



THE INCULTURATION OF CHRISTIAN HUMANISM AT THE HEART OF CULTURES

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I wish to thank our Holy Father Pope John Paul II for appointing me Member of this Pontifical Council for Culture and His Eminence Cardinal Paul Poupard for forwarding that good news to me late last year. For me it is a signal honour to be invited to serve in this esteemed Dicastery and to be asked to address you this morning.

I have been requested to make brief introductory remarks on: *The Inculturation of Christian Humanism at the Heart of cultures*. There is indeed a very close parallelism between Inculturation and Christian Humanism on the one hand, and amid the Incarnation and the Person of Christ on the other. Just as the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (*Jn 1:14*), the Gospel of Jesus Christ is inculturated in human life. Thus just as the Logos confirms humanity, transforms humanity and sometimes corrects and raises fallen humanity, the Gospel confirms culture, transforms culture and corrects culture, thereby uplifting it. In this sense the relationship between the Logos and humanity is analogous to that between Gospel and Culture.

The Catholic Church is at the very centre of the dialogue between culture and Christian Humanism. This dialogue is urgent in our times because of the rift that sometimes exists between the Gospel and cultures as Article 2 of the Motu Proprio *Inde a Pontificatus* so clearly points out. But if there is a gap between the Gospel and cultures, it is equally true that there is also a profound relationship between faith and culture. The challenge, therefore, is to develop "the synthesis between faith and culture" as the same Motu Proprio indicates. The primary task here is the mutual enrichment of faith and culture. Indeed, the final sentence in Article 2 of the Motu Proprio *Inde a Pontificatus* is that the Church has a "pastoral activity in evangelising cultures and inculturating the Gospel". This is of particular relevance in the area of African Christian marriage, given the central place of the family in African and all human societies.

The inculturation of the Gospel in Africa needs to take into consideration the increasing influence of urbanization including the sub-cultures of large African cities, the changing sociology of the African family and the secular trends brought in by the mass media.

The term Christian Humanism, developed by Christian thinkers such as Jacques Maritain and M. D. Chenu earlier in our passing century is referred to in various other ways: integral humanism, complete humanism, true humanism etc. It is intimately connected to the dignity of the human person and the renewal of culture based on Gospel values. It is related to the history of the enlightenment and the synthesis of natural and supernatural humanism. Our Holy Father aptly re-emphasizes this expression along with the "culture of life" to counteract the effects of secular humanism and the "culture of death" in certain contemporary thinking. It is vital for the Church to move in this direction indicated by the Holy Father. Thank you.