

JOHN PAUL II'S CORE TEACHING ON CULTURE (1979–1980)

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“This deep aspiration of the human spirit for God and the meaning of existence, as well as the expression of this quest in various ways, is the heart of culture.”



Karol Wojtyła was destined to become an advocate for beauty and culture on the day he was elected to the papacy on October 16, 1978. As a man of great cultural sensitivity—an actor and author, a scholar and professor who probed the anthropological and ethical dimensions of culture, a pastoral priest and bishop ministering to educators and artists, a Polish patriot who keenly appreciated the role of culture in sustaining Polish identity—he relished the opportunity to make his first bold proclamation: “Open wide the doors for Christ . . . the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development.”¹ The impact of the Church on economic and political systems during his papacy is very well documented

1. John Paul II, Homily for the Inauguration of His Pontificate (Vatican City, 22 October 1978), 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html.

and celebrated. Perhaps lesser-known are his tremendous efforts to open the doors of the domains of culture and civilization, doors that were shut tightly against the message, and man, of the Gospel. Nevertheless, his youthful dream of an “Athenian Poland,” more perfect than Athens because of the “boundless immensity of Christianity,”² resounded often in many different climes, places, and cultures during his long pontificate. Inculturation and the Christian transformation of culture was the theme of one of his fourteen encyclicals, *Slavorum apostoli* (1985), a brilliant but often neglected work. Culture was also a constant topic in many of his encounters with university students, faculty, and administrators, but also in meetings with political leaders, international groups, and, of course, artists. In 1983 he founded the Pontifical Council for Culture, having given almost a hundred talks on culture during the first five years of his pontificate (almost twenty per year).³ His dedication to culture and the work of artists found a culminating point twenty years later in his *Letter to Artists* (1999), toward whom he felt “closely linked by experiences reaching far back in time and which have indelibly marked [his] life” (1). He reaches very far back, over sixty years, when, in German-occupied Poland, Karol Wojtyła joined a group of actors who met in basements and kitchens to rehearse long passages from great Polish literature. In the *Letter to Artists* he extols works of art for revealing “the original contribution which artists offer to the history of culture” (2).

But his last great advocacy for culture is found in *Roman Triptych*, a series of poems stemming from his meditations on the work of the greatest of artists: *il divino*, Michelangelo. According to Pope Benedict XVI, we discover in the poem “a pilgrim journeying inward and upward.”⁴ Culture is an inward or im-

2. Adam Boniecki, *The Making of the Pope of the Millennium: Kalendarium of the Life of Karol Wojtyła* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2000), 63–64; and Dariusz Radziejowski, “‘Culture of the Person’ and ‘Culture of Works’ According to Karol Wojtyła,” *Logos i ethos* 56, no. 1 (2021): 87.

3. See Joseph Gremillion, ed., *The Church and Culture since Vatican II: The Experience of North and Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985). For a list of all the pope’s statements on culture from 1978 to 1984, see *ibid.*, 223–34.

4. Pope Benedict XVI, *John Paul II: My Beloved Predecessor*, ed. Elio Guerriero (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2007), 50.

manent achievement of the person, and such an achievement is necessarily “transcendent” or “oriented upward,” so to speak, toward what is true, good, and beautiful. “The name of the source that the pilgrim discovers is, above all, the ‘Word’” (ibid., 49). As Benedict says, the key words that sum up the pilgrimage are “vision and seeing.” This vision will lead to a communion of persons, a mutual exchange: “If, at first, we saw God beginning from man, we now learn to see the human person beginning from God: a reciprocal gift of self—the human person is destined for this” (ibid., 51). Such would be the fullness of a culture of love, a civilization of love, which furthers the pilgrimage of the person toward God. John Paul II’s prior philosophical work establishes the dynamism of the person from the standpoint of a phenomenology of human action, and such an account opens up the dimension of culture as the “shape of transcendence.”⁵

Our plan is to survey the thought of John Paul II on culture by way of considering (1) the clues to the meaning of culture laid out at the outset of his pontificate in his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis* (= *RH*); and (2) two early statements made in 1980 about culture, which we will designate as his “treatise” on culture (address to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and his “manifesto” on culture (Brazilian address).

1. CLUES TO THE MEANING OF CULTURE IN *REDEMPTOR HOMINIS*

Although the term “culture” is only mentioned three times in *Redemptor hominis*, the reason for the extraordinary care and concern dedicated to the theme of culture in his pontificate will become apparent when we look closely at the context for each use of the term. This encyclical was promulgated in March of 1979, soon after he was elected pope. Much later in life he said, “Everything I said in the encyclical I brought with me from Poland.”⁶ Prior to its promulgation, he said, “I tried to express

5. Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1979), 181.

6. John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 5.

in it what has animated and continually animates my thoughts and my heart since the beginning of the pontificate,”⁷ that is, thoughts of the beauty and love of Jesus Christ as well as a deep amazement at the human person. Such thoughts, he reflects, had been “maturing in me previously, during the years of my service as a priest, and then as a bishop,” and now Christ wanted “these calls of the intellect and heart, these expressions of faith, hope, and charity, to ring out in my new and universal ministry, right from its beginning” (*ibid.*). These calls defined and continued to animate his priestly life and his service as bishop. His responsiveness to them became amplified through his papacy for the whole Church, and indeed for the world at large for many years to come. This statement reveals much about the significance of *Redemptor hominis*.

Redemptor hominis, a short encyclical, has four parts. In part one, “Inheritance” (1–6), after announcing his main theme—“the Redeemer of Man, Jesus Christ,” as the center of the universe and history—he explains his presence and mission in the Chair of Peter, namely to build upon the work of the popes of Vatican II. In part two, “The Mystery of the Redemption” (7–12), he explains the fundamental principles of Christian faith pertaining to the Incarnation and Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and why this leads to a deep amazement at the dignity of the human person. In part three, “Redeemed Man and his Situation in the Modern World” (13–17), he discusses the plight of the human person in the world today who faces the degradation of life brought about by the recoil of technology, the menace of totalitarian oppression, and the allure of boundless freedom, as well as how redemption offers hope in our present day. In part four, “The Church’s Mission and Man’s Destiny” (18–22), he uses the threefold office of Christ to establish principles for the Church to embody a civilization of love. The roots of cultural renewal are opened up in part two: they are in the human person’s powers of intellect and will, in his concrete subjectivity as a person in the world. The principles for cultural renewal—ethos, person, and spirit—are laid out in part three. In part four

7. John Paul II, *Angelus* (Vatican City, 11 March 1979), 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/angelus/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19790311.html.

(18), John Paul II articulates the Augustinian principle for evangelization and the encounter of the Gospel with culture.⁸ The heart of the document is found in his declaration that,

in reality, the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity. This amazement determines the Church's mission in the world and, perhaps even more so, "in the modern world." This amazement, which is also a conviction and a certitude—at its deepest root it is the certainty of faith, but in a hidden and mysterious way it vivifies every aspect of authentic humanism—is closely connected with Christ. (*RH*, 10)

John Paul II looks to Christ from a broader perspective than that of faith, for "He, the Son of the living God, speaks to people also as Man: it is his life that speaks, his humanity, his fidelity to the truth, his all-embracing love" (7). As the pope acknowledges, Christ has earned a place in the "history of man and of mankind" (10), but it is of course from within faith that he arrives at the deepest admiration for the human person as redeemed in love. Jesus Christ is the new Adam who has brought to human beings a restored relationship with God, has made them into a new creation. John Paul II explains that, in our actions and projects, we have lost the link with "the divine source of Wisdom and Love" (8), namely God. "As this link was broken in the man Adam, so in the Man Christ it was reforged (cf. Rom 5:12–21)" (8). In the twentieth century, this broken link, the alienation from God and others, has become magnified by the pace and intensity of man's projects.

The descent of the human race, devoid of wisdom and love, reaches an extreme depravity in the German death camps on Polish soil. There is a very concrete point of reference for the rock bottom of futility, sin, and alienation: in Polish the place is called Oświęcim (Auschwitz). It is the end of the line for man in his mastery of nature, now sweeping up all humans as potential objects; it is the end of the line for totalitarian rule and control;

8. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, he speaks of "the history of evangelization" as "a history that developed in the encounter of the Gospel with the culture of each epoch" (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* [New York: Knopf, 1994], 108).

it is the end of the line for the ultimate degradation of humanity in both prisoner and guard. Three months after the publication of *Redemptor hominis*, when John Paul II returned to his native Poland and spoke at the Brzezinka concentration camp, he said,

I have come to pray with all of you who have come here today and with the whole of Poland and the whole of Europe. Christ wishes that I who have become the Successor of Peter should give witness before the world to what constitutes the *greatness and the misery* of contemporary man, to what is *his defeat and his victory*.

I have come and I kneel on this Golgotha of the modern world.⁹

At the very place where man was destroyed in body and spirit, John Paul looks to Maximilian Kolbe as a man who lived a life of service, a man who “reforged the link” with wisdom and love through faith. He would often look back to the life and deeds of the saint for a witness to the possibility of love: “The victory through faith and love was won by him in this place, which was built for the *negation of faith*—faith in God and faith in man—and to trample radically not only on love but on all signs of human dignity, of humanity” (ibid., 1, emphasis added).

Redemptor hominis is about the restoration of our humanity through faith and charity. John Paul II ends section eight by recalling Colossians: Christ as “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), who “restores the divine likeness [to the sons of Adam] which had been disfigured from the first sin onward” (*Gaudium et spes*, 22). Before the renewal of culture and before the restoration of philosophy and political moderation, we need the restoration of our humanity by God’s grace; we need the Redeemer of man. Then we can see victory rising above defeat. Even there, “love is greater than sin, than weakness, than the ‘futility of creation,’ it is stronger than death” (*RH*, 9). This revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: Jesus Christ. From this divine dimension of the mystery of redemption, John Paul II invites all human beings to rediscover their greatness, dignity, and value, if we would but “draw near to

9. John Paul II, Homily (Auschwitz-Birkenau, 7 June 1979), 2 (emphasis added), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790607_polonia-brzezinka.html.

Christ” with our “unrest, uncertainty and even [our] weakness and sinfulness” (10). In directing the human person to discover this restored humanity offered by Christ, the Church fulfills her “fundamental function in every age” and thereby touches the “deepest sphere” of human life, “the sphere of human hearts, consciences and events” (10). It is from this deeper sphere of human life that culture develops and unfolds.

In the section on the mystery of Christ as the basis for the Church’s mission (11), John Paul II speaks of the work of culture. Following in Paul VI’s footsteps, who called for sincere dialogue among world religions, John Paul II speaks about a dialogue with those who do not share our faith. The Church, says John Paul II, must affirm the “primacy of the spiritual, which in the life of mankind finds expression in religion and then in morality, with direct effects on the whole of culture” (11). This first reference to culture, therefore, places it in the context of religion, which is culture’s true root, and morality, which is culture’s primary aim, the education or humanization of the person. For the pope, the deepest aspiration of the human spirit is “expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life” (11). This deep aspiration of the human spirit for God and the meaning of existence, as well as the expression of this quest in various ways, is the heart of culture.¹⁰

The second reference to culture is in the section on “The Church’s Mission and Human Freedom” (*RH*, 12). John Paul II says that “the Church in our time attaches great importance to all that is stated by the Second Vatican Council in its *Declaration on Religious Freedom*” (12). This is because the Church, following Christ himself, shows “a deep esteem for man, for his intellect, his will, his conscience and his freedom”

10. Twelve years later, in his encyclical *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II will define culture explicitly as such: “Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated within the sphere of culture through his language, history, and the position he takes towards the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence” (24). We can better appreciate why in *Redemptor hominis* he speaks of the phenomenon of an atheism that is programmed, organized, and structured as a political system; it is a form of “anti-culture.”

(12). The human person's dignity itself becomes "part of the content of that proclamation, being included not necessarily in words but by an attitude towards it" (12). If we are inspired by a deep amazement for the depths of the human person and filled with wonder at human dignity, then of course we must stand in amazement at the capacity of the person to whom we preach the Gospel. The person is *capax Dei* and destined for communion with God—Christ "makes his supreme calling clear."¹¹ We are thereby enabled to "approach all cultures, all ideological concepts, all people of good will"¹² with respect and esteem for what good may be found. This attitude of respect or esteem for the liberty and cultural expression of the quest for God characterizes St. Paul's missionary attitude at the Areopagus: "We approach them with the esteem, respect and discernment that since the time of the Apostles has marked the *missionary* attitude."¹³ While respecting human freedom, the Church is

11. *Gaudium et spes*, 22, is completed by paragraph 24: "God, Who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, Who 'from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth' (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself. . . . To men growing daily more dependent on one another, and to a world becoming more unified every day, this truth proves to be of paramount importance. Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, 'that all may be one . . . as we are one' (John 17:21–22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."

12. *RH*, 12. The *missionary* attitude always begins with a "feeling of deep esteem for 'what is in man,' for what man has himself worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which 'blows where it wills.' The mission is never destruction, but instead is a taking up and fresh building, even if in practice there has not always been full correspondence with this high ideal. And we know well that the conversion that is begun by the mission is a work of grace, in which man must fully find himself again" (*RH*, 11).

13. *RH*, 12. In 1985, John Paul II also commends Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the apostles to the Slavs, for this same attitude toward the person and culture: "But it is in the specific area of missionary activity that the example of Cyril and Methodius is of even greater value. For this activity is an essential task of the Church, and is urgent today in the already mentioned form of

even more a “guardian of this freedom” (*RH*, 12). Jesus Christ meets the man of every age with the words: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32). This statement has cultural relevance because it contains a “requirement” and a “warning” (*RH*, 12); the requirement for freedom is an “an honest relationship with regard to truth” (12); the warning bids us to avoid “every kind of illusory freedom, every superficial unilateral freedom” (12). We must be wary of whatever “curtails, diminishes and as it were breaks off this freedom at its root, in man’s soul, his heart and his conscience” (12). The roots of culture must tap human freedom, but human freedom as nourished by truth in conscience and in the heart.

For the third and final use of the term “culture” in *Redemptor hominis*, we must go to section three: “Redeemed Man and His Situation in the Modern World.” Man—the concrete man in “the full truth of his existence” (14) and in the various spheres of community—is the way of the Church. The Church is aware of the threats to man and to the efforts to make human life more human. The crisis of our times pertains precisely to the threats to human dignity posed by (i) the ambiguity of technology, a tremendous power that can be used against the human person; (ii) the corresponding development of complex and powerful systems of productivity, and the release and endorsement of the acquisitive spirit; and (iii) the rampant materialism and reductive philosophies of life spawned by the ideologies of communism and bourgeois liberalism.

John Paul II opens section sixteen with the following statement: “Man’s situation in the modern world seems indeed to be far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the requirements of justice, and even more of social love.” He expresses a concern that solidarity is a lost virtue and that in current world affairs “freedom is confused with the instinct for individual or collective interest or with the instinct for combat and domination” (16). As he puts it, “No truly human economy will be possible unless [these instincts] are taken up, directed and

‘inculturation.’ The two Brothers not only carried out their mission with full respect for the culture already existing among the Slav peoples, but together with religion they eminently and unceasingly promoted and extended that culture” (*Slavorum apostoli*, 26).

dominated by the deepest powers in man, which decide the true culture of peoples” (16). These deeper powers are conscience and intellect. Christians will learn from the kingly office of Christ that dominion over the visible world, which the Creator gave to man, “consists in the priority of ethics over technology, in the primacy of the person over things, and in the superiority of spirit over matter” (16). Progress must be measured by this standard.

The three principles are interconnected, and together they lay out a program for cultural development. In other words, these principles are not a checklist for ethical criticism but a set of interlocking dynamic principles for the development of a culture respectful of the human person. Thus, the threefold set of priorities for overcoming the threats to mankind in the modern world are essentially priorities of culture. The promotion of human rights in jurisprudence and political association, based upon the dignity of the human person, points to a deeper set of issues pertaining to culture.

The principle concerning the priority of ethics over technology must be understood in a more profound way than the application of moral norms to technological projects. Modern morality, especially the Kantian variety, may interpret it in such a way. But John Paul II is a Thomistic philosopher, who grasps that ethics is about a way of life, an ethos, a development of character within a community.¹⁴ The whole modern project comes from the notion that technology can substitute morality or ethics. It emphasizes *techné* and human art above ethos or character. Technology is a way of life more than a set of tools and instruments. Artificial birth control, for instance, displaces a primarily moral or ethical issue with technological solutions. Responsible parenthood demands mutual self-giving, self-control, and generous readiness to receive children. Artificial birth control places the burden of responsible parenthood on method effectiveness and external devices. The priority of ethics over technology is intrinsically connected with the priority of the person over things. Technology can degrade the world to the status of a thing to be

14. See Michael Waldstein’s explanation of “ethos” in John Paul II’s *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. and ed. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 694. For an elaboration of this teaching, see my “John Paul II on *Humanae Vitae* and the Priority of Ethics over Technology,” *Philosophy and Canon Law* 5 (2019): 35–68.

used, including the human person. “What is in question is the advancement of persons, not just the multiplying of things that people can use” (*RH*, 16), and the advancement of persons entails growth in virtue, knowledge, and love. The other principles, the priority of ethos over technology and of spirit over matter, support the priority of persons over things.

John Paul II, influenced by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, author of *Being and Having*,¹⁵ says, “It is a matter—as a contemporary philosopher has said and as the Council has stated—not so much of ‘having more’ as of ‘being more.’”¹⁶ For a person, “being more” means being in relationship with others; we do not seek to acquire or to assimilate but to encounter the other. The reference to *Gaudium et spes*, where the Council Fathers explain how to assess the notion of progress, is very helpful:

Human activity, to be sure, takes its significance from its relationship to man. Just as it proceeds from man, so it is ordered toward man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has. (35)

The focus on “being” over “having” should raise the question, what does it mean to be human? We must attempt to see the “whole man,” or what John Paul II calls “the whole truth

15. Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1965). See the chapter “Outlines of a Phenomenology of Having,” 154–74. See the introduction to *A Gabriel Marcel Reader*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2011).

16. “C’est bien là, en effet, qu’il faut chercher la solution d’un des problèmes majeurs de notre époque: il ne suffit pas que l’homme grandisse dans ce qu’il a, il faut qu’il grandisse dans ce qu’il est” (Paul VI, Discours au corps diplomatique [7 January 1965], https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19650107_diplomatic-corps.html). See also *Populorum progressio*, 14: “The development We speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man.” Pope Paul VI was deeply influenced by Jacques Maritain’s *Integral Humanism* and Henri de Lubac’s *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*. See notes 58 and 59 below.

about man" (*RH*, 12), not merely man measured by partial or illusory standards. He wants us to keep in view the idea of a "total vocation" and an "integral humanism." With this in mind, we can understand why he challenges the contemporary civilization with its focus on things and the realm of "having." It is not that we do not need things or that we must understand our lives in terms of both being and having. He is not preaching a strict asceticism, nor is he railing against the productivity of modern economies. He is, however, warning of the danger that we can lose our interiority and our freedom if we are swamped by externals and become enslaved in new ways to the very things we hoped would free us from drudgery and pain. "Man cannot become the slave of things, the slave of economic systems, the slave of production, the slave of his own products" (*RH*, 16). The way of Christ is the way of liberty. The message should have a special appeal in modern culture as people begin to experience the enslavement to products, systems, false expectations, and envy. The root of this error is the lack of an appreciation of human interiority and the life of the spirit. It is a problem of a materialistic philosophy of life, articulated in very different ways in Marxism and in bourgeois liberalism. "A civilization purely materialistic in outline condemns man to such slavery, even if at times, no doubt, this occurs contrary to the intentions and the very premises of its pioneers" (16). The founders and pioneers of modern civilization championed human freedom and liberation, but they could neither sustain nor fulfill what they originally promised. At root is the anthropological question (what does it mean to be human?), a question that is historical and cultural, not an abstraction. The pope wishes to bring Christians to an awareness of and critical engagement with culture. "It is a matter of the whole of the dynamism of life and civilization. It is a matter of the meaningfulness of the various initiatives of everyday life" (16). We must become radical, that is, go to the roots of the crisis to identify and challenge the assumptions or "premises for many civilization programmes, political programmes, economic ones, social ones, state ones, and many others" (16). And the priority of the spiritual over the material is perhaps the fundamental underlying principle of cultural development. Modern culture emphasizes the material over the spiritual. The Marxist/communist ideology is explicitly and dogmatically materialistic, denying all spirituality and goods beyond the temporal realm. The liberal ideology of the

West likewise emphasizes productivity of material goods and the comfortable self-preservation of the individual.

In *Redemptor hominis* (18), John Paul II speaks about the “creative” restlessness of the human person, which is ever propelling him to search beyond the immediately given, beyond the limits of the surrounding culture and environment.¹⁷ In this creative restlessness there “beats and pulsates what is most deeply human—the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful, and the voice of conscience” (*RH*, 18). In this one sentence there is a profound account of the human person. The pope identifies a series of dynamic aspects of the human person that define life as a person. Describing them as “beating” or “pulsating” is more than poetic hyperbole or metaphor, since a power of the soul is precisely an active dynamism that springs into action in the presence of its object; it requires a constant effort—knocking, seeking, asking—in order to discover the transcendent object. He also alludes to the words of Christ: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). The human person inquires and searches after truth through his cognitive powers; he must always be evaluating and reevaluating choice, action, deliberation, and art in light of the good. Through his will he is zealous for his own freedom and self-determination; his awareness of the beautiful arouses a longing or “nostalgia” for that which somehow eludes his grasp; his attention to the “voice” of conscience demands his honest and resolute response. By describing these activities as “pulsating,” John Paul II points to the dynamism in the human person, an active potential that must be developed and actualized.

In other contexts, John Paul II speaks about personal existence as a “gift” and a “task.” It is a gift because these aims of personal life such as truth, beauty, and goodness are something that transcend our power—we discover them, receive them with gratitude, and at times with joy and surprise. It is a “task” because we must take responsibility for its cultivation, activation, and protection. Moreover, they are described as “beating” or

17. Here I draw from my previous article: “The Springs of Religious Freedom: Conscience and the Search for Truth,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 29, no. 1/2 (2017): 4–24.

“pulsating” because, like the heart’s own rhythms and constant exchanges, so too the life of the person must be characterized by the daily rhythms and exchanges with other persons and the world that embody a respect for truth, goodness, and beauty. This dynamic is inherently restless because what they reach for is transcendent, infinite, and inexhaustible. Truth, goodness, and beauty—the transcendentals—point toward God as their source and exemplar.

During the first years of his pontificate, John Paul II delivered bold speeches making a keen effort to open the immense domains of culture to Christ and to raise the bar for the education and development of the human person.¹⁸ The most famous no doubt is his speech to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) presented on June 2, 1980,¹⁹ but also important is his impromptu talk on culture to a group of intellectuals in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) on July 1, 1980.²⁰ John Paul II set out to present a systematic account of this vision of the priority of culture, fed by the springs of creativity in the human person’s heart, head, and conscience, whose depth is faith in Christ, the Redeemer of man. These speeches, delivered within a month of each other, were presented in very different circumstances: one, during a planned visit to Paris, was a scheduled talk on culture for UNESCO; the other took place at an unplanned meeting with representatives of culture who had sent him a note regarding the dire situation surrounding the Church’s fight for social justice in Brazil.²¹ I suggest that the

18. Selections from these speeches can be found in John Paul II, “Man, Culture and the Apostolate to Culture,” *The Laity Today* 28 (1981): 7–21.

19. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization” (Paris, 2 June 1980), available in English at <https://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>. The same address can also be found under the title “Understanding Culture through the Whole Man,” in *The Church and Culture since Vatican II*, 187–200. Hereafter, citations will refer to paragraph numbers of the former source.

20. John Paul II, “Remarks to Cultural Leaders at the Residence of Cardinal Eugenio de Araujo Sales, July 1,” in *Addresses and Homilies Given in Brazil*, trans. National Catholic News Service (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 1980), 48–54.

21. The circumstances of the trips may be found in Bolesław Wierzbianski, *Shepherd for All People* (New York: Bicentennial Publishing, 1993). See also George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York:

justly famous UNESCO speech is his basic treatise on culture, which he supplements from time to time.

2. A TREATISE ON CULTURE

This treatise, presented in June of 1980, a year after John Paul II's first return to Poland as pontiff, was entitled "Understanding Culture through the Whole Man." In it, the pope develops a more systematic, extensive, and philosophical exploration of culture and anthropology. He takes up this theme from *Redemptor hominis*, directly echoing and even citing the encyclical at various points. The UNESCO speech was, for the pope, "one of the most important of his life."²² This allowed him the opportunity to speak to the world about "what had quickly become one of the dominant themes of his pontificate—the priority of culture in shaping the human future."²³ UNESCO, founded to promote the intellectual and moral solidarity of all nations and to provide greater access to education and truth in a spirit of freedom, was a perfect setting for the young pope to present his thoughts on culture. John Paul II was welcomed quite warmly by the general director of UNESCO, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, who saw the opportunity to discuss the importance of an education endorsing the "sanctity of the individual, a universal ethic and humanism" for the "whole of mankind."²⁴ Mr. M'Bow introduced him as a "worker, poet, priest, [and] writer deeply rooted in his native land and through it open to the whole world, dedicated to his faith and constantly listening to the voices of others, a tireless student of continents and souls, bringing to the task of the service of mankind an extraordinary knowledge of the human being."²⁵ John Paul II responded by acknowledging the providential role of the United Nations after World War II in its declaration of

Harper Perennial, 2009); and Jonathan Kwitny, *Man of the Century: The Life and Times of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997).

22. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 377.

23. *Ibid.*, 376.

24. Swierzawski, "John Paul II at UNESCO," in Wierzbianski, *Shepherd for All People*, 208.

25. *Ibid.*

universal human rights, for “respect for the inalterable rights of the human person is at the basis of everything.”²⁶ He then lifted a page directly out of *Redemptor hominis* (16) and thereby linked his mission to promote the primacy of the spiritual to that of UNESCO:

That is also why, referring to the origins of your Organization, I stress the necessity of mobilizing all forces which direct the spiritual dimension of human existence, and which bear witness to the primacy of the spiritual in man—and of what corresponds to the dignity of his intelligence, his will and his heart—in order not to succumb again to the monstrous alienation of collective evil, which is always ready to use material powers in the exterminating struggle of men against men, of nations against nations. (Ibid.)

With this appeal to the origins of UNESCO, John Paul II identifies the “first noble impulses of human conscience, intelligence and will” (ibid., 5), the same impulses that will inspire his native country’s “Solidarność” trade union in its impending revolution of conscience.²⁷ The pope affirms the “premises and first principles” of any discourse on human culture. This treatise culminates in the penultimate section (22), in which he cites *Redemptor hominis*, 16, and states the principle of transcendency; culture is the shape of transcendence. The talk is structured to present five principles for culture: (i) culture is a “specific way” of man’s existing and being, giving priority to being over having as well as to the subject of culture over the products of culture (6–7); (ii) man is the primary and fundamental fact of human culture in his spiritual and material subjectivity as a complete whole (8); (iii) there is an organic and constitutive link between culture and religion (9–10); (iv) the primary and essential task of culture is education (11–13); (v) the nation exists through and for culture, the source of its fundamental sovereignty (14–16). After explaining these fundamental principles of culture, John Paul II discusses the various challenges that face educational institutions and projects (17–19) and directly challenges the leaders

26. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 4.

27. See John P. Hittinger, “The Revolution of Conscience in *Centesimus Annus*,” *Philosophy and Canon Law* 3 (2017): 51–69.

of science and culture to take on the responsibility of mobilizing conscience to serve truth and peace (20–22).²⁸ He concludes his speech with a cry from the heart for the cause of culture and the human person (23). Let us now analyze the five principles of culture.

2.1. Culture as a “specific way” of man’s existing and being

Culture flows from man’s nature as a rational animal. In this address, John Paul II quotes Thomas Aquinas twice: “Genus humanum arte et ratione vivit.”²⁹ In paragraph six, he uses the line to explain that reason and art must provide a stable and flourishing human life; no matter the time or place, “man lives a really human life thanks to culture.”³⁰ In paragraph seventeen, John Paul II uses the same quote to highlight the progressive expansion of human nature through education: “Man is himself through truth, and becomes more himself through increasingly perfect knowledge of truth.” The perfection of the soul’s powers as well as the realization of social nature transpires through culture. Drawing from his philosophical work on human subjectivity, the pope seeks the concrete center of culture in the concrete person, for the person expresses and realizes himself in culture and is therefore the “ontic subject of culture” (ibid., 7). In other words, culture, while social, exists only in the concrete person; and the development of the person is the true object and aim of culture. This means that culture springs from human creativity and is ultimately realized in a greater personal being; it is realized in the person more than in the products of culture.

In 1964, John Paul II wrote, “In a sense, the greatest work of culture is man himself—not any of his works or creations, but he himself. . . . After all, man’s actions and their fruit

28. See John P. Hittinger, “Responsibility of the University in the Modern World,” in *Responsibility: Recognition and Limits*, vol. 20, ed. Anton Rauscher (Munich: Soziale Orientierung, 2010), 349–68.

29. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* 1. The pope cites the line in paragraphs 6 and 17 and translates it as “the human race lives by creativity and intellect.”

30. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 6.

are in the closest relationship with who he is and what he lives with. Thus, the works of man's culture are the fruit of this work of culture, which is man himself."³¹ Throughout his work, the pope comes to distinguish between "the culture of the human person" and "the culture of works." Culture, although recognizable in the production of beautiful things and works, is most of all to be found in the formation of the person and his "being more." Thus, he says that "the fundamental distinction between what man is and what he has, between being and having, has its foundation there too."³² Culture is related in an essential and necessary manner to "what man is"; it is related to "what man has" in a secondary and relative way. We should consider the person first, the artwork second. The works without the personal appropriation by which a human being becomes "more" lack the proper fecundity of a living culture.

2.2. *Man as the primary and fundamental fact of human culture*

UNESCO was assembled for the sake of the culture and the education of the human being; culture is, thus, the reality of its purpose. John Paul II warns the delegates not to lose the concreteness and beauty of the human achievement to which their organization is dedicated through a fog of theory or ideology; he reminds them that "this *man* who expresses himself and objectivizes himself in and through culture, is *unique, complete, and indivisible*. He is at once subject and architect of culture" (ibid., 8). The pope looks to human subjectivity, and we could say to human nature (human causality as a proper effect of human nature), as the essential agency for culture. He explicitly rejects the Marxist idea that culture is the result of "the production relations that prevail at a given period" (ibid.). Even if culture in some way reflects the historical cluster of productive forces, it is the concrete man "who lives in the system, who accepts it, or tries to change it" (ibid.). John Paul II is thinking again of the importance of conscience and the deeper powers

31. Karol Wojtyła, "Chrześcijanin a kultura," *Znak* 16, no. 10 (1964): 1154, as translated in Dariusz Radziechowski's "'Culture of the Person' and 'Culture of Works' According to Karol Wojtyła," *Logos i Ethos* 56, no. 1 (2021): 89–90.

32. John Paul II, "To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization," 7.

of the human person, which he also discusses in *Redemptor hominis*. He argues that “a culture without human subjectivity and without human causality is inconceivable” (ibid.). Being neither a passive member of a superior party nor a passive consumer, the human person is called to participate and to create it. As the subject of culture, man is called to participate in culture; as the architect, he is called to create. Thus, in the cultural field we must conclude that “*man is always the first fact: man is the prime and fundamental fact of culture*” (ibid., emphasis original).

As a corollary to this principle he posits a factor of totality or “*spiritual and material subjectivity as a complete whole*” (ibid., emphasis original). The Marxist idea of culture reduces man to matter, as do certain forms of Western consumerism. With culture, however, we must reckon with both the spiritualization of matter and the materialization/incarnation of spirit or what is spiritual. The full development of the human person must account for both spheres of life, material and spiritual. We must seek the whole truth about the human person and not impose “*preconceived divisions and oppositions*” (ibid., emphasis original).

2.3. *The organic and constitutive link between culture and religion*

John Paul II reflects on why it is suitable for the Holy See to be represented as a permanent observer at UNESCO. The justification lies in the “*the organic and constitutive link which exists between religion in general and Christianity in particular, on the one hand, and culture, on the other hand*” (ibid., emphasis original). Evidence for the link may be found throughout the course of history all over the world. Christianity is linked to the “*whole of Europe,*” in each nation and as a whole.³³ He expresses this “*deep personal conviction*” with no intention to belittle other heritages or to deny other sources of European heritage. To the contrary, he pays “*the deepest and most sincere*

33. John Paul II carried on this argument for many years, writing most poignantly about it in *Ecclesia in Europa*. See George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 336–41. Weigel says, “*Ecclesia in Europa* stands as John Paul’s last gift to the world Church of his distinctive reading of the cultural, social, economic, and political signs of the times in the developed world” (337).

tribute to all the cultures of the human family as a whole” because in each he sees the capacity of the human person, the creative restlessness he celebrated in *Redemptor hominis*, which he now calls “the creative riches of the human spirit,” present in all the particular forms of culture.³⁴ More importantly, the Gospel ties the Church to humanity and to the sources of the creation of culture. Culture requires a profound consideration of man’s transcendency. The person, as the subject of culture, must be respected or affirmed for himself, not for other motives such as profit or utopian social aims. And most of all, “man must be loved because he is man”³⁵ and loved for the particular dignity he possesses. Summarizing the substance of his first encyclical, John Paul II says, “The whole of the affirmations concerning man belongs to the very substance of Christ’s message and of the mission of the Church, in spite of all that critics may have declared about this matter, and all that the different movements opposed to religion in general and to Christianity in particular may have done.”³⁶ By his own testimony, the sad lesson of history has shown that

where *religious institutions* have been suppressed, where ideas and works born of religious inspiration, and in particular of Christian inspiration, have been deprived of their citizenship, men find again these same elements *outside institutional ways*, through the confrontation operated, in truth and interior effort, between what constitutes their humanity and what is contained in the Christian message.³⁷

34. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 9 (emphasis original).

35. John Paul II, Address to the Korean Intellectuals and Artists (Seoul, 5 May 1984), 4, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1984/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19840505_intelletuali-seoul.html.

36. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 10.

37. *Ibid.* (emphasis original). In Poland, he more forcefully stated that it is impossible to understand Polish history and culture without Christ, and so it is wrong for the communist authorities (or any authorities) to exclude Christ deliberately from the history of humanity in “any part of the globe, at any longitude or latitude of geography” (Warsaw, June 2, 1979), in *Return to Poland: The Collected Speeches of John Paul II* (New York: Collins, 1979), 24–30.

It is therefore not only his personal testimony but also a fact that “bears within it this truth”: if we seek everything that is human or “the elements in which man expresses himself or through which he wishes to be the subject of his existence,”³⁸ we will discover religion and vertical transcendence. The very heart of transcendence is, after all, vertical transcendence.

2.4. *Education as the primary and essential task of culture*

The pope identifies the primary and essential task of culture as “education,” enabling the human person to “be more” rather than “have more.” Man must become more himself through education, for education forms who we are as human persons to be with others and for others. John Paul II points to the centuries of educational efforts made by and through the Church, even if the deeper source of educational achievement is not simply the institution’s organized and material means. “The most important thing,” he says, “is always man, man and his moral authority which comes from the truth of his principles and from the conformity of his actions with these principles” (ibid., 11). The pope develops the notion of self-education especially in his message to the youth: each person must take on the task of becoming more human through self-education. The fundamental fact of moral education, he says, is the spiritually mature man, a fully educated man who can educate himself and others. The core of education, the development of man as man, is a moral culture. This first and fundamental aspect of education devolves upon the family, the first and primary educator of the child. The family, as he explains in *Love and Responsibility* and *Letter to Families*, is the school of virtue and the law of free giving. He encourages UNESCO, therefore, to promote and protect the family and its moral authority. So too he speaks about the importance of establishing a culture of life, in order to overcome narrow technical training and resist manipulation by economic forces and political powers. The manipulators teach that life is an engineering of oneself, and therefore education is, at present,

38. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 10.

filled with false imperatives and fundamental renunciations of our humanity.

2.5. Culture as the source and fundamental sovereignty of the nation

John Paul II's fifth principle is a striking one and close to his life and work. He says that the primacy of the family and the rights of the nation must be placed at the basis of culture and education. The nation, he says, is "the great community of men who are united by various ties, but above all, precisely by culture" (*ibid.*, 14). The nation is the great educator of man because it exists through culture and for culture. Poland learned the lesson of the priority of culture through centuries of struggle in resisting political oppression and totalitarian regimes. Addressing UNESCO, the pope said, "I am the son of a Nation which its neighbors have condemned to death several times, but which has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity in spite of partitions and foreign occupations by relying on its culture. This culture turned out in the circumstances to be more powerful than all other forces."³⁹ He argues that culture is the core of national sovereignty and identity, that it is more powerful in the long run than worldly forces. Culture testifies to the priority of spirit over matter.

On the second day of his return to Poland in 1979, John Paul II said to young people in the Archdiocese of Gniezno, the center of historic Catholic Poland,

Culture is an expression of man, a confirmation of humanity. Man creates culture and through culture creates himself. He creates himself with the inward effort of the spirit, of thought, will and heart. . . . Culture is above all a common good of the nation. Polish culture is a good on which the spiritual life of Poles rests. It distinguishes us as

39. *Ibid.* Rocco Buttiglione explains this dimension of Polish consciousness: "Thousands of times defeated on the train of force, the nation is reborn each time thanks to the spiritual awareness of its own identity and of its own right, animated by Christian faith." The essence of this particular vision of man that nourishes the Polish consciousness is "cultural and existential certitude that Christ is the keystone for the understanding of man and of his history" (*Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], 6–8).

a nation. It is decisive for us throughout the course of history, more decisive than material power.⁴⁰

The nation is “the great educator” because its memory goes beyond that of the individual and the family; therefore, the family itself must be nourished by the national culture. This is not to give way to immoderate nationalism but to acknowledge a “stable element of human experience and of the humanistic perspective of man’s development.”⁴¹ There must be a constant struggle to maintain “their own identity and their own values against the influences and pressure of models proposed from outside. . . . Cherish it like the apple of your eye for the future of the great human family” (ibid., 14–15). And yet we must acknowledge that national culture is often prey to economic and political interests and that people are still victimized by “totalitarian and imperialistic systems” (ibid., 15). For these groups, the nation is but another object to be manipulated. The fifth principle regarding the importance of national culture and history also highlights the thesis that concrete man is the subject and architect of culture. But the human person creates and achieves culture through and with others in various levels of social “subjectivity,” such as the family, the Church, and appropriate political entities. The person and these essential associations must also be afforded a fundamental freedom to create, express, and perpetuate culture.

In paragraph sixteen of the treatise, John Paul II concludes by summarizing his main points and warning about the danger of social media. He proposes a “fundamental criterion” by which to assess social media and pop culture, a criterion that must respect the “sovereignty which exists and which draws its origin from the specific culture of the nation and society, from the primacy of the family in the work of education, and finally from the personal dignity of every man” (ibid., 16). His warning, issued over forty years ago, sounded a prophetic alarm that

40. John Paul II, *Return to Poland*, 47. On culture and the nation in John Paul II, see James V. Schall, *The Church, the State and Society in the Thought of John Paul II* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), chap. 4. See also Stanisław Grygiel, *Discovering the Human Person: In Conversation with John Paul II* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), chap. 5.

41. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 14.

so-called “social” media could become the “*means of domination over others*, on the part of agents of political power as well as of financial powers which impose their programme and their model” (ibid., emphasis original). The full dignity of the person, the real needs of society, the responsibility of the family in the field of education, the nation’s culture and its history—these have indeed become almost totally subjected to “the criterion of interest, of the sensational and of immediate success” (ibid.).

In paragraphs seventeen through twenty-three, John Paul II exhorts the international gathering of men and women of culture. He praises their efforts to increase literacy and education throughout the world (ibid., 17); he encourages Catholic schools and universities to forge ahead despite opposition from atheistic regimes (ibid., 18); he speaks of the university as the “workbench” for man’s vocation to knowledge and as the highest rung of a ladder reaching for “knowledge of the reality of the world” and “knowledge of the mysteries of humanity” (ibid., 19). He asks UNESCO to fight to preserve the “human and ethical honesty” of science and truth when they are so easily encroached upon by “non-scientific aims” (ibid., 20). Science has become all too easily pushed to serve the purposes of destruction and death, especially in genetic and biological manipulation, as well as chemical, bacteriological, and nuclear armaments (ibid., 21). John Paul II provides his audience with a similar argument in *Redemptor hominis*’s sections fifteen (“What Modern Man Is Afraid Of”) and sixteen (“Progress or Threat”). He seeks to mobilize human consciences:⁴²

The efforts of human consciences must be increased in proportion to the tension between good and evil to which men at the end of the twentieth century are subjected. We must convince ourselves of the priority of ethics over

42. In *Evangelium vitae* (1995), John Paul II will use the same phrase, “mobilizing of conscience,” to exhort his listeners to withstand the destructive features of modern culture: “What is urgently called for is a general mobilization of consciences and a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life. All together, we must build a new culture of life: new, because it will be able to confront and solve today’s unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians; new, because it will be capable of bringing about a serious and courageous cultural dialogue among all parties” (95).

technology, of the primacy of the person over things, of the superiority of spirit over matter (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 16). The cause of man will be served if science forms an alliance with conscience. The man of science will really help humanity if he keeps “the sense of man’s transcendence over the world and of God’s over man” (*Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences* [10 November 1979], n. 4).⁴³

With this reference to the three principles for cultural formation, John Paul II sends his listeners to the deeper sources of his account of the human person and of culture, which we briefly discussed above. Scientists themselves, as all men and women devoted to truth and culture, must properly understand human transcendence—“the sense of man’s transcendence over the world and of God’s over man,” as he put it to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.⁴⁴ Man transcends the world in his orientation toward what is good and true, in his powers of knowledge and love. God transcends man as the source of “vertical transcendence” in truth and goodness. The pope’s appeal looks to the concrete human person in his integrity or wholeness, concluding with an exhortation to show “*respect for all the rights of man*, those which are connected with his material and economic dimension as well as those which are connected with the spiritual and interior dimension of his existence in this world.”⁴⁵ And he gives them his blessing: “May wisdom inspire you! May love guide you” (*ibid.*). Wisdom and love are rediscovered most of all in Christ the Redeemer, who restored the link with God that had been severed by Adam.

His concluding remarks are very personal and very moving. It was the deepest desire of his heart, he said, to be invited to the very heart of the “Areopagus of whole world.” He describes his talk as a “cry to you from the inmost depths of my soul.” “Yes!,” he says, “The future of man depends on culture. Yes!

43. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 22 (emphasis original).

44. John Paul II, “Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences” (10 November 1979), available at <http://www.academyofsciences.va/content/accademia/en/magisterium/johnpaulii/10november1979.html>.

45. John Paul II, “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,” 22 (emphasis original).

The peace of the world depends on *the primacy of the Spirit!* Yes! The peaceful future of mankind depends on *love!*” (ibid., 23, emphasis original). His appeals were largely ignored by the leaders of culture, even within the Church, but their depth, coherence, and power nevertheless remain a part of his legacy.

3. A MANIFESTO ON CULTURE

John Paul II had an opportunity to formulate these principles for cultural formation a month later during his visit to Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro, on July 1, 1980, John Paul II gave an impromptu speech to a gathering of men and women of culture who had sent him a special letter. He responded to their appeal with what amounts to a kind of manifesto on culture as the first priority of action. We should look at it both for its brevity and for its special urgency.

The Brazil trip was much anticipated and filled with tension due to potential confrontations. Weigel calls the trip a pilgrimage “fraught with difficulties.”⁴⁶ Brazil, one of the countries in the world with the highest number of Catholics, was struggling to establish a democracy and deal with disparities in wealth, especially given a common and very dehumanizing state of poverty. The government had been through a period of harsh security measures, including torture, and leading churchmen were embracing liberation theology. It would seem that the pope had little room to maneuver. Jonathan Kwitny writes that the trajectory of John Paul’s previous dealing with liberation theology would have suggested a more public discipline to Church leaders.⁴⁷ But, in fact, John Paul II also voiced support for the

46. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 378–80.

47. See Jonathan Kwitny, *Man of the Century: The Life and Times of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997). Kwitny suggests that John Paul II changed his attitude toward liberation theology, but I would argue he is mistaken. The impromptu speech on culture helps us see why. At initial meetings, John Paul spoke to youth and affirmed their desire to work for social justice; he cautioned them to avoid the ideologies of hatred and class warfare and bid them ground the social revolution in love and the recognition of the transcendence of the human person. At a meeting before the great statue of Christ atop Corcovado, John Paul II referenced his encyclical *Redemptor hominis* and invoked a blessing on Brazil, beseeching the love that is greater than sin and death and the truth that is light. He described his own papal voice as a

poor and suffering in that country, saving his corrections for a private meeting. The entire country was swept along by a great spirit of affirmation of the Polish pope, acclaiming him “John of God,” “father,” “brother,” and even “king.” Maciej Feldhuzen reported that “unexpectedly, at the last moment, the Holy Father decided to change the evening’s schedule by inviting to the cardinal’s palace in which he was staying about a hundred Brazilian intellectuals, writers, poets, scholars, journalists, artists and musicians, with whom he wanted to have a dialogue.”⁴⁸ Evidently drawing from many of his speeches and ideas,⁴⁹ he presented a short manifesto concerning culture that, in effect, answered the questions concerning liberation theology and the Church’s mission to redeem man in the various spheres of life, work, family, economics, and politics. For the sake of evangelization and transformation, our first priority must be to work for culture, for the unity of faith and culture. This presentation can be summarized in seven main points:⁵⁰

1. “The choice of culture is man’s destiny” (ibid., 48). In the field of culture, man’s destiny is at stake because the choice lies between a true or authentic culture, which humanizes and develops the human person at the deepest levels of personhood, or a false culture, that is, a nonculture, a cancel culture, which dehumanizes and deracinates the human person.

2. “Reduction *ad unum* always means dehumanizing culture” (ibid.). John Paul II speaks out against reductionism, one of the flaws of Marxism and consumerism. The human person is a composite, involving body and spirit, individuality and sociality, particularity and universality. Thus, to focus exclusively on body or soul, on race or class, violates the concreteness and richness of personal existence and communal life.

“mere echo and resonance” of Christ’s voice. The statue, incidentally designed in 1929 by a French artist of Polish descent, Paul Landowski (1875–1961), is a “symbol of love” and a call to reconciliation. In his meetings with workers, catechists, immigrants, and the faithful, he proclaimed his message of hope.

48. Maciej Feldhuzen, “John Paul II in Brazil,” in Wierzbianski, *Shepherd for All People*, 212–35, at 215.

49. He cites *Gaudium et spes*, *Redemptor hominis*, *Populorum progressio*, and “To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.”

50. John Paul II, “Remarks to Cultural Leaders,” 48–54.

3. Culture must be inspired by an “integral humanism.” Culture must cultivate the soul according to the whole truth about the human person; it must raise the human person to its supreme dignity of knowing and loving.

4. “The true *cultura animi* is a culture of freedom” (ibid., 49–50). Culture must “spring from the depth of the human spirit” (ibid.) and be neither subjected to coercion of power nor advanced through intimidation. Culture should be proposed, not imposed; it must allow for free personal assimilation. The Church fully respects religious freedom, akin to cultural freedom, founded on the dignity of the human person. Culture must form freedom and educate into virtue.

5. Culture is a work of love. The development of the human person must include knowledge but also conscience and an ordered love so as to avoid a proud humanism, consumerism, productivism, and an exaggerated nationalism. Culture should educate man in the “integrality of his being and relationships” (ibid., 51).

6. Culture is “God’s field” (1 Cor 3:9). Through the various covenants, God “became a cultural agent for the development of man.”⁵¹ God is man’s friend and works in man so that man can grow in his kingliness over the world. There is a twofold transcendence of man over the world and in relationship to God;⁵² there is a human and divine dimension that God offers to every man and the community of men through the perfect man, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of man.

7. Culture must be a plurality unified by mutual respect. There are numerous traditions and various historical processes,

51. John Paul II, “Remarks to Cultural Leaders,” 52.

52. See John Paul II’s speech given two weeks earlier to the Italian Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Commitment on twofold transcendence, especially the need to recognize and live God’s transcendence over man. “Exercising her mission of guardian and advocate of both transcendences, the Church considers she is helping science to keep its ideal purity in the aspect of basic research, and to carry out its service of man in the aspect of its practical applications” (John Paul II, “Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences,” 4). The threefold priority is that of ethics over technology, persons over things, and spirit over matter. See *Redemptor hominis*, 16. See also my comments on this threefold superiority: “Ethos, Person and Spirit—Principles of Social and Cultural Renewal,” in *Człowiek w Kulturze: Pismo Poświęcone Filozofii i Kulturze* 26 (2016): 161–72; and “The Springs of Religious Freedom: Conscience and the Search for Truth,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 29, no. 1/2 (2017): 4–24.

and only through dialogue will there be reciprocal enrichment. There is a lack of social love when economic and political interests are imposed on those who are weaker.

Needless to say, the pope put forward an impressive list of essential points in this impromptu address. The Marxism of liberation theology must be countered at the nexus of culture and education; then social justice will flow from the love and solidarity that derive from the authentic *cultura animi*. This speech amplifies what he had said earlier that day to the youth: social justice must be achieved on the basis of the recognition of human rights, which are based upon the “transcendent dimension of man.”⁵³ To deny this transcendence is to “reduce man to an instrument of domination or to the omnipotence of the totalitarian state.” According to Maciej Feldhuzen’s account, “All the papal statements made in Brazil were carefully balanced and always adjusted to the level and interest of his audience” (*ibid.*, 227–35). He proved himself to be a pope of conciliation. After twelve days, during which he traveled thousands of miles and delivered fifty-four homilies and addresses, he made a deep impact on the society. He spoke out against the injustices and evils in Brazilian society, stressing the danger of acting on utopian illusions and using violence and hatred as a means to achieve greater justice. His impromptu Brazilian address may be one of the most enduring speeches of this trip. When read together with the UNESCO address, it provides a powerful account of culture and a basis for the unity of faith and culture.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The pope’s core teachings on culture were formulated within the first two years of his pontificate. In his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*, he put forward his vision of the human person drawing on principles from Vatican II and from his previous philosophical and theological work. There he sought to uncover the deeper sources of human activity: conscience, intellect, and heart. Explaining the

53. John Paul II, “Build Your Future on the Foundation of Christ” (address delivered at the Pope’s Mass for Youth at Belo Horizonte on July 1, 1980), in Wierzbianski, *Shepherd for All People*, 416–17.

reasons for his deep amazement at the human person, John Paul II proclaimed man as “the way for the Church” (*RH*, 14). He analyzed carefully the conditions for human life in the modern world, examining “what modern man is afraid of,” the ambivalence of progress, and noting the many threats to the dignity of the person. The achievements of modern technology and modern rational organization must be evaluated in terms of the threefold priority of ethics over technology, persons over things, and spirit over matter. Appealing to the Spirit, “precisely to obtain the Spirit,” John Paul II is hopeful that the human person can tap into a creative restlessness from which “beats and pulsates what is most deeply human—the search for truth, the insatiable need for the good, hunger for freedom, nostalgia for the beautiful, and the voice of conscience” (*RH*, 18). The quest for transcendence and the transcendentals lies at the heart of this creative restlessness. This Augustinian principle, that the heart is restless until it rests in God, is cited or alluded to in many of the pope’s talks to young people during the first years of his pontificate.⁵⁴ In fact, the day before his presentation to UNESCO, John Paul II spoke to students and faculty at the Institut Catholique de Paris about Augustine’s “incomparable formula of the search for God” (*ibid.*, 75–83).

Karol Wojtyła had done a thorough philosophical analysis of culture a few years prior to the publication of *Redemptor hominis*.⁵⁵ Culture points to the transcendental dimension of the good, true, and beautiful. In light of *Redemptor hominis*, we can better appreciate the pope’s thorough and urgent address on culture for UNESCO in 1980, as well as his urgent appeal for human rights and freedom of conscience addressed to the United Nations in 1979. Both speeches are foundational documents for his papacy. Through them he first shared and entrusted his vision for culture and human renewal with the powerful and influential leaders of culture. A few years later, in 1983, John Paul II founded the Pontifical

54. See John Paul II, *The Whole Truth about Man: John Paul II to University Faculties and Students*, ed. James V. Schall (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981).

55. Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture through Human Praxis,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM, Catholic Thought from Lublin (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 263–75.

Council for Culture, hoping to enlist the aid of leading churchmen and world leaders.⁵⁶

The pope extended the apostolate to culture to universities, a mission he formulated quite precisely in 1990 with *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.⁵⁷ His high hopes for the university apostolate to culture encountered limits already noted by himself at UNESCO. In 1994, the Pontifical Council for Culture remarked that the situation of the universities was deeply affected by the distortions of culture already mentioned in the pope's treatise and manifesto.⁵⁸ The report states, "Whereas the University, by vocation, has a primary role to play in the development of culture, it is exposed, in many countries, to two opposing risks: either passively to submit to the dominant cultural influences, or to become marginal in relation to them." The dominant cultural influences in the United States and Europe have done as much. Catholic universities have generally lost their identities in attempting to achieve prestige and success.⁵⁹ The greatest threat to the human person is the loss of a community of learning. The institution becomes a mere "instrument" in the hands of the state and of the dominant economic forces. This becomes manifest when the chief aim of the educational institution is "to assure the technical and professional training of specialists, without giving of education of the

56. See Gremillion, *The Church and Culture since Vatican II*, 201–06.

57. *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, 10: "Therefore, it is with great trust and hope that I invite all Catholic universities to pursue their irreplaceable task. Their mission appears increasingly necessary for the encounter of the Church with the development of the sciences and with the cultures of our age." See also *ibid.*, 43–45. See my "Vatican II, Evangelization and Catholic Higher Education," in *The Enduring Nature of the Catholic University: Commemorating the Anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI's Address to Catholic Educators on April 17, 2008* (Manassas, VA: The Cardinal Newman Society, 2009), 27–42; and "Responsibility of the University in the Modern World," in *Responsibility: Recognition and Limits*, vol. 20, 349–68.

58. Congregation for Catholic Education, Pontifical Council for the Laity, and Pontifical Council for Culture, "The Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture" (Vatican City, 22 May 1994), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_doc_22051994_presence_en.html.

59. See James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

person the central place it has by right.”⁶⁰ In anticipation of these institutional crises, John Paul II had already recommended to young people in his *Dilecti amici* (1985) a course of self-education, to take their education into their own hands through prayer and study: “Both the action of the family and that of the school will remain incomplete (and could even be made useless) unless each one of you young people undertakes the work of your own education” (13). The family and institutional schooling can only provide “elements for the work of self-education” (13). But the promise of the words of Jesus, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32), must be personally appropriated and become “an essential programme” (*Dilecti amici*, 13). Outlining this essential program, John Paul II reiterates the philosophy of the person laid out in *Redemptor hominis*:

Young people, one might say, have an inborn “sense of truth.” And truth must be used for freedom: young people also have a spontaneous “desire for freedom.” And what does it mean to be free? It means to know how to use one’s freedom in truth—to be “truly” free. To be truly free does not at all mean doing everything that pleases me, or doing what I want to do. Freedom contains in itself the criterion of truth, the discipline of truth. To be truly free means to use one’s own freedom for what is a true good. Continuing therefore: to be truly free means to be a person of upright conscience, to be responsible, to be a person “for others.” (*Dilecti amici*, 13)

But learning the truth that frees can only be done from within, not from without. Each young person, indeed any person, must set out on a deliberate course of “self-education.” This takes “effort, perseverance and patience” (13), but with perseverance we can save our souls (Lk 21:19), for the fruit of self-education is nothing less than “to save our souls” (*Dilecti amici*, 13). Self-education builds a foundation for the future, and youth is “the sculptress that shapes the whole of life” (13).

With this important section on “self-education,” John Paul II brings together various themes of his work. He looked to

60. “The Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture.”

the young for hope in the future⁶¹ and spoke about the important task of becoming who we are, the achievement in action of personal fulfillment. Most of all, he emphasized the primacy of culture as a personal act: "Culture is basically oriented not so much toward the creation of human products as toward the creation of the human self, which radiates out into the world of products."⁶² The centers of power and influence will continue to designate the products of culture (artwork) as the primary task and achievement of culture, and thus lose the person who must be educated by means of this culture. Universities also, despite if not because of the millions of dollars acquired in grants and endowments, will easily lose sight of the primary purpose of education: the human person and his growth in truth and freedom. Perhaps John Paul II always turned to the young as a source for renewal of life and culture because he knew the lesson from Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings*: "Such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere."⁶³ □

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61. See John Paul II, "Is There Really Hope in the Young?," in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 118–26.

62. Karol Wojtyła, "The Problem of the Constitution of Culture," 266, as cited in Radziechowski, "'Culture of the Person' and 'Culture of Works' According to Karol Wojtyła," 90–91.

63. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, vol. 1: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 283.