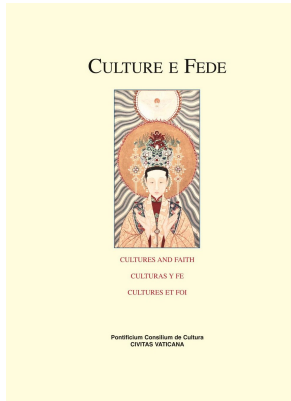




# PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE

## ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

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The monographic section covers a number of viewpoints: the history of the missions, veneration of ancestors, cultural challenges in politics and peace-making, statecraft and the presence of women. Together the articles paint humanism with an Asian face, making clear the universality of Catholicism.

Other sections witness the activities of the Courtyard of the Gentiles and the departments for sports, humanities, music and cinema.

See the index and note the original languages.

Editorial:

Lest our horizons shrink: Asian perspectives

The apostolic letter *Maximum Illud* written by Pope Benedict XV in 1919 represents a cultural milestone in the history of the missions. Hugo Gonçalves Dores examines this document, which is influenced by Alexander VII's *Instructions* – oft described as the Magna Carta of the missions – to illustrate missionary respect for non-western cultures, the need for the adaptation of Catholicism to indigenous needs, and to reflect on the Church in the setting of international relations. *Maximum Illud* is an appeal for the Church to fulfil the Divine Command and “dispatch to every corner of the world her couriers” to proclaim the Good News. This requires engagement with local languages and cultures.

If we fast forward nearly a century – beyond other great missionary documents such as Pius XI's *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Pius XII's ten mission letters, including *Evangelii Praecones*, John XXIII's *Princeps Pastorum*, the Council's *Ad Gentes*, Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* – we come to Pope Francis and his 2013 missionary document *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG). This Pope of the peripheries and integral reform rebukes notions of centralization and encourages us to emerge with new joy as a people of many faces, preaching the revealed message, whose content is transcultural, accepting and embracing diversity, for “we would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous” (EG 117).

As we saw with the Synod on the Pan-Amazonian Region, it is by listening to the holy pilgrim people of God that as Church we are to discern how to live out mission. Input to that pastoral and cultural conversation from all the geographical contours of the Church

is a requisite if she is to bring to each person and all cultures the message of which she is guardian, particularly those in situations of conflict or injustice, the poor and needy. Of which, as we shall see, there are many in Asia.

In his missionary exhortation, in a chapter where he reflects on the priorities of Time over Space, Reality over Ideas, and the Whole over the Parts, Pope Francis also reflected on the priority of Unity over Conflict: “Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, *our horizons shrink* and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality” (EG 226).

For this number of our journal, lest our horizons shrink, we have invited a number of papers with Asian perspectives. These are interspersed with images of indigenous sacred art provided by the Ethnological Department of the Vatican Museums, *Anima Mundi*.

Bishop Joseph Dang Duc Ngan, the President of the Committee on Culture of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam, presents a recent document on the Veneration of Ancestors in Funeral and Marriage Rites, which learns from the Chinese rites controversy and enters into the detail of the current cultural and pastoral challenges in Vietnam.

Rudolf Heredia, SJ, supplies six *sutras* from India examining the cultural and political challenges of the world’s most populous democracy. He then points to dialogue as the way out of cultural entrenchment.

Next we hear from three consultors of the Dicastery. For Edward Alam in Lebanon, the mistaken perception of Christianity as a foreign religion is the starting point for a reflection on the notes of apostolicity and catholicity, or wholeness, and on life together in the Abrahamic interreligious context where the role of the Christian community is as leaven in the dough for the renewal of humanity. Choe Hyondok from Korea describes her nation’s political process of “coming to terms with the past” with an acute sense of citizenship and the use of memory and transitional justice. And a pleasant example of intercultural dialogue is found in Glen Chatelier’s presentation of poems of praise, which seek to articulate Christian concerns in Thai culture by evoking the quest for wisdom and holiness in society with Davidic regalism.

The Dicastery’s two permanent consultation bodies (women and youth) also turn their gaze east to allow us to experience the particular disparities women face in the Dalit communities of India, where they are called to become agents empowered for their own emancipation. And there are youthful studies on cooperation between Russia and Iran, and on the brotherhood between China and Myanmar, with its fledgling democratic movements. These very much share the spirit of the Abu Dhabi document on Human Fraternity for Peaceful Coexistence.

Contrasts are numerous within the mosaic of Asian cultures – and we have had no space for articles on the Philippines, Singapore, Nepal, Indonesia, nor most others of Asia’s 48 states. What does transpire from these writings, however, is an earnest desire on the part of the Church to dwell among different cultures, among the polarities and conflicts, in a stance of dialogue eager to find new solutions for a peaceful coexistence of peoples, looking for ever better ways of being present that were perhaps not imagined before.

Indeed, moving on from dialectic oppositions is a basic action criteria for Pope Francis. His programmatic vision is the opposite of relativism. He teaches: “authentic solutions are never found by dampening boldness, shirking concrete demands or assigning blame to others. On the contrary, solutions are found by ‘overflowing’ (*desbordar*), that is, by transcending the contraposition that limits our vision and recognizing a greater gift that God is offering” (*Querida Amazonia*, 105). A new Christian humanism is rising – as from an overflowing fountain – with multiple Asian faces.

