

II Meeting of Directors of Catholic Cultural Centres in Africa
organised by the Pontifical Council for Culture
The Catholic Cultural Centres in Africa :
Dialogue between cultures for a better living together

Catholic Cultural Centres:
At the Service of Intercultural Dialogue and the Inculturation of the Faith

A talk by Mr Richard Rouse
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Your Excellencies,
Reverend Fathers,

This talk on Catholic Cultural Centres begins by referring to the definition given to us by the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, which, taking up one of the propositions of the same synod, gives us the following text in its Chapter V on *structures of evangelisation*:

"Catholic cultural centres offer to the Church the possibility of presence and action in the field of cultural change. They constitute, in effect, public *forums* which allow the Church to make widely known, in creative dialogue Christian convictions about man, woman, family, work, economy, society, politics, international life, the environment. Thus they are places of listening, respect and tolerance"¹ (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 103).

Addressing you on the theme of *Catholic cultural centres at the service of Intercultural Dialogue and Inculturation of the Faith*, I begin by illustrating one aspect of the Pontifical Council for Culture's effort to contribute to the Church's pastoral approach to culture, that is its promotion of a network of Catholic cultural centres, before then offering some reflections, based on magisterial documents, of the importance of intercultural dialogue and inculturation of the faith.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 103.

The Pontifical Council for Culture's Network

The Pontifical Council for Culture has now for more than fifteen years sought to stimulate the evangelisation of contemporary cultures. Aside from its theological reflection on these matters, exhaustively expressed in the document *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, it has also undertaken a pragmatic campaign in the form of creating and sustaining a network of Catholic cultural centres. By publishing a directory of them and inviting them to network and interact at meetings such as this one, a certain sense of coordination and empowerment has resulted allowing a more effective engagement in facilitating the salvific meeting, the *colloquium salutis*, between the Faith and contemporary cultures.

What do they do?

The typology of each centre varies according to local needs and abilities. There is no strict definition of these structures of evangelisation. Some might operate a website, or publish books or reviews, hold courses, or organise conferences, release messages or statements, advise or teach, run a bookshop or library, direct an academy, carry out research, award prizes, engage in advocacy, or promote other initiatives in the field of culture. Whatever activity they carry out they are in a good position to give a voice to the counter-current of Christianity in a world where the parish priest's lone voice in isolation needs to be reinforced by other means. In a globalising world in which educational and authority paradigms are changing, it is not amiss to say that Catholic Cultural Centres are well placed to be adaptable to the changing situation to get the same message across.

The Directory

There are obvious advantages for centres when they can collaborate, network and share ideas, skills or methods and increase their visibility, so there are many requests to be listed in the directory compiled by the Pontifical Council for Culture, which currently contains details of 1,472 Catholic Cultural Centres in the world. 235 of these are in Africa. The discerning criteria are that the centre be Catholic, although not necessarily in name – indeed in some cases this would be disadvantageous – and that its work is aimed at shaping the minds and hearts of people in their cultures, possibly even shaping the direction of the cultures themselves, sharing the mission of the Church for whom, “*evangelizing* means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new... It is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of

judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.”²

The directory contains a copy of the questionnaire that is used to gather information through the good offices of the Apostolic Nunciatures and local episcopates. If you know of any other centres please help us fill in the gaps. The next printed edition is due out in the near future, but an online edition will be continually updated and made available for consultation.

Meetings of Directors

A further initiative to encourage the work of such centres lies in the meetings for Directors of Catholic Cultural Centres that are organised by the Pontifical Council for Culture. Since the first meeting in Chantilly, France in 1993 – at which only 3 African centres were represented – a further 18 meetings have taken place as the network has grown, developing to become more articulated and responsive to local needs. Meetings are now held not just internationally, but also on continental, regional and national bases. The first African meeting was organised in Lusaka, Zambia, April 18-22, 2006. From the blurb of the published acts we can read that

“such centres, from arts and crafts workshops to high-level research institutions, are seeking to make African cultural resources available to the Church, family of God, developing a new Christian culture for Africa that is fully African and fully Christian. Such a culture is not merely a flourishing expression of what it means to be Christian, but is also the privileged path for reconciliation and forgiveness, which builds the culture of peace.”³

The theme, proposed by Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, was that of *Cultural Resources for Reconciliation and Forgiveness* and it brought the attention of the 35 directors of different centres to the urgency of these issues, within the local setting, and with attention to culture as a great opportunity, indeed a necessity, for the new evangelisation. Certainly there were centres dedicated to the arts – I think of the Kungoni Centre for Culture and Art (Malawi), and the Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute (Zambia) – which aid sculptors and musicians to express and grow in their Christian faith through the artistic norms of local cultures. But the majority of centres were dedicated to culture in the wider sense, being interested in agriculture, population development, education and academia, justice and peace issues, service of the poor and the handicapped, and science; in short, they sought an incarnation of the Faith in the social dialogue that evolves in the field of culture, which is fully captured in the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*, which it will do no harm to hear again:

² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*.

³ Blurb on the inside cover.

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

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

Thence it follows that human culture has necessarily a historical and social aspect and the word "culture" also often assumes a sociological and ethnological sense. According to this sense we speak of a plurality of cultures. Different styles of life and multiple scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of labouring, of expressing oneself, of practicing religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridical institutions, of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty. Thus the customs handed down to it form the patrimony proper to each human community. It is also in this way that there is formed the definite, historical milieu which enfolds the man of every nation and age and from which he draws the values which permit him to promote civilization.⁴

Addressing Diverse Themes at our Meetings

To show the flexibility and diversity of interests of centres, it may be worth reading out the list of themes that has been addressed at meetings of directors of Catholic Cultural Centres. They do touch on a wide range of cultural issues: secularisation, politics and society, dialogue, values, transformation, change and development of cultures, individualism, relativism, liberty and liberalism, economics, anxiety, hope, religious indifference, sects, secularism, cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue, Islam, emigration, multiculturalism, sciences, globalisation, the Mass Media, the youth, handing on the faith, identity, urbanisation and rural issues.⁵

The Vademecum

A useful *Vademecum* or *Guide* has been published, with the help of the Italian Episcopate and its Cultural Project, under the title *Why? What are they? What to do?* It has been prepared for what it calls "those various places which have the particular aim of helping the Christian community further the relationship between the Gospel and current history, between the Gospel and

⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World, *Gaudium et spes*, 53.

⁵ G. MURA, ed., *Cultural Resources for Reconciliation and Forgiveness*, pp. 263-264.

the values of the prevailing culture.”⁶ The Guide is a sort of ABC of how to set up and run an effective centre. It notes that each cultural centre is able to listen to the needs of the potential destinies of its offerings. It can plan and realise over time a series of events or cultural activities that respond to those needs. Based on research, strategic planning, a programme of action, management techniques, developing a mission and a vision, checking up and post-event management, the method proposed is nothing other than an articulated dialogue between the creative and dynamic action of the team working through the centre and men and women submerged in contemporary culture.

Globalisation and its effects on cultures

This flexibility of cultural centres is perhaps their greatest strength, particularly in the context of **globalisation** and with regard to **its effects on African cultures**, which was the theme of the last meeting of the Pontifical Council for Culture’s African Members and Consultors together with representatives of Episcopal commissions: Globalisation is not just an economic phenomenon of the twentieth century – indeed for the Indian Nobel Prize Winner Amartya K. Sen⁷ it is a millennia old affair and many have noted that markets today are less liberal and global than they were in the past due to trade sanctions. Rather globalisation is the key-word used for describing the state of the global village, the intimacy that has brought together in close contact, through massive migration and technological progress, different peoples with their social, cultural, religious and economic experiences. It is a fast rhythm of change that brings different cultures into contact via mobile phones, internet, television, radio, daily living, daily competition for economic and social advancement. It is a time of demographic explosion, with new needs appearing and new marketing techniques, new dress codes, the meeting of languages, mentalities, and food intake. Now, these are the cultural expressions which reflect the very ethos of man: who he is, what he is, where he is going. And so the new Christian humanism, as Pope Paul VI called it, becomes the sphere for our reflection on the universal values shared by these people, who are the children and parents of this new intercultural mix, these men and women who are made in the image and likeness of God. There is a clear urgency to raise the voice of the Church in this intercultural dialogue, which itself demands a responsiveness by the Church, for which Catholic cultural centres can offer their flexibility, with a view to inculturating the Faith.

Pope John Paul II in a memorable Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture’s Plenary Assembly in 1983, on the Church’s evangelising mission in cultures, stated that “as cultures continually change, they demand a renewed approach. [...] New sectors of culture are appearing,

⁶ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE AND THE CENTRAL OFFICE FOR THE CULTURAL PROJECT OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE, *Guide to Catholic Cultural Centres: Why? What are They? What to do?*, Rome 2006.

⁷ AMARTYA K. SEN, *Globalizzazione e libertà*, Milan 2002.

with diverse objectives, methods, and languages. Intercultural dialogue is therefore a must for Christians in all countries”⁸. As globalisation favours interculturality and the movement and vehicularisation of other peoples’ and cultures’ values, pastoralists, with the support of cultural centres, respond to this area in many ways. For example, some ask what effect is caused by the juxtaposition of the individualisation of social relations with the needs of the social community, particularly in societies where the social tissue of the community is more robust⁹. Then “there are those who argue that cultural globalisation fosters a clash of civilisations and ... those who believe that it is necessary to defend the cultural biodiversity of mankind”¹⁰. For others intercultural dialogue is the space in which we develop and experiment a new language to communicate, for if we are to gain respect among people with different value systems, it is those very values we must be seen to be using – indeed such values are perhaps already our own but prioritised and accentuated in other ways. So priority is given to listening, to responsiveness to issues of interest, to a person-to-person “incarnated” communication (not mass-media centred), and to the use of symbolic gestures such as the washing of feet, and breaking of bread which are activities that transcend specific cultures. There is no room for apathy and disengagement, and even less for partiality and sectarianism. We must not yield to fear or pessimism. Rather, we must cultivate optimism and hope. In this way we seek, as one missionary put it, to move from a culture of consumerism to one of generosity; from a culture of individualism to one of hospitality; from a culture of superficiality to interiority; from a culture of marginalisation to solidarity; from a culture of conflict and violence to harmony; from a culture of information to introspection; from a culture of efficient communication to genuine community.¹¹

Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue

Addressing Muslim communities in Cologne during the World Youth Days in Germany, our Holy Father stated that, “Interreligious and intercultural dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is in fact a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends.”¹² Dialogue is a necessity and urgent obligation in the historical *kairós* in which we

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 18 January 1983.

⁹ F. Hilaire RAHARILALAO, « L’Eglise et Fihavanana dans le contexte actuel marqué par la mondialisation et la fracture sociale », relation à la session interdisciplinaire organisée par le département de théologie de l’Institut Catholique de Madagascar, 11 et 12 février 2008, in *Aspects du Christianisme à Madagascar*, §Tome 16, N. 1 2008, pp. 32-45.

¹⁰ Roberto PAPINI, « Intercultural Dialogue and Human Rights », in *Notes et documents*, XXXIII, janvier-avril 2008, p.12-17, 14.

¹¹ James H. KROEGER, M.M., “Witnessing to the Word in the World” Reflective overview of the 2007 III Plenary Assembly of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM) held August 28-31 2007 in Pieniezno, Poland, in *Mission*, vol. XIV (2007), 2, pp. 287-291.

¹² BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with Representatives of some Muslim Communities, Cologne, 20 August 2005.

live; it is an intrinsic element and demanding duty of the cristological event¹³. “Go out and spread the good news” is the Mission Command. “The mission encounter is no longer the interaction between a mono-cultural missionary with a rather homogenous group of people,”¹⁴ but today, it is an intercultural and interreligious event due to the cultural diversity we meet in the globalised multicultural areopagus; there is not only a more frequent meeting of cultures, but also of religions. And in this new *agora*, it is not just the Church which feels the necessity of dialogue. 2008 has also been declared by the European Union to be the year of intercultural dialogue. But our friends in secular institutions have often confused intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and often with that meddlingness which seeks to determine how religions should speak to each other and what they should think and do, which in secular mentality is devoid of reference to God and frequently marked by ignorance. Their presumption is that violence stems from religions. But violence is not a religious fact, it is a cultural one. So what we propose instead is sincere dialogue stemming from Mission, in reciprocal respect, based on proposition not force, and avoiding relativism.¹⁵ This will allow religions to offer their own real contribution of peace, respect, collaboration and service of each and every person.

As Benedict XVI again had occasion to clarify after the fall-out from the reactions misinterpreting his speech at Regensburg was able to say:

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is a necessity for building together this world of peace and fraternity ardently desired by all people of good will. In this area, our contemporaries expect from us an eloquent witness to show all people the value of the religious dimension of life. Likewise, faithful to the teachings of their own religious traditions, Christians and Muslims must learn to work together, as indeed they already do in many common undertakings, in order to guard against all forms of intolerance and to oppose

¹³ Piero CODA, « Conoscere e approfondire la propria identità, riconoscere e accettare le differenze: vie e posta in gioco del dialogo interculturale e interreligioso », in *I Centri culturali cattolici del mediterraneo*, Atti dell'incontro di Dubrovnik, 25-28 ottobre 2007, p. 22..

¹⁴ James H. KROEGER, M.M., “Witnessing to the Word in the World” Reflective overview of the 2007 III Plenary Assembly of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (IACM) held August 28-31 2007 in Pieniezno, Poland, in *Mission*, vol. XIV (2007), 2, pp.287-291.

¹⁵ In this regard it will do us no harm to report the relevant passage from the *Note on Some Aspects of Evangelisation* prepared by the CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, at N.8: “Evangelization also involves a sincere dialogue that seeks to understand the reasons and feelings of others. Indeed, the heart of another person can only be approached in freedom, in love and in dialogue, in such a manner that the word which is spoken is not simply offered, but also truly witnessed in the hearts of those to whom it is addressed. This requires taking into account the hopes, sufferings and concrete situations of those with whom one is in dialogue. Precisely in this way, people of good will open their hearts more freely and share their spiritual and religious experiences in all sincerity. This experience of sharing, a characteristic of true friendship, is a valuable occasion for witnessing and for Christian proclamation.

As in any other field of human activity, so too in dialogue on religious matters, sin can enter in. It may sometimes happen that such a dialogue is not guided by its natural purpose, but gives way instead to deception, selfish motives or arrogance, thus failing in respect for the dignity and religious freedom of the partners in dialogue. For this reason, “the Church severely prohibits forcing people to embrace the faith or leading or enticing them by improper techniques; by the same token, she also strongly defends the right that no one be deterred from the faith by deplorable ill treatment”.

all manifestations of violence; as for us, religious authorities and political leaders, we must guide and encourage them in this direction. Indeed, "although considerable dissensions and enmities between Christians and Muslims may have arisen in the course of the centuries, the Council urges all parties that, forgetting past things, they train themselves towards sincere mutual understanding and together maintain and promote social justice and moral values as well as peace and freedom for all people" (Declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, 3). The lessons of the past must therefore help us to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to fruitful co-operation in the service of all humanity. As Pope John Paul II said in his memorable speech to young people at Casablanca in Morocco, "Respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom. They favour peace and agreement between peoples" (no. 5).¹⁶

God created us all as brothers, his children, made in his image and likeness and for this reason we have a dignity, and are worthy of respect. This generous act of creation produces points of friendship and dialogue between men and women of different beliefs and cultures; this gift is a source of hope and motivation for the work we are doing, work which let us not forget must be sustained by prayer. It is a dialogue which emerges from and is central to our apostolate, our being disciples of Christ engaging with cultures on the strength of His love, "love, which he reminded a recent meeting of the Pontifical Council for Culture, is like a great force hidden deep within cultures in order to urge them to overcome their incurable finiteness by opening themselves to him who is their Source and End, and to give them, when they do open themselves to his grace, enriching fullness".¹⁷

Inculturation of the Faith

In promoting intercultural dialogue – which as we know is closely related to but different from interreligious dialogue – the Church is playing but one part of her mission which involves the double action of evangelisation of cultures and inculturation of the Gospel. Evangelisation of cultures should lead to an authentic inculturation. If evangelisation is centred on the mystery of Christ - his incarnation, redemption and mission – we avoid those failed attempts at inculturation which have been nothing other than a backward-looking archeologism. Just as Our Lord, by assuming human nature, identified himself with humanity, so too in its work of inculturating the

¹⁶ Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority and to the Representatives of Muslim Communities in Italy, Castel Gandolfo, Monday, 25 September 2006.

¹⁷ BENEDICT XVI, to the Participants in the Study Convention on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Friday, 15 June 2007.

faith, the Church has to engage with cultures. And just as Christ, while assuming human nature sanctified it and infused it with Grace thus transforming it, so too the Church is entrusted the task of sanctifying and purifying cultures, getting to the heart of what people think and the way they make judgements to touch their values and affect the way they live. This inculturation of the faith is an essential part of the evangelisation of cultures. And the diversity and localness of Catholic cultural centres is a privileged tool for bringing this about. They are able to ensure a presence for the mystery of Christ, paradigm for all evangelisation and all inculturation, by which the faith touches the very hearts of our contemporaries in their cultures. As John Paul II stated memorably, “a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully embraced, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived”.

And again the Council for culture has described the art of inculturation thus:

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.”¹⁸

Inculturation recognizes that every culture has its values, codes and practices, customs and usages, traditions and ethos, often its own language, music, art, and even its own way of dressing. Inculturation allows the Gospel message to speak through and in the language, music and expression of the people. It allows the images and axioms, adages and proverbs of the culture to be used to speak to the truths of the Christian faith. It uses the stories, parables, and mores of a particular culture to help the people of that culture understand Christian values, the story of salvation and to respond to it in faith. The Word made flesh in the incarnation was absolute and real, precisely because it was also an incarnation in a particular culture. Jesus Christ, the incarnated word of God, true man and true God. His life and ministry on earth took place in a concrete time and place, in the cultural ambience of Palestine and its inhabitants, transforming them and taking on their modes of speech and ways of living, symbols, metaphors, parables and wisdom sayings, but at the same time shedding new light on that culture. He spoke the language of his culture, communicated to his hearers in ways that they could understand him and evoked a response to his message in the cultural patterns available to his listeners. What better example, model and paradigm can we have today as we, through our Catholic Cultural Centres, seek to bring the light of the Gospel to all men and women in the heart of their own cultures!

¹⁸ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *A Pastoral Approach to Culture*, 5.