

AN AUTHENTIC RESPONSE
TO THE CALL OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH

(Keynote address at the 50th Anniversary
Tekakwitha Conference, at Fargo, North Dakota,
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INTRODUCTION

The Tekakwitha Conference has every reason to acknowledge the workings of Divine Providence, to be filled with gratitude to God, and to rejoice as it celebrates its half century of existence. From its small beginnings in 1939 as a missionary priest advisory group founded by the great and foresighted Aloysius Cardinal Muench, the Conference has evolved into an organization of Native American Catholics together with those who minister ^{with} ~~to~~ them, and has eventually graduated into a vibrant and promising North American movement. I rejoice with you at the growth of your Conference. Please accept my gratitude and that of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, for your kind invitation ^{for} ~~to~~ me to participate in this celebration of your Golden Jubilee.

I address you as fellow Christians, as ^{brothers} ~~men~~ and ^{sisters} ~~women~~ who, like myself, have been called to live in the wonderful light of Christ (cf. I Pet 2:9) and to manifest how his Gospel can be lived concretely in every culture. We also meet and reflect as fellow Christians whose cultural and family roots are to be found in the traditional ^{sacred ways and} religions: in your case in the traditional ^{sacred ways} ~~religions~~ of the Native Americans, and in my case in African traditional religion.

2. Since one of the major objectives of the Tekakwitha Conference is attention to the religious and spiritual traditions and values of the Native American cultures, I wish to propose to you some reflections on the following points:

- I. Importance of the Cultural Roots of a People.
- II. Bringing the Gospel to a People in their Culture.
- III. Traditional Religions and the Importance of Pastoral
- Attention to them.
- IV. Dialogue and Study.
- V. Some Key Doctrinal Points.
- VI. Looking towards the Future.

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE CULTURAL ROOTS OF A PEOPLE

3. Unity and Diversity

All human beings have a fundamental unity because it is God who made them all "in his own image and likeness" (Gen 1:27).

He made them all for himself, to be eternally happy with him in heaven. Moreover, God's plan of salvation is also one for all humanity. It is centred in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became man for our sake.

In cultures, however, peoples and nations may differ. Every people or nation has its own way of expressing itself, of looking at events and of behaving. Every people has its philosophy of life, its customs and traditions, its code of conduct, its view of the universe and the place of the human being within it, its *sacred way* of religion. In short, every people or nation has its own culture.

4. You have deep Cultural Roots

You, as the various Native peoples of America, have deep cultural roots. The Creator has walked with you and your ancestors along the centuries. You are richly gifted in your traditions, history, customs, sacred ways and cultures. These contain significant

teachings and values. They are to be found in your oral traditions, songs, dances, stories, paintings, art and ways of living. Your collective historical consciousness merits respect and credibility.

As native peoples from many nations and tribes in the east, the south, the west and the north, you believe in and respect the Creator and all his creation. Your prayers, your sacred ceremonies to renew all creation, your vision quests, your sweats, your fasting, your stories of love for the extended family, your appreciation and respect for the dignity and worth of every human being from conception right up to natural death, and your stewardship and care of mother earth, contribute not only to your identity but also to your unity as the peoples that you are. They form also a significant contribution to the patrimony of the entire human family.

You are right, and you have every right, to strive to recognize more and more who you are and to tell it to others. This calm and clear idea of your own identity helps you to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ and remain authentically Native Americans and authentically Christians.

h 4/ Your historic Participation in the Assisi Day of Prayer

On 27 October 1986 His Holiness, Pope John Paul II invited representatives of the major world religions to come to Assisi to fast and pray for peace. You were represented there. Mr Burton Pretty On Top, Mr John Pretty On Top, accompanied by your able *out-going* Conference Executive Director, Father Gilbert Hemauer, and Mr Thomas B. Constantino, represented you. It was an opportunity for the larger world to know more about your culture and traditions. And the world showed interest.

The assessment which Mr Burton Pretty On Top, Sr., gave of the Assisi celebration is significant. He wrote: "The unity and respect for each other's sacred ways was one of the most visible

reflections I had on the Day of Prayer for Peace. There were different tongues, and different religions and sacred ways of each race; but the message was one: All for World Peace. Praying to the one God and all of our roots, and coming from Mother Earth tells us that we are one family" (in Tekakwitha Newsletter, Winter 1986/1987, p. 11). The Assisi celebration was for you an encouragement to give more attention to your culture and see how it can receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not only enrich you but also contribute to the universal Church and the world at large.

6. Elements of your Culture

Each people must carefully study its culture especially those elements which can be related to the Gospel. In your various cultures, for example, you might identify elements such as the following: stories, chant, dance and sacrifice. I understand that among you, sacrifice is a particularly important theme. One finds it operative in the accounts of your revered patroness, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. The sun dance, vision quest, sweat lodge and period fastings are other examples. There is the insight in your culture and traditional religion that one must endure self-humiliation and self-deprivation for the sake of something greater, something of spiritual value. You are also known for patience, endurance and the ability to survive.

As in some other traditional religions, ^{or sacred ways,} you may also notice in yours and in your culture a sense of the sacred, a spiritual vision of life, a concept of authority which is not secular and divorced from God but rather a holy trust, and a rich pattern of symbols by which the invisible world can be apprehended and interpreted.

The above, and such like, are elements of religion and culture which need to be studied, identified, ~~and~~ ^{and understood.} analysed. In this way their openness to the Gospel can be better assessed.

7. Importance of Cultural Roots

People alienated from their cultural roots are like a living plant which has been uprooted and thrown on the ground. As its roots shrivel and die, so does the plant.

When Jesus Christ came into this world, he came among one definite people with a precise language, with traditions and customs, with rites and symbols. This was necessary because he was true man, accepting the limitations of human nature. But as Son of God made man and universal Saviour, he came for all and so his message, shown especially in his words and actions, goes beyond the limits of his own culture.

When the Gospel meets a people's culture, the Gospel does not destroy what is good, true or noble in that culture. The theologians say that God's grace enhances, heals, elevates and transforms nature; it does not destroy nature.

True, the Gospel is not identified with any one culture. But each people's culture is important because it is through it that the people develop as persons, articulate their wishes, communicate with others and strive to ^{realize} ~~attain~~ their potentialities (cf. Vatican II: Gaudium and Spes, n. 53).

8. The Teaching Authority of the Church emphasizes this Point

Pope Paul VI emphasizes that culture and the Good News of Jesus Christ must meet: "Fidelity both to the message whose servants we are, and to the people to whom we must transmit it living and intact, is the central axis of evangelization" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, n. 4).

On that unforgettable day, 14 September 1987 at Phoenix, Arizona, Pope John Paul II encouraged you to give attention to your culture. He said: "Within this family each people preserves and expresses its own identity and enriches others with its gifts of culture, tradition, customs, stories, song, dance, art and

skills. From the very beginning, the Creator bestowed his gifts on each people. It is clear that stereotyping, prejudice, bigotry and racism demean the human dignity which comes from the hand of the Creator and which is seen in variety and diversity. I encourage you, as native people belonging to the different tribes and nations in the East, South, West and North, to preserve and keep alive your cultures, your languages, the values and customs which have served you well in the past and which provide a solid foundation for the future. Your customs that mark the various stages of life, your love for the extended family, your respect for the dignity and worth of every human being, from the unborn to the aged, and your stewardship and care of the earth: these things benefit not only yourselves but the entire human family" (in Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, X, 3, 1987, p. 514-515, Address to Native Americans, n. 4).

II. BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO A PEOPLE IN THEIR CULTURE

9. Approved Missionary Method of the Church

The approved missionary method of the Church is that the herald of the Gospel should pay great attention to each people and culture that is receiving the Good News. The missionary who comes to a new people must listen to, observe and strive to understand, the people and their customs, symbols, myths, stories and teachings. This will help the missionary to ^{share with} ~~bring~~ the people the Good News of Jesus Christ so that it can strike deep roots among them. Moreover, needless mistakes in evangelization will thereby be avoided.

If in any particular area of the world there has not been adequate attention paid to the people's culture in the work of evangelization, this is not due to lack of proper official directives

from the Church, but due to failure to follow these instructions. Indeed this cardinal principle of missionary method was laid down as far back as 1659 when the Vatican Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith instructed the missionaries who were going to China and Indo-China to respect and adopt local customs as far as possible, and warned them against what Cardinal Costantini has aptly called "religious colonization". The famous document of 1659 reads: "Put no obstacles in their way, and for no reason whatever should you persuade these people to change their rites, customs, and ways of life, unless these are obviously opposed to religion and good morals. For what is more absurd than to bring France or Spain or Italy or any other part of Europe into China? It is not these that you should bring but the faith which does not spurn or reject any peoples' rites and customs, unless they are depraved, but on the contrary tries to keep them....Admire and praise what deserves to be respected" (Collectanea S.C.P.F. Vol. 1, n. 135, p. 42).

10. Other Religions and Cultures can be a Preparation for the Gospel

The Spirit of God has been active in history in the various cultures and peoples. Some Fathers of the Church in the second and third centuries, such as Saints Justin, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, show remarkable openness to the religions and cultures that existed before Christ. These authors speak about the "seeds" sown by the Word of God in the nations. They consider that God has already in some ways manifested himself to them. St Augustine in his later works spoke of the universal presence and influence of the mystery of Christ even before the incarnation.

In ways which we may not know, God's light and action have been present and operative among peoples in their cultures long

before the Son of God became man. The human soul is made by God for himself. It is in search of God. Nothing less than God can satisfy it. The Holy Spirit moves the human soul in this search, even in the midst of errors due to human weakness, sin and, in some cases perhaps, the influence of the devil. The Holy Spirit also works "outside the visible confines of the Mystical body" (John Paul II: Redemptor Hominis, n. 6. Cf. also Lumen Gentium, n. 16; Gaudium et Spes, n. 22; Ad Gentes, n. 15). "The Spirit both anticipates and accompanies the path of the Church which, nevertheless, feels itself impelled to discern the signs of his presence, to follow him wherever he leads, and to serve him as a humble and discreet collaborator" (Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue: Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of other Religions, n. 24).

11. The Church respects this action of Providence

The Catholic Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council, adopts therefore a positive attitude towards the other religions. The Council exhorts Catholics prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these other believers, as well as the values in their society and culture. Then they will learn "what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth" (Vatican II: Ad Gentes, n. 11; cf. also Nostra Aetate, n. 2).

By interreligious dialogue the Church puts herself as an instrument into the hands of divine providence and in God's working out of His own mystery of salvation. In such a dialogue

the Church discovers the working of God in other religions, elements of truth and grace, seeds of the Word, seeds of contemplation, elements which are true and good, precious things both religious and human, ways of truth which illumines all mankind, and preparation for the Gospel, as the Second Vatican Council says in various documents (cf. Ad Gentes nn. 9, 11, 15, 18; Optatam Totius n. 16; Gaudium et Spes, n. 92; Nostra Aetate, n. 2; Lumen Gentium, n. 16).

You can see from this attitude that in ^{preaching} ~~bringing~~ the Gospel to a people the Church wants very delicate attention to be paid to the religion and culture of that people because these hearers of the Good News do not come from a religious and cultural void. Says the Second Vatican Council: "The Church or People of God takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people by establishing that kingdom. Rather does she foster and take to herself, insofar as they are good, the ability, resources, and customs of each people. Taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens, and ennobles them. The Church in this is mindful that she must harvest with that King to whom the nations were given for an inheritance (cf. Ps. 2:8) and into whose city they bring gifts and presents (cf. Ps. 71(72): 10; Is. 60:4-7; Apoc. 21:24). This characteristic of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord Himself. By reason of it, the Catholic Church strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity with all its riches back to Christ its Head in the unity of His Spirit" (Lumen Gentium, n. 13).

12. The Church rejects Racism

All this is exemplified and reinforced by the Church's rejection^{of} racism. Already in 1537 Pope Paul III denounced the errors of those European colonizers in the Americas who held that "the inhabitants of the West Indies and the southern continents... should be treated like

irrational animals and used exclusively for our profit and our service" (quoted by Pont. Council for Justice and Peace: The Church and Racism, p. 11).

The Second Vatican Council asserted the basic equality of all human beings. God created every one of them in his own image and likeness. Christ by taking on human nature has in some way joined himself with every human being. And all are redeemed by the one Saviour Jesus Christ (cf. Gaudium et Spes, nn. 22, 29). Therefore "every form of discrimination based on race... is absolutely unacceptable", as Pope John Paul II said to the U.N. Special Committee against Apartheid on 7 July 1984 (cf. Address, n. 1, in Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, VII, 2, 1984, p. 36).

The principle of equality in dignity, to be sure, does not destroy diversity, complementarity, different cultural endowments and differing degrees of development. It asserts that "No human group, however, can boast of having a natural superiority over others". This has been clearly enunciated by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in paragraph 23 of its fine document, The Church and Racism, published at the end of 1988.

13. Popes and Bishops urge the Evangelization of Culture

Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, says that peoples and cultures must be evangelized. Evangelization should affect, and when necessary upset, people's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, by subjecting them to the light of God's Word. "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.

The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, n. 20).

In 1982 Pope John Paul II instituted the Pontifical Council for Culture to impress upon the Church the urgent need of dialogue with each human culture and the importance of the evangelization of culture. Christ comes into every human culture, to confirm some aspects, to transform or purify some others, and to speak the prophetic word of condemnation against still others.

On 14 September 1987 the Holy Father said to you at Phoenix: "Your gifts can also be expressed even more fully in the Christian way of life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is at home in every people. It enriches, uplifts and purifies every culture " (in Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, X, 3, 1987, P. 515).

The Catholic Bishops of the United States had said the same thing in paragraph 8 of their 4 May 1977 Statement on American Indians: "The Christian faith should celebrate and strengthen the many diverse cultures which are the product of human hope and aspiration. The Gospel message must take root and grow within each culture and each community. Faith finds expression in and through the particular values, customs and institutions of the people who hear it. It seeks to take flesh within each culture, within each nation, within each race, while remaining the prisoner of none".

III. TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PASTORAL ATTENTION TO THEM

14. Traditional Religions widespread

Traditional religions are to be found in Africa, Asia, America and Oceania. They differ widely even within the same country. Here are some of the features which can be identified in some of them: beliefs and an accompanying set of customs handed down carefully from generation to generation, an integrating element in the people's lives, a religion not generally based on a revealed book, a religion which permeates life in such a way that it is often difficult to distinguish between strict religious elements and local custom, a religion which strives to offer its followers an answer to sickness, suffering and other crises in a holistic synthesis between religion and life, a religion which marks the major moments of life such as birth, adulthood, marriage, the installation of leaders and death, a religion which cherishes a permanent link with ancestors, a religion which pays great attention to the earth, to the seasons and to creation, a religion which believes in a life after death, and finally a religion which has no doubt about the existence of a Superior Being and his action on creation.

The elements of history, integration, communality and the sense of the sacred characterize these systems of beliefs and practices. Traditional religions have helped peoples to know who they are, what their place is in this world, and how to govern their relations with one another and with the spirit world. These religions have taught their adherents the sacred ways through which they strive to walk in the paths of the Great One, the Mighty Spirit, or however the various peoples have referred to God, or the Divine, the Transcendent that is yet everywhere in their midst.

15. 1988 Roman Document

The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue (formerly called the Secretariat for Non-Christians) has grappled with the question of continuity and discontinuity in regard to African Traditional Religion. In particular it raised the question of the situation of those Christians who have been converted from this religion. In March 1988 it sent a letter to the Presidents of all the Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar to urge increased pastoral attention to African Traditional Religion. There are many reasons why this effort should be called for. I suspect that a number of them are applicable not only to traditional religion in Africa, but also to that of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, of Oceania, and of those regions in Asia where the traditional religion is a living force in the lives of the people.

16. Why give Attention to Traditional Religion?

What are these reasons for devoting our time and attention and study to African traditional religion? First of all, it is the religious and cultural context in which so many African Christians today find their roots. Others of our own peoples still live these traditions. Moreover, many Christians, at critical moments in their lives, have recourse to the forms and practices of traditional religion: to healing methods, initiation rites, meditative practices, ascetical regimes, fortune-telling, and consultation of dreams.

The fact that a traditional religion is still alive and dynamic is certainly a factor which motivates us to study and reflect upon it. But also our very Christian faith encourages this investigation *and effort at understanding.*

The Catholic Church has declared repeatedly that we respect the religions and cultures of the peoples of this planet and that we desire to preserve all that is noble, true, and good in them. The encounter with traditional religion helps us to understand the felt needs of our peoples, so that it might become clearer to us how Christianity can meet those needs. A deeper knowledge of traditional religion and culture can enrich our Christian catechesis and worship. In my own Nigerian context, for example, the strong emphasis on the family and on the community aspect of our traditional lives is very helpful in presenting the Church as a spiritual family, as the "communion of Saints". This influences the celebration of marriage especially. So we must approach traditional religion with open minds, our Christian faith seeking fresh expressions in the philosophy and wisdom of our people.

IV. DIALOGUE AND STUDY

17. Dialogue in two senses

This pastoral approach to traditional religion might be termed a dialogue. Just as Christians are called upon to enter into dialogue with the followers of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions, so too a serious dialogue must be undertaken with the adherents of traditional religions. This dialogue can be said to have two sides or aspects. On the one hand, we come into friendly and respectful contact with our neighbours and relatives who still follow a traditional religion. We learn the values they find in their religion and how these values are expressed in prayer, art, custom, and social relations. And from us they learn about the Gospel.

On the other hand, and this is the other side of the coin, there is the "internal dialogue" which goes on inside each of us who has been called from a traditional religion to follow Christ.

It is from the internal dialogue which takes place within individuals and communities who have accepted Christ, that the answer to the questions of continuity and discontinuity must, through God's grace, emerge. What are the good and worthy elements of the traditional religion in which we and our peoples have been formed which Jesus Christ came to affirm, strengthen, and integrate into a culturally sound discipleship? Which are the elements of our traditional religion which Christ has come to transform, to give a new and deeper meaning, and to raise to new heights of spiritual significance?

18. No Romanticizing of Traditional Religion

Yet, it must be admitted, our internal dialogue will also discover some aspects of traditional religion which are incompatible with the manner and message of Christ. For we must not romanticize traditional religion. Our attitude must be simultaneously respectful and critical. For if Christ had come solely to confirm and affirm, he would never have met with rejection and had to undergo the cross. In Jesus' own life, we see him confirming all that was most valuable and elevated in his own Jewish tradition. We see him transforming some aspects of that tradition and giving them a new meaning which could only be discovered through an encounter with his person and mission. And we see him also in his prophetic role denouncing all those ways in which the tradition had been manipulated to serve the interests of a few and become an instrument of oppression against the many. Above all, he announces a new Covenant between God and humanity.

In its letter to the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue indicated the need to spell out the negative elements that may be found in African traditional religion and culture, such as

inadequate ideas on the objects of worship, objectionable moral practices, degrading rites, polygamy, discrimination against women, human sacrifice, and the rejection of twins. In other traditional cultures and religions, the examples of inhumane and un-Christian elements are likely to be different, just as the oppressive and destructive aspects of industrialized technological cultures are different again from those of traditional societies. The point is that Christians cannot close their eyes to whatever is incompatible with the life and teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

19. The Gospel expressed in a Culture

The ^{old} Good News of Jesus Christ is expressed in and among various human cultures. As Pope John XXIII said to the inaugural assembly of the Second Vatican Council: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another" (John XXIII: Opening Speech to the Council, in W. Abbot: Documents of Vat. II, p. 75). The faith never changes. Its cultural expression can and should change according to the peoples, times, and places.

When missionaries ^{preach} ~~bring~~ the faith to a people, they may unwittingly bring with them their home cultural patterns. It is not an easy matter to distinguish in practice what is essential to the Gospel and what is due to historical or cultural developments. Moreover, the Church lives in time, and grows in her understanding and living of the mystery of Christ.

Some people in Africa and Asia have reacted to Christianity as if it were the same as colonialism, have rejected the Christian Message as foreign, and have tried to resurrect or to perpetuate the religion of their ancestors. Such rejection is not the appropriate answer. What is needed is study, understanding, delicate discernment,

patience, humility, and faith. The Gospel Message is valid for all cultures and should be at home in them all.

20. Study is needed

In order that the delicate and difficult development outlined above may take place, study is needed in each cultural area. You as Native Americans need ^{your own} experts in history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy and religion who will carefully document and assess your traditions, rituals, stories, oral teachings, dances, initiation rites, prayers and, in a word, your religion and culture.

The more difficult work in the theological area will then have to be grappled with. Says the Second Vatican Council: "Theologic investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area, as it is called. In this way, under the light of the tradition of the universal Church, a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to sacred Scripture, and which have been unfolded by the Church Fathers and the teaching authority of the Church.

Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result, avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life. Thanks to such a procedure, every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism can be excluded, and Christian life can be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture" (Ad Gentes, n. 22).

All this will need time, talent, patience, faith, humility, communion within the Church and obedience out of love for Christ and the Church.

21. Dialogue and Sharing

One result will be that there will be dialogue, sharing and mutual enrichment within the universal Church and also between peoples and between cultures. The Church promotes healthy variety in her catholic unity. "In virtue of this catholicity each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of other parts and of the whole Church" (Lumen Gentium, n. 13). Pope John Paul II told you at Phoenix that your customs benefit not only yourselves but the entire human family. In 1984 he had said something similar to the native peoples at the Shrine of Saint Anne de Beaupré in Canada: "Your encounter with the Gospel has not only enriched you; it has enriched the Church. We are well aware that this has not taken place without its difficulties and, occasionally, its blunders. However, you are experiencing this today, the Gospel does not destroy what is best in you. On the contrary, it enriches, as it were from within, the spiritual qualities and gifts that are distinctive of your cultures" (Address of 10 Sept 1984, n. 3, in Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, VII, 2, 1984, p. 407).

One culture and people also dialogues with other cultures and peoples and shares with them. We are one human family. We can and should enrich each other. No living culture can remain static. No people has a monopoly of all that is good, true, noble, beautiful and holy. For example, millions of people have come to this country, especially from Europe, bringing with them their knowledge, skills, religion and culture. By meeting in respectful

dialogue, seeking to understand one another and sharing, both sides can grow. This applies to relations within the Catholic Church and also, with the necessary adjustments, to contacts with other Christians and other believers.

The Catholic Bishops of the United States emphasized this necessity in paragraph 12 of their 1977 Statement: "Today, we Americans are called to reflect upon past injustices and to consider again the need for both unity and diversity, to become one nation built upon respect for the distinctive traditions and values of many peoples and cultures. Both respect for cultural diversity and dialogue between cultures are indispensable if the legitimate quest for cultural identity is to lead to human development and social progress and not simply perpetuate the bitter divisions of the past. The challenge of this effort is placed before the nation by Black Americans, by Spanish-speaking Americans, by the heirs of Europe's migrations and by the persevering voice of the oldest Americans, the American Indians".

Modern technology has brought many benefits to humankind in the field of industrial development, in medical science and in the art of communication. Yet there is a danger of a "levelling down", as valid traditional elements are lost sight of. It is here that traditional ways of understanding people and nature have much to contribute, along with the Gospel.

V. KEY DOCTRINAL ELEMENTS

In the effort to find suitable expressions and formulations of the Christian faith within your own cultural context, and indeed in any other, some of the key doctrines of our faith to be kept in mind are the following.

22. The Centrality of Christ

The revealed nature of the message brought us by Christ and the centrality of Christ in God's plan of salvation are of prime importance. In Jesus Christ, the Son of God who took on human nature for us, who suffered, died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all people as a gift of God's boundless love and mercy. Christ brings us new life. The Gospel is superior to all cultures and religions and is not a natural development of any. Yet it is for all peoples and religions and is at home among them all. As your Bishops said in 1977: "This Good News of salvation is not bound by time or human structures. Christ's Gospel of love and redemption, addressed to all people, transcends national boundaries, cultural differences and divisions among peoples. It cannot be considered foreign anywhere on earth; nor can it be considered identical with any particular culture or heritage. It is the common blessing of all". (Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on American Indians, n. 6).

23. Other key doctrinal points are the irreplaceable and normative role of the Bible and of Tradition in forming our faith, the unity of the Church for which Christ prayed and sacrificed himself, and the role of the Successor of St Peter in the communion of the local Churches with the Church of Rome and among themselves.

These provide the necessary framework within which the riches of the traditional religion can find their fulfilment, while we take care to preserve the unity of the Catholic faith around the world.

VI. LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Let us close with a look towards the future of your people in the Catholic Church.

24. Love the Gospel

My brothers and sisters, love the Gospel. As Pope John Paul II said to you at Phoenix, Arizona, "This Gospel of Jesus Christ is today, and will remain forever, the greatest pride and possession of your people". The Catholic Church which announces this Good News has the necessary unity, love, diversity, flexibility and universality to accommodate all peoples and offer them the opportunity to respond to God's call while remaining authentically of their culture.

25. Develop Native American Leadership in the Church

I rejoice with you that from your ranks have come two Bishops and at least 30 priests, 60 Permanent Deacons, 90 Religious Brothers and Sisters and many leading lay persons. The younger people and the families have to reflect and pray over the need for more priests and also sisters and brothers. The Church among every people needs such consecrated people in large numbers for effective permeation of the Gospel message in society. At the same time, well-prepared and fully-committed lay faithful are needed for leadership in the Church.

On this important point of leadership the U.S. Bishops said in 1977: "Perhaps the most important task before us is the development of Indian leadership - clerical, religious and lay - within the Church. This is necessary if the Church is to prosper in Indian communities. We are especially encouraged by the efforts of several dioceses to include American Indians in their permanent diaconate programs and hope that this effort is expanded. In addition,

efforts should be made to insure that American Indians have representation and a voice in all decisions made by Church agencies and organizations affecting their communities". (Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on American Indians, n. 28).

26. Continue Study and Reflection

Study and reflection on how the Gospel can become better rooted in your culture and how your culture can be transformed by the Gospel must continue. Theologians, diocesan and national liturgical commissions and producers of catechetical textbooks and audio-visual aids and hymnbooks, must be encouraged to continue to search for expressions of the realities of the Catholic way in Native American idiom (cf. Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on American Indians, n. 26).

27. Fraternity and Solidarity within the Church in the U.S.

The promotion of Native American culture and leadership in the Catholic Church will be greatly aided by fraternity and solidarity within the Church in this great country. Pope John Paul II at Phoenix, Arizona, urged "the local Churches to be truly 'catholic' in their outreach to native peoples, and to show respect and honour for their culture and all their worthy traditions".

CONCLUSION

28. I salute the efforts which have been made by the Tekakwitha Conference during the first half-century of its life. You have sought to maintain and proclaim your Christian faith; you have sought to preserve and promote what is best in your heritage as the indigenous people of this continent; and you are committed to carry that work into the future, as a genuine service, not only to your own peoples, but also to all the cultures represented

in your country today, and indeed to the wider world. I urge you to continue your efforts to take seriously your tradition. We all still have much to learn and many areas in which our understanding must be deepened. We have Someone great to proclaim, yet many paths to explore in order to promote better the evangelization of the multi-faceted and culturally pluralist world of today. And we have Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha to intercede for us. May Mary Immaculate, Mother of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, obtain for us all the graces that we need for this challenging vocation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Francis Card. Arinze". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'F' and a long, sweeping tail.

Francis Card. Arinze
3rd August, 1989.