the right manner it would so stimulate its inner genius and the God-given gifts that they have would truly flower. The touch of Christ is life-stirring.

1. Coming on the Wavelength of People

People find it difficult to listen to others speaking of God, and are not open to places and experiences that invite them to this reflection (Lineamenta 19).

The very first thing for us evangelizers to do, then, is to make an effort to come on the wavelength of people. When we fail in this, our work of Evangelization does not even take off. We may own the best instruments of communication (gadgets, tools, styles), we may have consummate skill in preaching; but if we do not come on the wavelength of people, we are wasting our energies.

As long as we limit ourselves to ‘our side concerns’: our own arguments and their contents, quality, clarity, precision, orthodoxy; our internal logic, vocabulary, sources of inspiration; the mandate we have received, its binding power; our zeal, determination, plans, strategies… our task does not even get started. All these are important, no doubt. But they can become purposeful only if we succeed to capture the attention of the specific person/group/community to whom we are addressing the Gospel and are able to retain that attention for a while. But when we fail in this respect, the
conversation does not even begin. Like TV performances, ours too remains a one-way dialogue.

The right approach would be to make our starting point the cultural world and interests of our interlocutors, the ‘other side concerns’: their understanding of realities, their concepts and categories, their vocabulary, their anxieties, interests, needs, priorities: which means, we become ‘other-focused, other-centred’. This is not to compromise the contents of the faith or underestimate the Christian heritage, but merely to be pedagogical. Our approach should be personal, attentive to the other person’s vision of realities, his/her perceptions, his point of view, to his/her arguments, and we should keep learning all the time. The Evangelizer develops his skills for keeping up a worthwhile conversation with the searcher. He/she proposes, never imposes. He/she inspires, never compels. But inspirations can offer compelling motives by their very nature.

When an Evangelizer has been dealing with persons of a particular culture for a period of time, if he remains a ‘constant learner’, he/she becomes capable of judging to whom to tell what, when and how… how much and how fast… at what pace and in what tone. He/she remains ever creative, and unfailingly sensitive to diverse worldviews and cultural visions, and becomes capable of launching new initiatives. This calls for study, research, reflection, discussion, and self-criticism… not merely of an academic nature detached from situations, but of a pastoral, practical, realistic nature, close to people, self-evaluating all the time.

We try to lead people to a personal encounter with Christ through the reading of Sacred Scriptures and participation in the Eucharist, proclaiming the word in liturgical assemblies, listening to people and dialoguing with cultures. We need to spend time with young people introducing them to familiarity with Scriptures, walking with them, and teaching them to share.
We must take into account also the mobility of people, migration; and making of migrants evangelizers. Light of Christ needs to illumine family, schools, culture, work, leisure, every aspect of social life; preaching the word of consolation and of conversion (Lineamenta 13).

2. Being Pedagogical in Communicating the Faith

New approaches to evangelization are needed, new models of being Church must be developed, avoiding sectarianism and civic religion, maintaining one’s identity in this post-ideological age (Lineamenta 9).

The boundaries between pastoral care and evangelization is being obscured. Strategies ad intra and ad extra must combine. Being Church means being missionary, loving one’s faith means bearing witness to it. Faith is made stronger by transmitting it. Pastoral care should go beyond routine, reaching out beyond boundaries to broader horizons. It differs from ideas of self-sufficiency and a status quo mentality, and refers to renewal through developing a missionary character (Linamenta 10).

Our approach may be summarized in this manner. In communicating the Faith with a person of another culture, we take concepts and categories from the other person’s cultural world, begin with the premises he/she would concede, quote the authorities from his/her tradition, adopt codes of conduct and ethical principles that he/she understands and respects. And step by step we lead the enquirer from his/her own specific tradition to a neutral cultural ground, which means, to concepts, values and authorities which have general acceptance in the wider world. It is only at the final stage that we bring him/her into our own cultural world. Even so, there should be no haste in closing ourselves too fast in that limited world which seems to be shrinking
all the time. Once bridges are removed and doors closed, no further admission will be possible.

There is a plurality of methods in catechesis that can be used in a complementary way, teaching how to interiorize, ensuring systematic, integral, organic, hierarchical transmission of faith through catechesis. There is in fact a “pedagogy of faith”. Catechesis includes formation for Christian life, the work of initiation, incorporation into the community, education and instruction. Inculturation is a very important part of this pedagogy (Lineamenta 14).

The stages in this pilgrimage that I have just described are not so much chronological as pedagogical. When we are offering the gift of the Gospel to various categories of people, the pace of progress and styles of approach will differ according to each person’s mental preparedness, psychological openness or resistance. We should never forget that there is a Pedagogy of Communication in presenting the Faith, which ought to be based on the religious psychology of each community/person. We need to be creative, leading each person from what is familiar to what is less familiar, linking new ideas with what is old in each person’s tradition.

Radical changes, introduced in haste, can cause a sense of insecurity and fear, and even good suggestions may be resisted or rejected. Generally we will find it easier to win acceptance for new ideas, 1. if they are presented in a vocabulary drawn from the ordinary parlance of the day and with images from the prevalent culture, 2. if we establish a relationship between the old and the new, 3. If we build bridges linking proposed ideas with people’s needs.

3. Adopting Diverse Approaches to Different Cultural Experiences

*There is a scarcity of priests. There is weariness and fatigue in many families undermining the role of parents. There is a weakening of*
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communities and their sharing in the mission. There is a heavy burden on catechists, and they suffer from loneliness. This fatigue and consequent difficulties endanger the transmission of the faith. And yet, how are people to believe without a preacher? (Rom 10,4).

Ecclesial movements have contributed a great deal during this difficult period. They must strengthen the existing forms of catechesis and transmission and take the benefits to wider areas (Lineamenta 15).

If presenting the Gospel to people of different schools of thought within the same civilization is hard enough, to offer it to persons of different cultures and civilizations will be even more difficult. Distances are far greater. The Greeks looked for wisdom and the Jews for miracles (1Cor 1,22). The West may feel drawn to what is logical and analytical, the East to what is mystical and integrative, South (Africa, Latin America) may be exuberant and enthusiastic, and North may like to base their decision on existential realities. Brahmins may find the contemplative and mystical dimension of Christian life meaningful, the pragmatic castes the social relevance and efficiency of services offered by the Church, the downtrodden communities her commitment to justice and uplifting initiatives. Diverse cultures...diverse worldviews...diverse strategies.

The reason is that, historically speaking, different societies have walked different paths of philosophical search which has defined their categories of thought. They have come under diverse cultural influences which have charged each thought, word, phrase, art form, musical piece, with a specific emotional and meaning content. The Evangelizer must learn to notice the differences.

He must take note further of the prevailing atmosphere at a particular moment of history created by a experience the society concerned has just gone through, radically transforming culture. For example, the Renaissance,
exploration and conquest, Enlightenment thought, and optimism arising from scientific and economic expansion, buoyed up the emotional state of Western society in a particular period of history. Many things said and done in that era must be understood against that background.

In the same way, the tragedies of the World Wars and the experiences of the Cold War, erosion of cultures, change of World-Power patterns, triumph of competition, surrender to individualism and prolonged recession have been influencing the collective mind and mood of the same society. The meaning of words, response to problems, reaction to authority, cooperation or resistance to leadership are shaped by a community’s concepts and collective experiences in that particular era. Our understanding of reality and the apostolic initiatives that we adopt in response, need to take this fact into account. We ought to respond to the changing needs of a culture.

It is good for us to ask ourselves, for example, whether the causes for certain negative attitudes noticeable in today’s believing community can be traced back to its negative experiences in the past. Possibly, a non-flattering image of the Church has been handed down in recent history and preserved in the Christian community’s collective memory. For example, if the faithful have felt that persons whose role was to animate and guide have been taking advantage of their position, or, are more concerned about imposing discipline than encouraging the weak, or that they lack the moral fibre... the negative response over a period of time can come to have a cumulative effect. And if, a confrontational situation remains on, the resulting tension can go beyond proportions. May be we are experiencing something of it in these days.

Criticisms have often centred round the exercise of authority, self-righteous tone in which the prophetic role is exercised, too little evidence of authenticity and commitment, a simplistic presentation of the faith (e.g. the image of an intolerant God, or a literal understanding of scriptural texts); a
cold, heavy, clerical, pedantic, disciplinary approach to Church obligations. In this context, an image of humility and sincere eagerness to change can transform the whole atmosphere. A new culture can emerge.

Modern man listens to witnesses, persons whose lives reflect the Gospel: detachment, selfless dedication, freedom, sanctity; examples of missionary zeal like that of Paul, Patrick, Boniface, Xavier, Cyril and Methodius, Damien, Mother Teresa; edifying lives of bishops, priests, catechists, educators, and teachers. The work of evangelization is central to the work of the Church; it begins in the family, with visible examples of prayer, teaching, witnessing. The Message must be made intelligible (Lineamenta 22).

4. Attending to the Collective Mood of Communities

So great a task is not to be left to specialists only. Everyone must join the new apostolic outreach, making the task of announcing the Kingdom his own, witnessing to the joy that sets people free. Let us look forward to the renewing of the Pentecostal experience of the first Christians. It is not a new Gospel that we preach; but we seek to promote a culture more deeply grounded in the Gospel. All must develop a sense of mission. (Lineamenta 23).

Meanwhile discourse on God in some cultures has become foreign. We need to speak in such way as to respond to the anxieties and expectations of people. Help them to find their newness in Christ, guiding them in their search for meaning and thirst for truth. We need to identify the contexts (courtyard of the gentiles), where our word will be heard and understood as suggesting a relevant remedy for the ills of humanity (Lineamenta 19).

As nations in dominant positions today have their own collective memories, the Third World countries too have a great stock of memories, some of them negative: of subjugation and enslavement; national awakening due to western
education, liberation struggle; difficulties in handling the fresh-won freedom; nationalistic arrogance in their society and ideological aggressiveness....these and similar experiences leave marks on the collective emotional world of each society distorting its culture, each in its own way.

Further, there are other differences: if there have been experiences of a civil war, ethnic conflict, political chaos, instances of corruption, fluctuations of economy...each community differing according its experience. The trend of secularization too is fast affecting most societies, inflicting fatal wounds upon ancient and respected cultures and their values. Intermixing of cultures makes situations even more complex. In such contexts, it has become absolutely necessary for the Evangelizer to take note of such differences in the collective mood of different communities, relating with each in a meaningful and helpful manner... so that he becomes ‘all things to all men’.

This makes us understand that Inculturation is not as much about decorations and rituals as about dealing with each community according to its mental makeup, collective character, and its inner genius. Certainly, it is not mere archaism. Most of all, it has something to do with being absolutely respectful to the selfhood of a community. We should also avoid the mistake of hurting or humiliating it because of a particular weakness today, or its current mood, or prevailing intellectual atmosphere, which we find unacceptable. Our ‘prophetic mission’ should not be one of self-righteous denunciation in such contexts, but invitation to responsible reflection, to deeper thought.

We should normally respect a community’s pride in its proclaimed ideals even when it seems to fail for a while. Our mission is to help the community recapture those ideals that may have grown stale and distorted. A non-threatening and affirming attitude wins an easier hearing. But the thoughts that we propose should have depth. We know that as every community is eager to protect its cultural identity, roots, traditions, art forms, and symbolisms,
it is anxious to defend its present set of attitudes. Even if we are not able to agree with them, we can show a measure of respectful understanding.

Is adapting to differences compromising on orthodoxy? That is not what I am suggesting. The recognition of the reality of a pluralistic society in which we are compelled to live today is not conceding to relativism as though there is no objective truth and as though everything is the same. In showing respect for other ways of thinking and acting we are doing nothing else than trying to walk in the footsteps of Paul who said, “When working with the gentiles, I live like the gentiles. This does not mean I don’t obey God’s law… Among the weak in faith I become like one of them, in order to win them. So I become all things to all men, that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible”(1Cor 9,21-22). It is precisely when we listen to others with interest that they in turn will also lend us their ears.

Remember that though Paul was resisted at Athens in his time, a Hellenized Christianity was not. Inculturation had advanced in the meantime.

5. Encouraging Diverse Paths

It is the challenge of the evangelizer to reread the present moment and to reinterpret the Message, opening a door towards hope. There is a need to take a critical view of life, of our thinking, values, leading to a self-evaluation of Christianity. It is imperative that we shed all defensiveness and fear. We have to learn to dialogue even with those who are inclined towards atheism and extreme secularism, joining hands with them in issues of justice, peace and protection of the environment. In similar activities we join hands with other Christians (Lineamenata 7).

Moreover, we are fully aware that even within the Christian tradition there are diverse spiritual paths to God. There is no single roadmap. It never helps
to look down upon the other person’s ways of reaching out to God. Let me suggest you a few examples.

1. Some are inclined to a purely intellectual understanding of religion explaining things in philosophical and unemotional terms with a great sense of clarity and objectivity. They look down upon pious practices, devotional objects, religious observances, and emotional expressions of their faith.

2. However, today there is a renewed understanding and appreciation of popular piety and devotions. Anthropologists tell us that human beings can make their life together meaningful only through the use of rituals and symbolisms, that they are held together by myth and mystery; and that they need the help of concrete objects they can see and touch in order to grapple with the invisible.

3. A third group feels strongly drawn to social commitment. For them, religious faith makes no meaning if it does not commit itself to justice issues, human rights, social development, generous service, prophetic denunciation, struggles for freedom and equality. They consider popular devotions superstitious and a philosophic intellectual approach to religion elitist and supercilious.

4. Another group still is inclined to the mystical. They are drawn to contemplative life, keep themselves distant from day-to-day affairs, and are not impressed by the achievements of the other groups. They value apartness and depth.

Besides these four that I have mentioned, there are other ways of expressing our faith too. People of different cultures and civilizations may feel inclined in one direction or the other. No one is complete without the other. If each group makes an effort to avoid exaggerations and remains
self-critical, and recognize the contribution of others, the Church would be a happy place indeed. Life, after all, is continuous accommodation to each other.

6. Overcoming Irrelevances, Helping People Caught into a Culture of Questioning & Doubt

As believers we should be ready to admit that doubts can be reasonable, that they are normal. Then only can we invite non-believers (searchers) to admit that the experience of faith can be beautiful. Corriere della Sera of 28.10.11 said that Pope Benedict xvi at Assissi “sang the praise of thinking agnostics, of those who ‘seek the truth’”. It can happen that believers reduce or even distort the image of God. By challenging such images persons who question do a service to believers.

Not giving up in the face of these challenges, it is our duty to speak to today’s cultures. There is uncertainty in the minds of persons who call themselves agnostics and atheists. New spiritual efforts in the life of faith promise new possibilities. For, Isaiah said long ago, “My Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations” (Is 56,7) (Lineamenta 5).

Another mistake again is irrelevance. We are not often aware that in our religious teaching we keep answering questions that were asked generations ago and which no one is asking today. The cultural world has totally changed. We are unperceptive, for instance, of the self-questionings that the younger generation is going through and the inner journeys they are making in their effort to explore new horizons. They feel lost. Qoheleth wondered, “How can anyone know what is best for man in this short, useless life of his a life that passes like a shadow?” (Ecclesiastes 6,12). Such questions are often
occasioned by some painful experiences in our personal life or cultural changes in society that dash people’s certainties to the ground.

Job was a good man. But when his certitudes were shaken, he too questioned. “Where shall wisdom be found?… Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living… It is hidden from the eyes of the living” (Job 28,12-13.21a). Should we then wonder that the younger generation today should be asking some questions? Can we as Evangelizers become participators in their inner agonies, rather than remain severe critics of their questioning attitude? Can we risk an Emmaus walk with them? Will theoretically correct and theologically well-formulated answers alone suffice for people in pain, in inner agony? Can we help them to build a bridge from diffidence to self-confidence, despair to hope, and hesitation to faith? That is the challenge before the Evangelizer.

Most young people today are pragmatic. Apostle Thomas said “Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (Jn 20,25). He was not unlike modern man who seeks empirical evidence for everything. Not finding the evidence they seek, hundreds of thousands are moving away from the Christian Faith year after year. Are they very different from the Emmaus duo who walked away from Jerusalem, deeply disappointed with everything, hopes crushed. They kept saying, “We had hoped that he would be the one…” (Lk 24,21).

During his appearance to his disciple after resurrection he was compelled to ask, “Why are these doubts coming up in your minds?” (Lk 24,38). He admonished Thomas “Stop doubting, and believe” (Jn 20,27). Even before his ascension there was some hesitation among his intimates. Matthew says, “When they saw him, they worshipped him, even though some of them doubted” (Mt 28,17). If Thomas and some of the early disciples hesitated, questioned and doubted, doubt is nothing new in Christian history. Their deep
self-questioning led them to more profound religious convictions. Those were
the moments that believers experienced the strengthening of the Holy Spirit.

7. Handing on of the Faith Should mean more than Passing on of mere
Information-packages

Transmission of faith is a complex process, being with Jesus and living
with him. It begins with sharing something positive and beautiful. It is a gift
given to every Christian. Lay people have a special role, bringing the Gospel
to life in the family, workplace and society, adopting an integral approach:
charity, witness, proclamation, celebration, listening and sharing. New
Evangelization seeks to transform the entire temporal order, renewing cultures,
calling persons to conversion, offering ongoing instruction (Lineamenta 12).

Today’s culture does not allow the younger generation to accept the
content of the Faith that we pass on to them as readymade
‘information-packages’. But if Faith were shared as a ‘lived experience’ it
would have a better chance of touching them personally and convincing. They
would see better its existential value and relevance to their personal lives. Is
it possible for us as spiritual masters to walk with these confused young
questioners, and listen to them? Listening with empathy already reduces half
the anxiety and accomplishes half the persuasion. The mission of
Evangelization implies, therefore, attentive and sympathetic listening,
well-reflected understanding and intelligent interpretation. It is “a process of
discernment” (Lineamenta no. 3).

Another mistake we keep making is to give ultimate answers to those who
are asking functional questions or of giving functional answers to those in
search of ultimate questions. In today’s society long-term interests and
ultimate concerns get marginalized by the immediate, the functional and the
utilitarian. Our skill consists in establishing a relationship between the two; for, we know that our ultimate sources of energy and sustaining power are intimately linked with Ultimate Meaning. It is here that we fail. Lineamenta 9 refers to many persons who, though baptized, have walked away from their Faith and live unchristian lives, with poor knowledge of their religious belief. They have grown up with Faith presented in caricature, which induces indifference or stirs up hostility. However, a true Evangelizer never gets discouraged; the difficulty only stimulates his creativity.

In every situation, we ought to make sure to keep our core message close to the central concerns of humanity like justice and peace, mercy, honesty and uprightness, sincerity and authenticity, solidarity and generosity, respect for life and concern for the poor, love and forgiveness, concern for nature, and a profound sense of responsibility for human affairs. If at any time we notice that our expressions of Christian Faith have strayed far from these central concerns, we are on uncertain grounds. The entire prophetic tradition and the core preaching of Jesus himself were against empty religion and the absence of authenticity and of a human touch. Even with the best of theologies, ideologies, structures, laws, traditions, devotions and services, if we divert too far from these central human concerns, we are moving on unsure terrain, and we must rethink and return.

8. Cultural Insertion of Evangelizers, Developing an Understanding of the Psycho-Social Situation

The agent of transmission is the universal church; in each place, the local church. The faithful gather together by the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the Lord’s supper. It is the duty of all the Christians to be engaged in the task of proclamation and transmission of the faith: bishops,
priests, parents, consecrated persons, catechists, and communities—each playing his/her own role (Lineamenta 15).

Christians are also part of the rapid cultural changes that are taking place. On the one hand hopes are raised of new utopias, on the other hearts are filled with fear and scepticism. There is tension, loss of equilibrium, and absence of points of reference. Immersed in the present, there is a lack of appreciation of the past and of values that can be shared. There is constant criticism of the Church, of customary and established ways. It makes us aware of new approaches that are needed (Lineamenta 3).

One important caution for Evangelizers who are serving outside their own cultural world is that they should not remain like ‘foreigners’ and ‘outsiders’ where they work. They should not pretend to be like a ‘universal abstract idea’ or an ‘un-inserted global volunteer’. This would be a great mistake. Either one belongs or does not belong where he/she works; one inserts oneself into the surrounding society and that cultural world or remains permanently rootless. If you become culturally inserted where you serve and keep learning about that culture, taking keen interest in studies, discussions, researches, reflections, maps, monographs, publications; and interacting with local leaders, sharing experiences with persons who have long been in the area, it would make a world of a difference in the effectiveness of your service.

One mistake should be avoided. People generally study about cultures from the writings of scholars and in interaction with intellectuals. This alone is incomplete. Extremely useful as these exercises are, it has its own limitation: it does not give sufficient attention to current problems and to their local variations. Cultures are in constant evolution. New sub-cultures are continuously emerging in Asian societies. They give rise to new problems and to new local identities. Unfortunately not many Evangelizers are perceptive of the
need for observing and reflecting on the prevailing psycho-social realities and
trends in a community. Written studies may be far too few, they may have
become outdated or may have remained too generic and distant to be of use
and relevance in the present situation. Or they may have been too one-sided
to be considered complete.

That is why it is important not to go only by written texts or scholarly
expositions. One needs to take pains to analyze living cultures in life-contexts.
This has become necessary with increasing number of immigrants everywhere
and multiple intermixing of cultures. Interpreting cultures in contexts is the
only way of opening out to the psycho-social atmosphere prevailing in a
community at a given time. However, take care to give special attention to
indigenous communities in every place.

Far too many Church workers and Evangelizers fail to understand at depth
the prejudices, perceptions, values and attitudes of the communities they serve.
In fact, some are slaves to ethnocentrism looking at everyone else through
their own cultural glasses, others keep trying to impose the value systems of
the dominant community on others or promoting those of the community they
were familiar with. Some others are busy with social analysis exercises that
are purely economy-based, ignoring culture (e.g. ignoring influences based on
caste, creed, community, tribe, linguistic group, regional identity), or trying to
use similar tools that do not provide adequate explanation for interpreting the
total social reality. Some others still are dedicated to radical social activism,
which, if culture is ignored, can turn out to be an alienating service.

9. Making a Culture to Flower by the Touch of the Gospel

The Church is not going out to proselytize or open a debate with
non-believers rather than dialogue with them. Yet we cannot forget that the
Temple is destined to be a house of prayer for all the nations(Is 56,7; Mk
Jesus wanted the ‘Courtyard of the Gentiles’ to be considered a place for prayer, where people’s deepest expectations and thirst for God could be discussed. Those who serve the ‘unknown god’ are welcome (Acts 17,23). We should not become pessimistic in an age of agnostics and atheists. An earlier search for answers in a period of helplessness led to monasticism, and the birth of a new western culture. Similarly, we need to keep this search going (Lineamenta 5).

Differences between diverse cultures would be too many to be listed here. In this context, claims of superiority are irrelevant. All that I suggest is that we should be able to understand why a person from another culture or community is looking at a problem differently from us. It is the only way we can act as ‘cultural bridge-builders’ and ‘culture translators’ in a multicultural world, thus helping people to communicate across cultures and bringing people of various traditions into happy relationships. In this way we can do immense service in times of communal, ethnic, culture-related tensions and contribute our share towards social harmony... showing that Christ belongs to all.

In every culture there are elements that may be considered external and peripheral and therefore less important. However, it is for the community to decide what is peripheral and what is central for them. Experience shows that even a less important element may be held up by a people as the symbol of their identity or of their claims for rights at a given time, e.g. an item of the dress like the burqa, or the script. Rejection of the symbol at such a moment may be interpreted as rejection of the community during the period of dispute. This is what makes minorities sometimes to cling to empty shells in an effort to affirm their identity. The Evangelizer, however, needs to be understanding and helpful.
Even amidst changes and tensions what is central can never be compromised. Core values of a culture are of special importance to the destiny of a community; they ought to be carefully and intelligently identified and preserved. In the Indian society, for example, there are many greatly esteemed values like profound religious sense, strong family bonds, community loyalty and solidarity, respect for life, love for truth and uprightness. If we allow these values to be weakened or lost, it would jeopardize the future of our society and of our civilization. But if these values are given scope for fuller expression through the touch of the Gospel, our society’s genius begins to reveal its full potentiality. That is how a culture is made to flower, a process that is real but not easy to describe.

When the energies of a civilization/culture diminish, a stimulus for a fresh start is sorely needed. It may come from within the cultural assets of the native tradition, but often from elsewhere. That is where the Evangelizer finds an opportunity to offer a stimulus with the Message of the Gospel.

10. Wrong kinds of Accommodation to a Culture

The new evangelization is a frame-of mind which invites us to read and interpret new situations in human history. We need to be present in new sectors like cultures, economics, and civic life. Culture today is secularized, free from the past, closed to the transcendent. The atmosphere is not anti-Christian or anti-clerical, but God is completely or partially left out. Secularism has entered even Christian and ecclesial communities; it is an internal threat leading to relativism. Superficiality, self-centredness, hedonistic and consumeristic mentality, death of God attitude leading to cult of the individual...such things characterise the day. Yet a sense of the spiritual is not totally absent. Effort is needed to express more fully the joy of Christian
experience. There are also signs of a religious awakening, while confronting the ugly realities of fundamentalism, violence, terrorism (Lineamenta 6).

There are people who allow themselves to be caught into the wrong kind of cultural wave and who therefore uncritically play to its tune: e.g., responding to violence with violence, force with force, threat with threat, selfishness with selfishness. Response to injustice is not the elimination of the unjust. That would be borrowing the very style of those who prosper on injustice. One form of ‘Collective Egoism’ is not to be confronted with another form of swollen ego: continental, national, regional, racial, ritual, ethnic, cultural, class-based, gender-based.

Similarly, in a culture of irresponsible criticism within the Church, a responsible member must conduct himself as a mature person. And again, it is futile to replace one form of materialism with another, one psychological or sociological exaggeration with another. One form or religious fundamentalism cannot be fought by another: by market fundamentalism, cultural fundamentalism, or any other theory proposing a rigid position, whether it be cultural, rationalist, Marxist, Nazi, ultranationalist, ethnic, fascist, or justice-related.

11. Blurring of Vision: During Intermixture of Cultures Various Types of Relativism are Possible

While there are signs of religious awakening, there is also the phenomenon of fundamentalism, violence, terrorism, sects, mixing of cultures, erosion of fundamental references to life, undermining of values, abandoning of traditions and religion, loss of the sense of history and of identity. Globalization has given an opportunity for economic growth, solidarity, sharing benefits of development, north-south, east west dialogue, raising questions about God,
touching collective consciences. We can reach any part of the world through media. Digital culture has become a forum of public life and social interaction, exchange, solidarity, world culture, in order to build up a patrimony of values. But the present culture moves on to become one of passing novelties, of the present moment and of outward appearances; there is no memory of the past, no sense of the future (Lineamenta 20).

A blurring of vision often takes place during periods of rapid cultural transformation when a new worldview emerges to challenge the accepted beliefs and practices of a society. When, for example, a rapid intermixing of cultures took place during the emergence of River Valley Civilizations (like those of Tigris-Euphrates, Nile, Ganges, Yellow River), all the communities concerned were forced re-evaluate their respective beliefs, values and customs, comparing them with those of others. This has happened again and again at various turning points in history. An experience like that can lead a society to a sense of rootlessness, a loss of direction. Commonly accepted norms of earlier times do not seem to hold good any more. Everything appears relative for a while.

Educational institutions play a crucial role. Truths of faith and reason never contradict each other. Church purifies reason and assists humanity to recognize the ultimate truth as the foundation of ethics. Pope speaks of ‘educational emergency’. Transmitting values for right conduct is becoming arduous. It is a challenge for both parents and educators (Lineamenta 20).

This is possibly what is happening in our society today. The recent expansion of the economy at an unprecedented rate and development of new forms of communication have only intensified interaction among diverse peoples and cultures. Such an experience can lead to unhealthy syncretism and an obscuring of identities, weakening of cultures, leading to uncertainty in
values, the questioning of beliefs and traditions, enfeebling of convictions, and disorientation of the masses. New untried ideas sound attractive and convincing when heard for the first time. This offers new platforms for the Evangelizer as well, if he is creative, and new areas of sharing. Thus, the Gospel also finds a door open for drawing people to deeper reflection.

The loss of adherents that the Christian community is going through today is deeply distressing. The worst may be yet to come. It is a collective experience of the Dark Night of the Soul. This is a time for drawing the faithful ‘remnant’ to deepen their spiritual identity. They will have to bring healing to the damaged collective psyche of people caught amidst consumerism, competition, corruption, hatred, utopias, uncertainties, and consequent fears. A harassed generation is experiencing an inner hunger for something more profound and gripping. They must be made to hear Jesus’ words, “I will see you again, and your hearts will be filled with gladness” (Jn 16,22).

Christians must feel a sense of responsibility to become heralds of the Gospel with greater intensity, providing reasons for their hope, developing new forms of apologia, with gentleness and reverence (1Pet 3,15), and with gentle strength... They should take part in conversation in real life situations and workplace to bring the gift of hope to those unaware of the dignity or goal of human life (Lineamenta 16).

12. Unhealed Sense of Guilt can Create a Culture of Collective Self-Hatred
A Culture of Anger Needs Healing

Once uncertainty arises about the basics of stability and certitude, rules of living, meaning and goal, it is easy to opt for immediately satisfying desires, consumerism, short-lived satisfactions, leading to self-degradation and self-hatred. We need to create spaces for speaking about God especially in
educational services, building on the pedagogical resources of the Church, leading people to relationship with Christ (Lineamenta 20).

The Church is the community of believers, built on hope and love. Being fully immersed in the world and tempted by idols, it needs to be evangelized. Families must become communities of love, hope and sharing. We need to cultivate an ecumenical spirit, and readiness to dialogue with other religions, and engage together in works for social justice and solidarity, the poor. Joy must be evident in priesthood and consecrated life. There are times when one should speak out against infidelity and scandal. There should be readiness to do penance, seeking purification. Only in that way there can be true renewal in Christian communities (Lineamenta 17).

Modern psychology helps us to open our eyes to another reality. If the sense of sin, guilt, and personal or collective responsibility for the evils which we have caused is suppressed, it just sinks to the subconscious. It does not become non-existent; it manifests itself in other forms. Sin therefore cannot be wished away; it cannot be reduced to a mere human slip, a psychological weakness, social imbalance, a structural unevenness, no matter how much you try to rationalize issues. If the inherent nature of the evil in sin is not recognized and dealt with accordingly, there are bound to be psychological and sociological consequences: in the individual tension, stress, anxiety, sense of fear, of worthlessness, and even self-hatred; in society social tension, violence, corruption, hedonism, lack of respect for God’s creation.

In such a context, an Evangelizer ought to bring a sense of forgiveness and healing to people. Jesus’ warm reach-out to Levi touches him deeply and helps him to shake off his self-hatred and guilt feelings. He calls for a feast (Lk 5,27-32). So does Zacchaeus (Lk 19,1-9). In touch with Jesus, tax-collectors, sinners, zealots, lepers and prostitutes, feel affirmed and
restored. Jesus’ over-abundant goodness draws people to self-acceptance, conversion; stirs generosity and forges healing of relationships. A culture of aggressiveness and anger towards others gives way to one of mutual acceptance and a sense of belonging.

Having worked in the area of reconciliation between communities in conflict for about two decades, I know the meaning of ‘collective anger’. It is terrible. If the anger of an individual is alarming enough, the anger of a community that feels hurt, humiliated, or challenged, can take monstrous proportions. I used to ask my colleagues in peace-initiatives to pray that we might become the ‘Lambs of God’ who take away the ‘Anger of the World’.

The Good News should be preached not by evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient, anxious, combative but those whose lives glow with fervour, those whose joy in Christ makes them risk their lives for the Kingdom. Such persons generate joy and hope among people they evangelize. Spiritual guides approach their mission with enthusiasm even amidst tears, and consecrated lives radiate serenity peace and joy (Lineamenta 25).

Today this work of anger-reduction is sorely needed almost everywhere: anger of class against class, caste against caste, tribe against tribe, religious group against religious group; economic interest against economic interest, political alliance against political alliance. Once collective anger is roused, there is no limit to how far it can go. People become capable of justifying the greatest wrongs with the most specious arguments. Samuel Huntington feared the “Clash of Civilizations” in our times. What we ought to propagate rather is a “Communion of Cultures and Civilizations”, which can be ushered in only through dialogue. That is the only way of avoiding future conflicts and ensuring harmony in the days ahead.

Today collective anger is manifested in another manner too. There is a culture of growing suspicion of all organized systems of thought, ideologies,
comprehensive explanations, which, they feel, have been instrumentalized for exploitation. The same suspicion and anger have been extended, for analogical reasons, to all forms of established order and authority, moral codes, standard explanations, and religious admonitions. It is this discontentment that has come mercilessly against the Church (Lineamenta 3), especially when there is a perception or even evidence of inauthenticity, impersonality or distance. There is need of healers on a grand scale who can contribute to the healing of entire societies and civilizations.

Transmission of faith is a complex process, being with Jesus and living with him, sharing something positive and beautiful. It is a gift given to every Christian. Lay faithful are fully part of this mission, living the Gospel in family, workplace and society, and adopting an integrated approach: charity, witness, proclamation, celebration listening, sharing. The Gospel ought to transform the entire temporal order, renewing cultures, calling persons to conversion. There is need of ongoing instruction (Lineamenta 12).

13. “Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing” (Lk 5,5).

The centre of proclamation is Jesus Christ. It consists in transmitting the message of the Scriptures, the Gospel. We would be guilty if through negligence, fear or shame, we were to fail. Our message is not about a dead Christ as the disciples going to Emmaus thought Jesus was. Begin by evangelizing yourself. History of the Church provides examples of courage, dedication, boldness, intuition and reason; texts, prayers, models, teaching methods, spiritual programmes (Lineamenta 2).

Christianity is about the person of Jesus Christ. Transmission of faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Faith encounter is relationship with him, with the Father and experience of the power of the Spirit (Lineamenta 11).
Precisely this frustration of Peter could be what many missionaries feel when they do not see immediate results to their endeavours. They experience growing resistance to the Gospel in a culture that absolutizes mere production and consumption. Shockingly, groups in free societies today are doing exactly what totalitarian regimes of the last century were accused of: that of propagating aggressive atheism and of seeking to impose it on others. Intellectuals in free nations are humiliating believers with the same arguments and adopting the same aggressive tones in propagating their atheistic convictions. Religion is directly attacked, atheism is proclaimed, and the eventual demise of religion most solemnly predicted. Persons like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins are ardent evangelists of atheism. They wrongly attribute the misuse of religion to religion itself. Freedom of expression is interpreted as the freedom to demean and demolish the sense of the sacred in society.

What seems to be fast emerging on the world scene is a climate of indifference, a culture of agnosticism, in the media, politics, economy, education, secularized institutions, non-praying families. The percentage of those denying any religious affiliation has been growing rapidly. Unbelief has been increasingly taking the place of faith, reason the place of scriptures, politics the place of religion and the Church, earth the place of heaven. Steve Bruce points out that UK has seen at least 150 years of steady religious decline, in spite of the Pentecostal movements of the 1920s, charismatic movements of the 1960s, the new religious movements of the 1970s, the New Age spirituality of the 1990s. Though the Indian situation is different, the trend is not totally absent in India as well.

Jesus had promised to make of his disciple fishers of men. But it was precisely in that art of fishing that Peter failed. We understand his embarrassment. “Master, we have worked hard all night long and caught nothing”. In the same way, we thought we were wizards in the pedagogy of faith-communication. But we fail to make headway even in handing on the faith, let alone offering it to new communities. May be time has come for some measure of self-criticism. Critics may be exaggerating when they say that clerical support for Liberation Theology ultimately turned out to be a ‘clerical contribution’ to the dechristianization process,\textsuperscript{4}) possibly quite unawares. In our eagerness to present a secular face in the society in which we live, we should not become agents of secularization.

We may notice that several of our programmes are to be modified, offering a Gospel of hope in life situations. We need to keep looking for the initiatives that God is taking through the Spirit. Obstacles and tensions are normal (Lineamenta 4).

14. “Everyone is Looking for You” (Mk 1,37)

Christians must be bold in the new aeropaghi. Economy reveals inequality between the north and the south. There is a perception of unfairness between peoples. It is true that technological research has brought blessings. But we have also become dependent, and have subjected ourselves to new idols. Science itself has become a form of secular religion. Meanwhile cults have emerged, religion has taken the forms of clinical services. New political struggles are visible on the world scene seeking domination and power. We remain committed to works of peace, liberation, dialogue, collaboration, rights

of individuals, of minorities, all those who are vulnerable. There is further the duty of acting as stewards of creation and caring for the planet (Lineamenta 6).

Humanity is in the process of self-discovery, like a child exploring its bodily parts, like an adolescent becoming aware of his/her full developing faculties. However, it would be narcissistic to be lost in self-exploration and self-admiration all the time. A stage must come when one opens out to others and ventures out into the world beyond, and into the infinite, never being satisfied with anything limited and confining. When someone launches himself into this venture, he/she in search of the Ultimate. That is why we can truly say that everyone who is looking for more serious answers, fuller explanation of things, proposing a theory for a more complete understanding of reality, or is radically committed to the emergence of a better world... he/she is ardently in search of Jesus (Mk 1,37). They are the shapers of the future culture. Indeed every person in search of meaning and purpose ultimately, is “looking” for Him (Mk 1,37).

It is difficult for us to accept how even those who proposed false trails and launched massive injustices on fellow beings could have been in search of the Sovereign Good. But when they were restless for a better order of things, called for greater justice, greater development for themselves and for their people, they had a message for their society. If what was good in it was accepted, what was wrong in it would probably have been eliminated in a natural process. That did not always happen. We need to remember that people of various schools of thought are children of God, that opposing movements are often complementary, that the majority and the minority communities belong together, those of the great civilizations and the little cultures are interdependent. All good things are inter-related. They begin to converge with each other when true ‘Wisdom’ reaches the scene (Wis 7,11).
New evangelization is about being ready to give respectful answers to intelligent and penetrating questions, co-searching and co-discovering the deeper dimensions of realities and of ancient truths, until Christ’s face is revealed. Orderly patterns emerge below the chaotic processes of life and we gain a glimpse of His passing shadow. Things return to order again. Human needs and responses begin to coincide, divisions get bridged and selfishness gets crushed, and hatred fades away, ideas converge. When we witness an outburst of generosity where it is sorely needed a spontaneous acceptance of what is right, Jesus is there.

15. Tapping the Inner Resources of Culture

Psychologists tell us that the archetypes in our collective unconscious possess enormous amount of meaning, power, energy, initiative, destined profoundly to affect our lives. This energy has to be released. In Christian understanding, it is when one accepts God’s word and announces it powerfully that the potentialities of those archetypes are revealed. The fact is that in actual life the profounder dimensions of the human beings often remain untouched. They are stirred when someone speaks with ‘authority’ as Jesus did, addressing the deepest longings of human hearts. They are brought to life by persons who have been educated to a culture of egolessness and profound concern for others. Such should be the nature of Evangelizers.

Enemies may multiply. Failures may come one after another. Opposition may mount. Criticisms may humiliate you beyond endurance. But those very criticisms, like Shimei’s curses on David, may invoke God’s blessings on you (2Sam 16,12). Your words may be rejected at a given time. But ultimately what is right is proved right by its inner consistency and truthfulness. “Wisdom is proved right by her actions” (Mt 11,19). It is precisely when we feel helpless that we begin to hear an inner voice, a soft whispering. A new
inspiration awakens in our minds. A new insight is churned out from the running stream of the cultural wisdom that comes to us from our ancestors who were a little closer to the origin of things than we are. It is a spark that flies out of a mysterious collective mind (collective psyche, collective unconscious) of our ancestors, early believers. It took shape in deep-level co-thinking. It will prove itself more precious than the volume of accumulated capital or an abundance of natural resources that we boast of.

16. Bringing back a Soul to Modern Culture, Civilization

A secularized society is hungering for something more profound, noble, sublime, spiritual than what self-serving economics or politics is able to give. New religious movements are telling us precisely this. The revival of various non-Christian religions, the rapid growth of various ecclesial movements within the Church says that there is a hidden hunger the spiritual. Taize’ has drawn millions. The Post-modern respect for diverse cultural and religious traditions is also confirming the same thing.

In this age of materialism, glorified self-interest, inflated collective egos of dominant communities and nations; and in this age of refined secular humanism, political use of religion, issue-based loyalty to religion (e.g. linked only with movements like feminism, environmentalism; religion as merely a form of therapy, exaggerated ways of struggles even for rightful causes like justice, peace, nationalism, rights of the weak and the few and the voiceless) we long for a mystical experience. We long for the Hidden God. All our activities and movements need a soul. Will mysticism be allowed to plant itself into the deepest spaces of human activity and reveal its inner sturdiness? Can dynamism be combined with depth?

Future debates will not be between conservatives and progressives, rightists and leftists, but those who search for ultimate meaning and those who are
lost in the immediate forgetting that “the world in its present forms is passing away” (1Cor 7, 31). But new world is being born, even in our own times. We are called to be agents of it.