

HOW TO INTERACT WITH GLOBALIZATION

(Dialogue with the Youth– Number 11)

I consider my sharing of perspectives and concerns with our youth on special occasions and in respect to important and timely issues to be a vital dimension of my pontifical ministry. I believe that we must engage our youth in responsible dialogue with our church, with our community and the world at large. It is my deep conviction that our youth must not only listen but also talk, not only take but also give, not only wait but also act, not only follow but also lead in all spheres and at all levels of our common life.

In my opening remarks to the International Conference on "*Culture of Cilician Armenia*", organized by the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, January 14-18 2008, in Antelias, I said that "critical openness and creative interaction have been significant features of Armenian culture in Cilicia".

What do we mean by culture? Let me underscore a few points.–

1) Culture is the totality of a community's life in its various aspects, dimensions and expressions. Through forms and actions, colours and perceptions culture articulates the values and traditions, inner world and aspirations of a community. Culture is a source of identity; it ensures unity. Without a common culture, a community may sooner or later disintegrate losing its identity.

2) Interrelation and interaction are conditioned by culture. In fact, culture both safeguards the integrity of a community and plays an instrumental role in promoting and enhancing relations between communities, religions and civilizations. Through culture manifold features of communities enter in dynamic interaction. Mutual impacting is integral to this process.

3) Culture is the self-expression of a person or community in time and space, and it is essential for human survival. Preserving culture means preserving community, and preserving community means preserving culture. Culture cannot live without people and people cannot perpetuate without having a distinct culture. History is full of concrete cases.

4) Culture is a force which can be used in contradictory ways. It can become a source of prosperity and creativity. It can also lead to self-contained existence and marginalization. It can become a decisive factor for unity and survival. It can also generate discrimination and violence. Although this ambiguity is inherent in culture, it is largely due to misuse and abuse of culture. Hence, the inner renewal of culture is crucial.

5) Culture must respond to the challenges and changing conditions of its environment and time. To remain relevant, reliable and credible, culture must reflect the realities of its time and place. When a culture becomes a museum of ancient heritage, it loses its responsiveness. When a culture stagnates, it loses its creativity. Culture is

renewed when it is in a dynamic process of realistic self-assessment, critical dialogue with its milieu, and creative openness to new horizons.

Indeed, this is how we perceived our culture and its role in Armenian Cilicia (11th to 14th Centuries) which became the first Armenian organized diaspora. Our experience in Cilicia is a model and a point of reference in the context of the global Armenian diaspora.

In a globalized world, which destroys all cultural norms and patterns and promote a mono-culture, its own culture, we as Armenians must stick firmly to our centuries-old cultural values and traditions, paradigms and norms. But how? In fact, being directly exposed to the forces and values of the culture of globalization, on the one hand, and affirming our own culture, on the other hand, is not easy. Indeed, a globalized Armenianness is arising with globalization. Armenian diaspora is a global reality; it has also its contextual expressions. How to engage in creative dialogue these two dimensions which affect the way we perceive and articulate our identity. This requires strategy and vision. We face this challenge daily and existentially. Let me share with you my perspectives.-

a) We cannot stop the steady penetration of globalization into our life. We must be realistic. All aspects of our individual and community life are strongly impacted by globalization. The repercussions of radical changes and developments taking place in almost all areas of society will continue to affect our life. But we must not blindly appropriate the changes and values offered by globalization. We must know how to dialogue critically and responsibly with this new culture.

b) Dialoguing with globalization is risky; it is both enriching and distorting. If dialogical interaction with globalization takes place with a profound self-awareness of who we are as Armenians, then it makes our culture more creative and dynamic. If openness towards the culture of globalization is not underpinned by a firm conviction of the crucial importance of our cultural and spiritual heritage for the survival of our people, then it becomes a source of alienation.

c) We must dialogue with globalization in order to keep our culture from becoming parochial. We cannot live in isolation; isolation generate loss of identity. Opening our traditions and values to globalization will give to Armenian culture broader perspectives and new insights. It will also strengthen the inner resistance of our culture. Our experience in Armenian Cilicia is a concrete example.

d) Dialoguing with globalization will not only promote interactive approaches; it will also challenge our culture to renew itself. By renewal I do not simply mean change. Renewal will make Armenian culture more perceptive and receptive, more relevant and meaningful to modern Armenian man and woman. I consider this an absolute necessity and an urgent priority.

e) Dialoguing generates tolerance. In fact, tolerance has been a characteristic feature of Armenian culture. This inherent character of our culture, which acquired tangible expression in the Cilician period of our history, needs to be emphasized and given concrete manifestation. Indeed, preserving the ethos and identity of our culture is

the cardinal task of each Armenian. Yet, we must accept and respect others' cultures, and the dignity and freedom of others.

Reactive cultures will sooner or later die.

Exclusivism will make culture a source of enslavement.

Parochialism will not protect culture; it will make it more vulnerable.

Faithfulness will lose its true meaning, if it is not translated into critical and creative openness.

If a culture does not undergo a continuous process of evolution and renewal, it will become history. Likewise, if a nation does not remain faithful to its culture, it will disappear from the arena of history. Therefore, it is through FAITHFULNESS and OPENNESS, that the Armenian youth will be able to preserve our cultural heritage, the source of our identity, becoming at the same time an integral part of broader society.

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