

country, or discovered in the forest, digging, clearing and building; and other silent men, not seen, were sitting in a cold cloister, tiring their eyes and keeping their attention on the stretch, while they painfully copied and recopied the manuscripts which they had saved. There was no one who contended or cried out, or drew attention to what was going on, but by degrees the woody swamp became a hermitage, a religious house, a farm, an abbey, a village, a seminary, a school of learning and a city.”⁵²

4 MISSION AND ECUMENISM: THE NEW CULTURE

The new People, made up of those chosen in Baptism, shares, as we have said, in Christ’s mission, so that God’s Kingdom may come and His will be done. Belonging to Christ’s mission as a new nature changes the self-awareness of our person in such a way that the principle of action is no longer the “I” but a “You.” To live for an Other indicates the genesis of a new culture: living no longer for oneself, but for Him who died and rose for us.⁵³ This new awareness judges all the relationships of life and makes us able to love every bit of truth left in anyone, with a positivity and a critique unknown to the world.

We too are “sent” by the Father

We Christians, too, are called to be, like Jesus, those sent by the Father. “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.”⁵⁴ We have formed a clearer idea of the mysterious origin of this task, since no one can say as we do: “Abba, Father.”⁵⁵ And the aim, the end, of this overall plan has become clearer, too – the glory of Christ in the world. “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.”⁵⁶ His Kingdom is the glory of Christ in the world, for which “the hour has come; glorify your Son, so that the Son may glorify you.”⁵⁷

But even more profound, more enigmatic, and at the same time more attractive for us is the heart of the Mystery as the definition of our person. Not only is the Mystery the origin and the final

aim; it is at work in the ontology, in the supporting structures, in the directives and the criteria for action of our person. So what is our person in this Mystery? What is the meaning of this Mystery of belonging to Christ's mission in which the Father has us share so as to fulfill his aim? How does sharing in this mission determine my life? How do I live the bond with what is, instant by instant, with my new origin?

If we speak of a new origin it is because this is not our origin as creatures, but the origin of the new self in Baptism, which makes it share in the person and mission of Christ. So what produces this passion for the glory of Christ as the aim of every breath?⁵⁸ How does this vigilance take shape today? Since we have been taken hold of in Baptism, we are something other than we were and felt before; we are a new creature, which comes from the Father and is for the human glory of the Son.⁵⁹

Overwhelmed by the memory of Christ's love

St Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth, "The love of Christ overwhelms us at the thought that, if one has died for all, He died that all should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose for them."⁶⁰ The apostle defines the mission in its substantial terms as being overwhelmed, swept along by the memory of Christ's love. This is what "forces" us to the mission and leaves no respite! For whomever is called, chosen by God in Baptism, life's task is not so much to be a father or a mother, a lawyer or a teacher. In all this, your job is to be a prophet, because the mission is first and foremost prophecy, which means "speaking before everyone," spreading the message, the Gospel, the Good News, spreading the Word.

The mission is born of being overwhelmed, as the result of the thought of the love Christ had for us. It is passion, overwhelming passion, for the human glory of Christ that coincides with man's happiness, that gives birth to mission. Being overwhelmed means that you are no longer indifferent. It marks a radical change in the content of your self-awareness. It is the passage to a new content of your self-awareness, in which, instead of the "I," there

is a “You.” Normally the principle of action is the self; here the principle of action becomes the “You.” This passage requires that love be defined by a childlike simplicity that Jesus calls “poverty of spirit,” rather than by all the concerns, the stresses, the failures, and the successes from which man naturally draws his motive for following the value of life. One could say that this being overwhelmed, of which St Paul speaks, is the drama of a “forgetting” of self, a self-annihilation for a real *metanoia* to the point of putting the “You” in place of the “I” as the content of self-awareness. For this reason the ideal to follow is the simplicity with which St Peter – though taken unawares – says to Christ: “Yes, You know I love You.” Without this *yes*, our own pretensions and illusions come into play.

St Paul has the awareness of an obedience as method, as the source of action. In place of the “I,” the subject creating the action becomes a “You”; the “I” sacrifices itself for a You: “I live, not I, but it is Christ who lives in me.”⁶¹ It is a fundamental love, wholly gratuitous, without kickbacks or calculations or profits to be had.

In the mission, the offer of oneself to Christ is accomplished, in His living People which is the Church. This happens where He has placed us, in other words in the place and the mode of the charism; this offering is called obedience. In order that men may live no longer for themselves but for Christ, obedience is needed.

Obedience is the essence of the *summum ius*, the summit of God’s right over our lives. And this is also the virtue of friendship with Being, the summit of communion with the Mystery.⁶² There is no more dramatic word than this. It points to the most dramatic aspect of the moral question: the root of the alternative between one vision of the world and another, between the perception of human consciousness in which the ultimate reality is the Lord, and that in which the lord of reality is what man thinks and feels. What “witnesses” to the Lord is the life of the Christian, insofar as it *demonstrates* this obedience.

The last part of St Paul’s phrase we quoted, (“so that they should live for Him who died and rose”) highlights the cultural power in which the Christian event expresses itself fully: a new

vision of the world, a new feeling of the world, a totally new effect on the world.

“Living for” indicates the movement of a new culture.

A new culture

What characterizes the cultural dynamics of the Christian Event? Obedience instead of self-affirmation, living totally in the flesh but in faith in the Son of God,⁶³ the fact that One is all and in Him all are one. Man no longer lives for himself, but for a “You.” He is a new man: “my self is you,” I am an Other present. Though living in the flesh, according to all the levels of his experience of being man, this new man lives by faith in the Son of God.

The new culture indicates the “for whom” of the new genesis. The “for whom” is completely changed. It is no longer for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose for us. The “for whom” indicates the genesis of the new culture. The new man lives for Him who died, who was killed, who was defeated and who, in coming back to life, has given proof of His victory over death.⁶⁴ Living for Him is as disturbing as can be. “And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died and rose for us, He sent the Holy Spirit as his first gift to those who believe, to complete His work on earth and bring us the fullness of grace.”⁶⁵

The new culture is a new awareness of oneself and of the common journey;⁶⁶ it also implies a new morality, as we mentioned before, aided by a new correction, a new way of sharing the striving towards the ideal and of forgiving one’s weakness regarding the ideal. This *metanoia* implies the experience of free giving as the supreme imitation of Christ and of mercy as the Mystery’s way of behaving towards human sin. For one who lives no longer for himself but for God’s “You” turns out to be not a selfish “I” but a self that affirms the free giving of the Creator Mystery, that belongs totally to the unity that originates in Baptism, unity of self and unity with others. The “I-You” relationship between Christ and me is a relationship that carries my whole self in it, and therefore carries in me all those who share in Christ, as if they were one (*eis* as St Paul says).⁶⁷ With Baptism was born a

new personality which, the more it becomes aware of other human beings also called by Christ, the more it feels one with them (“Don’t you know you are members one of another?”).⁶⁸ Love for others becomes an overwhelming passion for them because they are part of Christ and therefore part of me. This is the new constellation that guides that sky which is God’s Holy Church.

Thus arises a true reality of communion that begins and spreads as a whole subject of society, of the world, of human history, of universal history – the Church as the Body of Christ. This human unity, in which He is the foundation, as divine free giving communicated to the chosen creature, has two characteristics. It is all-embracing and Catholic: all-embracing inasmuch as the awareness of this company tends to determine all relationships (“This dear joy / on which all virtue is founded, / whence comes it?”⁶⁹ Dante asked himself); Catholic inasmuch as it is a companionship open to everything that emerges and encounters it and thus outstretched to all things. It reaches out tirelessly to the discovery of the truth and to the affirmation of the good in everything.

Do not conform to the mentality of this world

The characteristics of the new culture, generated by those who belong to this communion in history, are reflected in a singular way in the *Letter to the Christians of the West*, by the greatest Bohemian theologian, Josef Zvěřina, in which he comments on St Paul’s letter to the Romans, 12:1-2. (He had suffered imprisonment for his faith under both the Nazis and Stalin.)

Brothers,

You have the presumption of being useful to the Kingdom of God assuming as far as possible the *saeculum*, its life, its words, its slogans, its way of thinking. But reflect, I beg you, what it means to accept this world. Perhaps it means that you have gradually lost yourselves in it? Sadly, it seems you are doing just that. It difficult these days to find you and recognize you in this strange world of yours. Probably we still recognize you because in this process you are taking

your time, because you are being assimilated by the world, whether quickly or slowly, but late all the same. We thank you for many things, or rather for almost everything, but we must distinguish ourselves from you in one thing. We have much to admire in you, so we can and must send you this warning.

Do not conform to this world, but transform yourselves by the renewal of your minds, so that you will be able to recognize the will of God, what is good, what is pleasing to him, what is perfect (Rom. 12:2). Do not conform! *Me syschematizesthe!* How well this expression reveals the perennial root of the verb: schema. In a nutshell, all schemas, all exterior models are empty. We have to want more, the apostle makes it our duty, “change your way of thinking, reshape your minds” – *metamorfoùsthe tè anakainósei toù noós*. Paul’s Greek is so expressive and concrete! He opposes *schèma* or *morphé* – permanent form, to *metamorphé* – change in the creature. One is not to change according to any model that in any case is always out of fashion, but it is a total newness with all its wealth (*anakainósei*). It’s not the vocabulary that changes but the meaning (*noùs*).

So not contestation, desacralization, secularization, because this is always little compared with Christian *anakaínosis*. Reflect on these words and your naïve admiration for revolution, Maoism, and violence (of which, in any case you are incapable) will abandon you.

Your critical and prophetic enthusiasm has already borne fruit, and we cannot indiscriminately condemn you for this. We simply realize, and we tell you sincerely, that we have more esteem for St Paul’s calm and discriminating invitation, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?” (2 Cor. 13:5).

We cannot imitate the world precisely because we have to judge it, not with pride and superiority, but with love, just as the Father loved the world (Jn 3:16) and for this reason pronounced judgment on it.

Do not *phroneîn* – think, and in conclusion *hyperphroneîn* – quibble, but *sophroneîn*, think with wisdom (Cf. Rom. 12:3). Be wise, so that we can discern the signs of the will and the time of God. Not the fashion of the moment, but what is good, honest and perfect.

We write as unwise to you who are wise, as weak men to you who are strong, as wretched men to you who are even more wretched! And this is stupid of us because there are certainly among you some excellent men and women. But precisely for this reason we need to write foolishly, as the Apostle Paul taught us, when he took repeated Christ's words, that the Father has hidden wisdom from those who know a lot about these things (Lk. 10:21).⁷⁰

Culture is precisely a way of looking, of perceiving, of judging; that is to say, of evaluating and deciding about everything. It is the fixing of an ultimate horizon from which the self's awareness begins its attack on reality and that imbues everything it finds on the way. The new culture is a vision of the world – from the self to the Eternal – that starts off from an encounter you have had, from an event that you are part of, from your coming across a Presence, not from books you read or ideas you hear. This encounter has a genetic value, since it represents the birth of a new subject, which arises in a precise place and in a moment of history, where it is nourished and grows as a new personality, with a unique conception, irreducible to any other; it is given a new *nous*, a new knowledge.

When this Presence is at work in all life's relationships, when all relationships "depend" on this, when they are saved, judged, coordinated, evaluated, and used in the light of this Presence, then we have a new culture. This culture springs, therefore, from the attitude you have towards this exceptional Presence, which is decisive for life. For this reason St Paul says, "This is your spiritual worship";⁷¹ it is our culture, a new point of view from which to look at the world and the whole of reality. When you look at that Presence with the eyes of a child, whether you are young or old (it's enough to set aside the ifs and the buts and be

full of the question that nourishes the heart), then you penetrate relationships, whether close or distant, with a light that no one else has, unless he has the same attitude before Christ, before God-made-man, the Word made flesh. "Consider all that is true, all that is good, just, pure, worthy of love and honourable; what comes from virtue and is praiseworthy."⁷²

In his comment on the letter to the Romans, Zvèrina stresses that "do not conform" (*me sy-schematizesthe*) means literally "do not take on the world's schemas,"⁷³ don't accept the standpoint the world has for looking at things, judging them, and evaluating them. Women, sex, bioethics, politics, art ... it's a question of not using the schema the world uses regarding these things. The Greek verb "do not conform" contains the root of the word "schema." We are surrounded by empty schemas, exterior models. Just think of television and the newspapers that fill the head, eyes, and imagination of everyone who does not defend himself. When is a way of treating people and things not an exterior one? When it participates in the interior reality of which the person and the thing are made – Christ. When is a schema not empty? When it belongs to the Father's plan – which is Christ – in other words, to another culture. A culture is not an empty schema when its origin is something that has happened and from which one cannot tear one's eyes away, a living, unique reality.

Zvèrina goes on, "We cannot copy the world, precisely because we have to judge it." We cannot copy it; certainly not out of pride and superiority, but out of love, just as the Father loved the world and for this reason pronounced His judgment on the world. This is why He sent the word of His truth into the world, which disturbed the world and will disturb it right up to the end.⁷⁴ We can't allow ourselves to be sidetracked by exterior models and by empty schemas that are not derived from what things are made of. Because things are made of Christ and the only schema of the world is the Father's plan, and it has a name – Christ. Evil is taking up the schemas of another who is foreign to our new nature.

It is a new culture, one that stands upon new principles and develops new applications. Thus attention is needed so as not

to assume the schemas of the world. Let us renew ourselves continually in the novelty, let us penetrate more and more and exalt the novelty that we are. In this way we will have a clear conscience because we shall do what is pleasing to God, what is good, right, and holy: "I exhort you, brothers, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; and this is your spiritual worship."⁷⁵ Our culture, our spiritual worship is this offering.

If we reflect on our experience we realize instead how often what prevails is a self-centredness that decides by itself the factors constituting the Event we claim to belong to and that does not spring from us; in place of obedience we impose the affirmation of our own ideas. This is a non-mortification of our pride, it is original sin introducing foreign bodies, induced by something else and accepted by us, into the original simplicity, the creatural simplicity. It is something foreign to the Christian event introducing itself, claiming to be essential to the definition of the event itself, to the extent of not acknowledging it without the presence of this foreign ingredient. "If we bring in liberalism or fascism or capitalism or nationalism, then I'll agree to be a Christian, otherwise no." If we do this we admit exterior restrictions into an irreducibly original Fact, which, to come about, only requires the freedom to accept the Fact as a whole. You accept God on condition that He agree with the predominant cultural ideal, whether it be the humanistic ideal, or that of the Renaissance, or of rationalism.

Today in particular, there is the pretension of identifying the tissue of the Christian Fact not so much with the Event of a Presence, but rather with something that will affirm itself only at the end of time. This is "eschatologism." We could define this as a maniacal exaltation of the final coming of Christ, in which He has nothing to do with the *hic et nunc*, with the here and now (analogous to the maniacal exaltation of reason as the measure of reality, which ends up denying any ultimate consistency of reality itself). Man's effort, from the moment of original sin, would consist in making God have nothing to do with the *hic et nunc*, postponing His action to His last coming.

Eschatologism therefore distracts people from historical responsibility. But in that case, how could we prove that faith is reasonable, given that its reasonableness lies precisely in its capacity to correspond to the human heart's expectation and needs? We couldn't. So eschatologism cannot but be identified with pure fideism.

Instead, for someone who belongs, that is, for the baptized, the supreme formula of the unfolding of the Christ Event is the *hic et nunc*, defined by the circumstances of space and time. As these circumstances develop, belonging to this Event is like the pole that supports a man's tent as he travels through the desert, in history. In this belonging, the tent becomes the dwelling, the temple, the place where God reveals himself continually merciful, and man finds himself continually in Peter's *yes*.

Ecumenism

This new, all-embracing conception of reality developed from the earliest Christian centuries within the Church's experience, perceived as *oikumene*. The Church herself was called *oikumene* (catholic) or *eirene* (peace). The *oikumene* was the vision of the kingdom of Christ that embraces the whole world, all times, and all space. With the word *oikumene* the human, social, and cultural subject was established, capable of embracing the whole universe.

We have used the word "culture" to define the profound way in which the human heart gives rise to an overall image of relationship with itself, with people, and with things. But this cannot derive solely from the enigmatic depth of our elementary experience, with its broad range of needs, interests, and original requirements, so rich but still fragmented and so hard to decipher – a baffling condition that makes man forever restive.⁷⁶ This restlessness is witnessed by the bewilderment found in our modern-day mentality, unable to overcome the divisions and contradictions, which are an inevitable consequence of a cultural conception in which the starting point is always the focus on a detail, idolatrously exalted to qualify everything. It is from this that falsehood and violence inevitably arise.

The Christian term that so well expresses originality and cultural development in the totality of its factors is “ecumenism,”⁷⁷ in its original etymological sense, which derives from *oikumene*. It means that the Christian view reverberates with a momentum that makes you able to exalt all the good that is present in all that you meet, a momentum that makes you acknowledge your participation in that plan that will be perfectly realized in eternity and that has been revealed in Christ.

Ecumenism starts from the Event of Christ, which is the Event of truth in all that is, of all time and space, of history. It is truth happening in the world – the Word has become flesh, the truth has become a human presence in history and remains in the present. This Presence invades – tends to invade – all of reality. When you are clearly conscious of the supreme truth that is the face of Christ, then you see something good in all you meet. Ecumenism is therefore not a generic tolerance that can leave the other person yet a stranger, but a love for the truth that is present in anyone, even if only a fragment of it. Every time a Christian meets a new reality he faces it positively, because it carries some echo of Christ, some echo of the truth.

Nothing is excluded from this positive embrace. This universality is the result of the missionary experience implied in the choice that God makes of the baptized and in the destiny for which one is chosen. The task of the baptized is the universal mission that God communicates to him as a sharing in the great mission of Christ. So the more he is committed to this mission the more he is also committed to discover the good that persists in all things, the fragment or the reflection of truth. Since I am part of the reality of Christ, I look at the mountains, the morning and the evening, all reality, looking first for the ultimate root in everything I see. And the conviction that the truth is in me and with me makes me extremely positive about everything. Not equivocal, but positive. If there is the tiniest bit of truth in something I affirm it. In this way a “critical” approach to reality is born, according to what St Paul says, “*pànta dokimàzete, tò kalòn katéchete*,”⁷⁸ “sift everything and keep what is of value,” what is beautiful, what is true, what corresponds to the original criterion of your heart.

The Christ Event is the true source of the critical attitude, since it does not mean finding the limitations of things, but discovering their value. Along these lines, an episode in an apocryphal writing speaks of Jesus walking through the fields and seeing the rotting carcass of a dead dog. St Peter, who was in front, says, "Master step around it," but Jesus went ahead and stopped before the carcass and said, "What beautiful white teeth!"⁷⁹ It was the only good thing in that rotten carcass. Limitations are notable and strike us all very easily, whereas the true value of things is discovered only by those who have the perception of being and of goodness, those who are able to bring out being and make it loved, without obliterating, cutting off, or denying, because to be critical is not to be hostile to things, but to love them. So you cannot be truly critical if you are not at peace through a love that possesses us and that we possess. Only if you are totally possessed by a love, only if you acknowledge that you belong to the love of Christ "brimming over with peace,"⁸⁰ are we like children who walk without fear in a dark forest.

It is the Event of Christ that creates the new culture and gives rise to true criticism. Valuing the good in all things, however little or however much, commits us to create a new civilization, to love a new construction. Thus a new culture is born, as the bond uniting all the fragments of good that are found, in striving to give them importance and to make them work. You stress the positive, despite its limitations, and you leave the rest to the Father's mercy. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some think, but He uses patience towards you, not wanting anyone to perish, but that all should have the means to repent."⁸¹ It is not that God is slow in coming, but He waits so that in His patience everyone should be able to bear fruit for his soul. The world has to be won over to Christianity in the end by this word that sums up everything: "mercy." The capacity for mercy is expressed as sensitivity to the good, as the certainty that with the power of Christ the good wins over: "I love you God, my strength";⁸² "I am capable of all things in Him in whom is my strength."⁸³

So there is one single source of a positive view of everything. On the other hand whoever is attached to a partial identification, to his own truth, cannot avoid looking at everything while defending his own position, unless he is totally skeptical or nihilist. Often the leaders of peoples, those with various claims to responsibility, if they are filled with common sense, favour a certain "ecumenism," because they are terrified of war and violence, which are inevitable consequences when someone asserts only himself. So it seems that joining together, trying to respect each others' identity might represent the realisation of *eirene*. But this is not peace, it is ambiguity. For at best this ends up as tolerance, in other words radical indifference. Thus the term "ecumenism," as it is proclaimed these days, seems to be the best expression of the good will of those who are in good faith, and are leaders of people, whether they are religious or political leaders. This "ecumenism" understood as a confraternity of the various philanthropic enterprises for building the world, turns out to be the chief enemy of the Christian identity. For at best it is an attempt at tolerance where each one is looking for his own interests and takes from the others what he finds useful. But if each one is only looking for his own particular interests, in the end they will all see each other as potential enemies to be defended against. For in the face of what interests us most, we cease to be tolerant.

Instead Catholic ecumenism is open to everyone and everything, down to the smallest nuances, ready to exalt what has a distant affinity with the truth with all possible generosity. If someone has discovered the real truth, Christ, he proceeds confidently in every kind of encounter, sure of finding a piece of himself in everyone.

True ecumenism keeps on discovering new things, so that there is never a total repetition: one is drawn on by an all-encompassing wonder before beauty. From beauty, time and time again are born images of unsuspected possibilities for repairing the ruined houses and building new ones.⁸⁴ This openness has us find ourselves at home with anyone who preserves a scrap of truth, and feel at ease everywhere. It is the concept of catholicity

not understood geographically (as it has been since 1500), but ontologically defined by truth.

The *Imitation of Christ* says, “Ex uno Verbo omnia et unum loquuntur omnia, et hoc est Principium quod et loquitur nobis.”⁸⁵ (“From one single Word everything, and one single Word cries out everything. And this Word is the Principle that speaks in us.”) It’s impossible to find another culture that defines everything with such a unitary and powerful embrace, that leaves nothing out. Jacopone da Todi in the eleventh century said that everything happens so that we all go together into the “*regno celesto che compie omne festo / che’l cor ha bramato*”⁸⁶ (the heavenly kingdom that perfects every feast / that the heart has longed for). And again, in the finest verse of Italian literature, “*Amor, amore, omne cosa conclama*”⁸⁷ (“Love, love, all things together cry out”). The word love is to be understood in its ultimate sense, as synonymous with Christ, with God who has bent down over us and embraced us. All things together cry out the truth. All things – the flowers of the field, the leaves on the trees, all the pine needles on earth (who knows how God can count them all?).

5 ENTERING INTO REALITY AS A WHOLE

This conception of culture and ecumenism requires a totally new approach to education. Christian formation has the aim of educating the human person in all his dimensions. Christian companionship, understood as the dwelling place of the human, encourages the person persuasively, pedagogically, and systematically to compare himself with reality up to its furthest frontiers, reawakening and sustaining the set of questions and original points of evidence that constitute our heart. This teaches us to sift everything and keep what is good; in other words, it educates us.

What does it mean to educate?

To educate means to help the human soul to enter into reality as a whole.⁸⁸ There is a starting point that makes this definition