

**THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL  
AND THE EVANGELISATION  
OF CULTURES  
(2/2)**

**Brother Enrique García Ahumada**

**2. Traditional family culture.**

Parents spontaneously hand down a mentality or culture which is either urban or town-based, native, black, immigrant or mixed, etc. This culture can be called popular, although it differs in various social and economic groups. It has certain static factors handed on from one generation to the next, and others actively interacting with modern scientific and technical surroundings and with the forces of other cultures. In school one should know, understand and also criticise from the Gospel point of view the culture and traditions of the family.

Every time we change destination we have to face a new socio-cultural reality, that is, to learn a new culture, which differs according to country or even city.

We have learned a culture when we know how to act normally in it, as the proverb says: When in Rome, do as Rome does. To spread the Gospel, you have to be accepted in a culture as one of the group. St. Paul gives us the example in this by being a Jew with the Jews, a gentile with the gentiles and all things to all men, not just in order to be nice, but to save everyone he can (1 Cor 9, 19-22).

The first way of finding the main signs of a family culture is to listen to the reasons they give their children for studying, to make or reject friends, to be socially acceptable, to have self-respect and to be someone important.(7)

Sometimes parents hand down convictions not worth having, such as superstitions; at other times they count on what they are actually experiencing right now around them, and which has affected them, or on broad knowledge coming from their academic background or on their professional and social position.

The role of the Brothers, in the stratum of society in which they work is to offer wisdom, real life, to put everything in the context of the Gospel, with humble perseverance in keeping with their consecrated life.(8)

Whether a Brother teaches in comfortable surroundings or in a poor suburb, he has to become one with the people in "everything which is true, noble, just, pure, lovable, honourable, virtuous and praiseworthy" (Phil 4,8) But to become a bourgeois in the one setting or vulgar in the other would be counter-evangelical. One has to learn what will be appropriate in each case, as to manners and ideals. Our presence is better accepted and more apt to spread the Gospel when it fits the circumstances and therefore more likely to influence the culture, without doing violence to our principles.(9)

Inculturation is essential to evangelisation according to the value systems present in a social group. Without that, the Gospel has no suitable terrain. Moreover in this way there is a better chance of getting vocations from those social settings, and then those vocations will be of service to their own social settings.

Let us look at the poorest sectors.

There are families and groups whose poverty causes them to have their own methods of dealing with reality, or feeling and reacting to it, and which can be called poverty culture (10).

The poor are often hungry, cold, sick, ignorant, tense; they act violently and are treated with violence; they sometimes manage to keep alive from childhood by theft, prostitution with either sex; they play games of chance, indulge in tobacco, drugs, alcohol. In extreme cases, they have no home, but are constantly on the move to places where they have the best chance of survival or of making some kind of relationships, or moving from places where they have been thrown out when urban planning upsets their present milieu. In such settings there exist social differentiations among otherwise equals, which explains certain values like confidence in one's own tricks, bravery or caution, companionship, solidarity, drills, one-way or mutual counselling, certain magic or religious beliefs.

Upon these values it is possible to build something positive. There has first to be established a confident relationship, in which certain conditions, either expressed or tacit, are strictly observed, and to build up incentives at an affective level, without humiliating or manipulating, which is a matter of sensitivity, connected with factors you might tend to neglect, like too firm tone of voice, expressions which do not enter their vocabulary, too much hurry in expecting an answer.

A priority in poorer areas is to spend time on mental hygiene, to lower the level of verbal and physical violence, which is so destructive of life and does so much damage to interpersonal relationships, in which the people have not had very much practice. Mental hygiene, though it is never called such, should be an important item in the ministry to families and in what is called the school of parents.

In lower level schooling one should avoid a lot of talk. It's enough to share a few bits of humour, songs and other things which give one a break, especially as, in those surroundings, there is so much monotony and stress to be undergone. Things you can hear and see are well looked on.

The Bible explained in connection with Jesus' influence on everyday life, makes them interested so much that they want to read the text themselves, even if they are not in the habit of reading. They are also glad to have a few moments of quiet and prayer, because this gives them the dignity of being in communication with God. The chance to help those worse off than themselves gives them great satisfaction, and helps them to grow in self-esteem. Prayer and reflection on the Gospel and helping others allows them to become fully integrated members of a holy and universal people. These spiritual helps which the poor can use are typical matters of interest for the Brothers, who, through the school, have contact with those on the margins of modern culture.

Culture handed down by the family has an emotional quality and therefore has great influence on children and adolescents. Parents sometimes get very worked up and violent in telling their children what they think important. They often do not have information or preparation to face scientific and technological culture, mass culture, youth subculture or to hand on the Christian faith in today's world. We really should get the family's persuasive ability on our side, in order to teach the Gospel, so that they will help the school in the formation of Christians. This requires organisation of ministry to families through the school, which can offer courses to families, as is being done with success in Latin America.

**3. Mass culture.**

Rapid growth in communications is speeding up social and historical processes, for which training in wisdom and maturity are needed.

The means of communication are getting better and more widespread, so that the public, whose entertainment was formerly limited to state occasions, has become used to shows involving the emotions, and which shock and enthuse. The themes are varied: sport, music, war, religion, the economy, ecology, tourism, art.

What makes a show a success is whether or not it can affect one's emotions. Production of these means of entertainment can fall into the hands of those who favour violence, pornography, drug-trafficking.

We are all exposed these days to mass media. The public, as a group, reacts according to whether it is excited or bored, not simply according to whether what they are offered is true or good. Society which goes to shows simply for entertainment won't find there the means of a better life.

Inculturation of the Gospel into the contemporary audiovisual scene demands of us:

a) To work out educational messages in current language, which is varied, involves the emotions, has suspense, which is colourful, full of dynamism and sound, in order to overcome the normal indifference of TV addicts. It is only if we use this kind of language that we can communicate the message about good and evil, or our audience will turn us off just like a TV.

b) To work out audiovisual programmes to teach how to be promoters, not just receivers of communication, to become knowledgeable of the language and manners which suit the message satisfactorily and as far as possible give direct Gospel messages.

c) to train the critical spirit by Gospel criteria, so that each listener will know what to hold on to as a Christian in the public arena shared by diverse multitudes today.

d) To direct the students by means of information having human and Christian interest, into a critical attitude towards magazines, radio, television, dancing, music, cinema, videos, poetry and other public cultural matters.

We also need to question mass culture by keeping a critical distance from it, in spite of the contagious attraction these things have:

a) to point out the passivity which gets hold of armchair entertainment seekers (all manipulated by politicians and big business), by practising and suggesting creative forms of learning, acting and entertaining oneself, inspired by love and justice;

b) to reprove the frivolousness of conformity to fashion in entertainment, taste, clothes, and other consumer items.

c) to recognise as disposable and ephemeral (of no value for eternal life) most of the information and secondhand experiences we see and hear in modern means of communication.

d) to tell adolescents that they need mental maturity to recognise those programmes which, needing wide audiences, aim at adolescents, for it is among them that they find their future audiences;

e) to point out the value of the despised printed word by educating them into habits of comprehensive reading, as a means of overcoming the slavery of the audiovisual and spectacular (which modern day social leaders themselves make sure they are free of), and in order to receive the word of God.

f) to point out the fiction associated with art, as opposed to reality, in shows where couples never have small children (seldom seen in films and TV, simply because it is hard to find child actors), in which wars are always glorious and where you never see any wounded or are told of the horrors of death; where good and evil are always depicted in separate people, not in each human heart which needs redemption and permanent education.

Evangelisation of audiovisual culture of the masses needs to be incorporated into all the educational disciplines; a creative and critical attitude based on the Gospels.

#### 4. Youth subculture transmitted by peers.

Child and adolescent mentality in addition to verbal and non-verbal languages has also symbols and norms generally adopted by each group, and certain values connected with them. This sub-culture is immersed in popular family culture and is very noticeable these days in mass culture.

Inculturation for evangelising purposes in this world of youth does not mean we have to take on their habits, which they would recognise as forced and false, but to understand them and direct them towards maturity, by emphasising their positive aspects:

a) Encourage their desire of a share in responsible creativity in human and evangelising matters;

b) listen patiently and understandingly to their wishes and difficulties, directing them to persons who can and should help them, not forgetting the personal contribution required of each young person;

c) support the weakly structured organisations which they themselves set up to look after their own needs and plans;

Of course we have to question those tenets, symbols and values of youth subculture, which do not harmonize with the Gospel:

a) the easy passivity which makes them either indifferent or critical, without making any effort to improve things themselves.

b) the crimes, terror or verbal violence they use destructively in a society because they do not agree with it;

c) the uncritical docility to social, political or religious leaders who captivate young people without assuring real improvements either for themselves, their families or for society in general;

d) the lack of coherence between what they demand of others and what they do themselves.

All the above need a good set up for pastoral ministry in schools, allowing for frequent individual contacts, in order to cover their needs in the light of the Gospel.

The plan for evangelising cultures, to which the Church gives so much importance, finds the Brothers in a key position, namely the school, where, filled with the charism of De La Salle, we can fill a very important role in renewing the world and the Church.

On the other hand we can sin by omission, by maintaining an innocuous presence, allowing society to unfold its relative values, which they think are absolute, even worthy of idolatry, and thus wasting an historic opportunity of increasing our influence, by sharing with well-intentioned lay people a task of transforming the world as Our Lord did in his Incarnation. ●

#### Notes:

(7) "A method of analysing culture of a group in order to evangelise it", in E. Garcia Ahumada, FSC "Anthropology for Apostolic Personnel". Santiago de Chile. ONAC. 1981. An example of a similar procedure is to be found in "A DAY OF PASTORAL MINISTRY 1989", "Evangelising culture". Archbishopric of Santiago. Vicariate of Western zone. 1981.

(8) Sergio Silva, SS.CC. "Religious Life: Response and challenge to cultures". "Testimonio" 103 (1987) 21-29. Marcello de Azevedo, SJ. "Inculturation of the religious in present reality: principles and criteria". "Testimonio" 103 (1987) 36-47.

(9) See Paul VI, "Evangelii Nuntiandi", 18-20 and 63.

(10) Oscar Lewis, "Anthropology of poverty", Mexico-Buenos Aires, FSC, 1961.