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EASTERN PRE-CONSTANTINE CHURCH HERITAGE OF ALEXANDRIA

Jean-Marie Hyacinthe Quenum, SJ[♦]

Hekima College, Nairobi

Abstract

It is exciting to discover how the life of the postmodern Church has been shaped by the remarkable contribution of Eastern pre-Constantine Church of Alexandria. Our purpose in this article is to reflect on the dynamic of the Eastern pre-Constantine Church heritage of Alexandria in the daily life of postmodern Church by stressing the importance of the dialogue between the Gospel and postmodern cultures. The Eastern pre-Constantine Church heritage of Alexandria is a paradigm for postmodern intercultural witness to the Gospel of Christ. In a postmodern world influenced by science, technology and social deconstruction, how do we proclaim the Gospel by respecting the inherent dignity of postmodern cultures as holy grounds of God's work? We will address this issue by using the insights of two ecclesiastic writers of the third century, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, in their ways of dialoguing with the Greek culture of their time as the paradigm for intercultural witness to the unchangeable message of the Gospel in postmodern cultures.

Introduction

The major doctrines and practices of the early church have their roots in eastern pre-Constantine church communities of faith.¹ The main elements of the Christian tradition emerged from pre-Constantine Eastern churches and postmodern churches depend on the intellectual, moral and spiritual achievements of two key creative

[♦]**Jean-Marie Hyacinthe Quenum** is a lecturer of systematic theology at the Jesuit School of Theology of Hekima College in Nairobi (Kenya). Email: quenum_jm@yahoo.com

¹Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992.

early Greek theologians of Eastern churches, Clement of Alexandria² and Origen³ who dealt successfully with the issues of newly Christian faith in new geographical and cultural contexts. The Eastern pre-Constantine Church heritage of Alexandria is a version of Christianity that impacted the formative period of church history. It crowned the wisdom of the incarnate God expressed beyond his native land and culture of Jewish people.⁴

How does the exclusive message of salvation preached by Jesus Christ spread in the eastern part of the polytheist and tolerant former Roman territories? In which way does the eastern version of Christianity affect today's perception of the intercultural witness to the Gospel of Christ? Is there any way to learn from the ecclesial experience of Eastern pre-Constantine Christianity in its formative period?

Our theological reflection will follow the path of the contextualization of the Gospel in postmodern cultures characterized by secularization, religious pluralism and social deconstruction.

1. Jesus' Exclusive Message of Salvation in the Eastern Part of the Former Roman Empire

The Gospel message of salvation by Jesus Christ alone spread successfully in the former Roman Empire because of the genuine hope it brought for people disappointed by various forms of polytheism. Many joined Christians, impressed by their integrity of life and their courage before persecution.⁵ Conversions to the Gospel values flourished with the acts of compassion of Christians and the fear of divine judgment by adherents of traditional religions and cults.

Christian teachers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen played a major role in shaping the faith of catechumen admitted to the fellowship after a long period of instruction and testing. Ready for witness to Christ in daily life even at the cost of their lives, the

²Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens) AD 150-AD 215 was an early Greek theologian who wrote three major works: *Exhortation*; *The Tutor*; *Miscellanies* which shaped the Christian vision of the Eastern pre-Constantine Church.

³Origen AD 184-AD 253 was a major ecclesiastic writer of the Eastern pre-Constantine Church, founder of mystical theology through his spiritual reading of the Scripture.

⁴Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Pelican History of the Church I), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.

⁵Justin, *Apology*. 1. 16 (NE 59).

professed Christians followed the way of life stated in *Didache*⁶ famous for its doctrine of the two ways found in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 18-20 as the ways of light and darkness.

Christians in this context were known for their upright lives. They honoured the widows, visited the sick and helped the poor. They followed Jesus Christ by applying the rules of Christian behaviour to the circumstances of their lives. Murder, abortion, bloody sports in arena, military service, fornication, adultery and idolatry were prohibited. Christians lived in the reverence of God who is the judge of the living and of the dead. Personal prayer and Eucharistic celebration sustained their lives and Scripture was systematically expounded in city churches by the great teachers of the day such as saint Clement of Alexandria and Origen.⁷

Eastern pre-Constantine Christianity is the heir of the type of church that focused on Christian beliefs about God, the world, the right Christian living and community life. It developed in Egypt and in other eastern parts of the former Roman Empire.⁸ It produced Christian ascetics, martyrs, apologists, theologians, mystics and great leaders of the church. This type of Christianity sought for the common ground between Christian message of salvation and Greek culture. It made possible the dialogue between the Gospel message and the ways of life of peoples living in the eastern part of the former Roman Empire. Alexandria, the greatest city of the East has been a centre of Greek learning as well as an important port city of trade that impacted Christianity.

Clement of Alexandria, a philosopher and rhetorician, wrote apologetic and ethical works presenting the Christian God as the source of all good things including Greek philosophy. According to Clement of Alexandria Greek philosophy has prepared the Greeks to Christ as the Law of Moses was supposed to lead Jews to the Gospel of grace. Secondary source of God's knowledge, Greek way of thinking is the servant of Christian faith considered as the foundation of rational knowledge.⁹

⁶The *Didache* is a moral code of early Christian life stressing the love of God and the love of one's neighbour as the way that leads to eternal communion with God. It clarifies God's commandments of Exodus 20 in the perspective of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) and in Rom 12:3-21.

⁷W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, London: Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1984.

⁸Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge: T&T Clark, 1975.

⁹Robert M. Grant, *Gods and the One God: Christian Theology in the Graeco-Roman World*, London: SPCK, 1986.

Scripture gives the true knowledge of Christ, the saviour of the world. This knowledge is available to all who use allegorical exegesis in their quest of the hidden and latent meaning of figures, types, parables and illustrations of the Scripture pointing to Jesus Christ who fulfils in his person and work the eternal salvific plan of God.¹⁰

Clement of Alexandria developed the concept of the true Gnostic in The *Tutor*. The true Gnostic loves the knowledge of God revealed in Scripture in order to fulfil the infinite human capacity to desire that for which he or she is made for.¹¹ Christian faith in the context of true Gnosticism enables the convert to turn away from non-biblical practices by embracing a virtuous life which presupposes the rational knowledge of God given by Jesus Christ, the tutor of human beings who learn from him how to lead a perfect human life. Jesus Christ, the tutor of the children of God instructs and helps the adopted children of God to lead a life free of passions, vices and sins.

God for Clement of Alexandria is absolutely one communicating his self through the incarnate Logos who is Jesus Christ whose Holy Spirit shared with the Father teaches inwardly the believers any time there is the proclamation of the Scripture and an authentic search of God in creation and in prayer. Clement of Alexandria in *Exhortation* taught eastern Christians to put their complete trust in the Christian God who alone satisfies the human desire to be united to the Creator of the world who is the source of life, the embodiment of goodness, love, wisdom and freedom.¹²

For Clement of Alexandria, the aim of Christian discipleship is the virtuous life that leads to peace, unity and communion with God.¹³ The Christian God is gracious and merciful. He blesses human beings with undeserved and unmerited favours of creation, salvation and final beatific life. In his divine Son, the Logos made human shine the kindness and goodness of God. Jesus Christ is referred to as the incarnate Logos, the tutor whose perfect human life inspires imitation as it reflects the love and wisdom of God. Jesus Christ is seen as the bridge-builder between the utterly transcendent God, the Father and the world which is the work of his mighty and perfect hands. The perfect human life of Jesus Christ on earth allowed him to know human beings from inside. Such perfect human life is filled with

¹⁰R.J. Coggins and J.I. Houlden, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, London: SCM 1990.

¹¹Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4.22.135-8 (NE 184-5).

¹²Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886.

¹³S.R.C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

sympathy and compassion and qualifies Jesus as the judge of the living and dead at the time of new creation hoped for.

Origen,¹⁴ a Christian philosopher, scholar and major ecclesiastic writer of the third century, has influenced Eastern pre-Constantine Christianity by his commentaries and homilies on Scripture. He laid down in his writings, the principles of Scripture interpretation in the line of apostolic tradition.¹⁵ Literal, moral and spiritual exegesis give the meaning of human existence lived for the praise and glory of God.

Origen is the founder of mystical theology based on spiritual reading of Scripture. A Christian mystic in Origen's perspective is a disciple of Jesus Christ called to find God in the deeper spiritual reading of Scripture connected to prayer and everyday life. A Christian mystic uses his or her creative imagination in contemplative prayer to find the meaning and ground of human existence, the God of Scripture.

In our reflection on intercultural witness to the Gospel, we will take Clement of Alexandria and Origen as guides in their distinctive ways of dealing with the presentation of Jesus' message of salvation to the peoples of Greek culture of their time. The strategy of Clement of Alexandria and Origen¹⁶ was to obey the Great commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age..."

Clement of Alexandria and Origen were scholars of valour and wisdom. Their long-life vocation was to disciple and train Christians in their catechetical schools. They elaborated Christian principles and values using the worldview of Greek culture and they proposed them to the people of their time. They made known the Christian God people of many nations of eastern part of the former Roman Empire by encouraging and inspiring their Christian lives.

Their bold teaching spread like wildfire and they got many committed Christians who shared their vision and passion for the Kingdom of God. In their scholarly works, Clement of Alexandria

¹⁴H. Crouzel, *Origen*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark: 1989.

¹⁵R.P.C. Hanson, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, London: SPCK, 1954.

¹⁶J.W. Trigg, *Origen*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983 / London: SCM, 1985.

and Origen unveil the purpose of the Christian God Creator of the world for which an eternal plan of salvation is designed to make human beings partakers of divine life through the incarnate Logos empowered by the Holy Spirit.

According to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, God's deep concern is to reach every human person created in his image and likeness (Gen 1:27-28). For this purpose, the Father sent his Son into the world to seek and save that which was lost (Lk 19:10; Jn 3:16; Acts 2:21). This saving love makes human beings God's partners. It empowers them to be stewards of God's creation and involved them in the redemptive work of the human family.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen invited the people of their time to be witnesses of the saving grace and power of the Christian God by rejecting idolatry and by becoming the representatives of the living, wise and gracious God of the good creation. This biblical image of God presented by Clement of Alexandria and Origen transformed most of the Eastern people of the former Roman Empire into believing people of God.

Postmodern churches depend on the insights of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed converts to Christianity come to the saving knowledge of God through the Scripture that leads them to the virtuous life of faith, hope and charity. True Christianity is the biblical one open to a rational appraisal of the revealed truths of creation, Incarnation and eschatological Kingdom of God.

True Christianity promotes the Gospel of grace inviting repentant sinners to turn to the merciful God who provides salvation, forgiveness, reconciliation and communion through the sacrificial death and resurrection of the incarnate Logos of God and tutor of the children of God.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen were aware of the richness of Greek culture. For them the Greek culture of their time was a Christian partner in expressing the fresh insights of the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus of Nazareth who gave his life so that all human beings may praise God for his love and wisdom for his children.

The love and wisdom of God are well appreciated through the words spoken by God in creation stories and decisively in the Holy Scripture which find their beginning and ending in the incarnate Logos of God (Jn 1:1-18). Clement of Alexandria and Origen

defended the primacy of Scripture and its revelatory authority making its knowledge a public truth available to all.

Christianity is true Gnosticism because it gives the saving knowledge of God, Lord of history, who is concerned with the welfare of his good creation. By criticizing the dualistic view of Greek culture in the light of biblical holistic and narrative understanding of the good creation of God, Clement of Alexandria and Origen crafted the Christian worldview based on God who creates, saves and unites under the headship of his Logos reconciling earth and heaven, matter and spirit, time and eternity. This approach makes God the author and the end of the basic nature of all realities.

Human beings are special creatures of God within human family. They have social roles unfortunately distorted by sin. The divine laws given in Exodus 20 were designed to limit the impact of sin in human family. The Gospel of Jesus Christ presented by Clement of Alexandria and Origen in their catechetical schools and writings called for the radical change of human individual heart leading to the construct of better structures in the wider society.

For Clement of Alexandria and Origen human beings need a rational saving knowledge of the Scripture, a solid human heart formation in local Christian communities and the commitment to witness by sweat, tears and blood. This understanding of Christianity rooted in the practice of discipleship toward mysticism is the Eastern pre-Constantine heritage of Alexandria and it is still relevant to our postmodern globalized world.

2. Today's Perception of Intercultural Witness to the Gospel of Christ

We live in a world of unprecedented spiritual harvest. Everyday more Christians are added to the Church. The Church everywhere is growing at an increasing rate. The Gospel is brought and sown to the four corners of the world making an indelible impression and lasting contribution to our globalized world.¹⁷

In this exciting time of Church's rapid growth there is a need to contextualize the Gospel and to make its message more relevant to the needs of indigenous people to whom it is addressed or to many people to re-evangelize in post-Christian materialist and secular societies. Christ should be announced and proclaimed to all nations

¹⁷Only one third of the world's population is made of professing Christians.

and to the creation. And he said to them, "Go into the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (Mk 16:15).

Christians empowered by the Holy Spirit are called to be Christ's witnesses "to the remotest part of the world" (Acts 1:8). They are to be the channels of God's grace in the world. The Church as the believing people of God is sent to train and to disciple the nations. This great commission is challenged by the complexity of our postmodern globalized world.

Today's world is made of heterogeneous societies with the diversity of subgroups and cultures characterized by mobility, dislocation and togetherness. With the recognition of the variety of cultures in their inherent dignity it is difficult for Christians to relate adequately to the intricate systems of beliefs and values lived by the people of our time.

The world in which we live with the dynamics of politics and economic structures is different from the world of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The present world in which we live and breathe is dominated by technology and digital science. Christians are to update their communication skills if they are to be heard with their unchangeable message of salvation crafted wisely by Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

Which Christ are we going to communicate to the people of our world? In which way are we to communicate effectively without compromising with the essence of Christian message of salvation? To which world must we communicate the Christian message of salvation? In responding to these three questions, we need to value the Eastern pre-Constantine Church heritage of Alexandria.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen have left a theology of the uniqueness of Christ as the only world saviour. No one is like Christ in matter of salvation. The incarnate Logos has an unquestionable authority and authenticity because of his perfect human life in which his word is in harmony with his deeds. As God in human flesh, Jesus Christ reflects as an angle mirror, the wisdom, the power and the love of God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:1; Jn 14:6). The Logos came in human flesh to reveal what it means to be a created human.

According to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, to be a created human implies the recognition of a vertical dimension as well as a horizontal dimension of created existence. Human beings are created by God and sustained in existence by the provident care of their maker. The Logos in whom they are made came down to redeem and

restore their condition distorted by sin. A created human life flourishing in “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” is a life inspired by the Spirit of God as a gift of the incarnate Logos, the tutor of the children of God (Gal 5:22).

Human worth comes from God who has shown to his children what is good. “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with him”(Mic 6:8). In this perspective, created humans embrace “whatever is noble; whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable (Phil 4:7-9).

Clement of Alexandria and Origen borrowed from Scripture and Greek culture their understanding of created humanity. Created humanity is made intentionally by the good Creator of the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1:26-27). Part of the multiple good things made by God, human beings are however special creatures and god-like. They possess reason and the freedom to lead a virtuous life. Well educated created human beings have the power over the created world of God.

Conversant with the neo-platonic thought, the ecclesiastic writers of Alexandria elaborated a Christian anthropology whereby human beings participate by their reason and freedom to the ruling power of love of the incarnate Logos.

Man was made in the beginning with intelligence that was superior to sin and passions. However, he was not at all incapable of turning aside in any direction he pleased; for the excellent Creator of the universe thought it right to attach to him the reins of his volition, and leave it to self-directed movements to achieve whatever he wanted. The reason is that virtue had to be a matter of deliberate choice, not the fruit of compulsion, nor so firmly fixed by nature’s laws that man would not stumble; for this is proper to the supreme essence and excellence.¹⁸

The greatness of the created humanity is the free exercise of God-given will to be virtuous. By deciding to be good, just, noble and excellent, human beings choose their self-realization by imaging the attributes of God who is eminently sovereign, good, powerful, wise, intelligent and free.

¹⁸Walter Burghardt , “The Image of God in Man,” *Studies in Christian Antiquity* 14 Woodstock, Md Woodstock College Press, 1957, 46.

This Alexandrian vision of what it means to be a created human in the sight of God can shape today's perception of intercultural witness to the Gospel of Christ. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos, is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15). As a tutor of human beings, they learn from him to participate to his ruling power of love by becoming compassionate. "Be compassionate as just as the Father is compassionate" (Lk 6:36). Compassion is the most needed virtue of our time plagued by violence, hunger, disease, and war. The Christ we are going to communicate to today's world in the line of the Alexandrian pre-Constantine Eastern Church heritage is the compassionate tutor of human beings created in his image.

Human beings imaging God under the lordship of the incarnate Logos are valued for their innate dignity as creatures of God. Their human lives have an absolute value. Their freedom is cherished as they are called to choose to be good, just, noble and excellent in their human development and Christian demeanour. The way to communicate this basic understanding of what it means to be a created human is to "speak the truth of the greatness of human beings in love" (Eph 4:15). Proclaiming the truth of the greatness and innate dignity of human beings in the sight of God implies the intercultural witness to the Gospel value of Christian freedom enabling a life of compassion so that our contemporaries "may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven (Mt 5:16).

Social concern for fellow human beings through mutual help, service and Christian responsibility to God are today's ways of uplifting the poor and oppressed trampled upon by the world impersonal economic system.

We learn from the Eastern pre-Constantine Church of Alexandria to accept with gratitude the fact that human beings are special creatures of God made for virtuous life that praises and glorifies the awesome and mind blowing God of creation and salvation.

3. The Richness of the Alexandrian Pre-Constantine Heritage in the Light of Intercultural Witness to the Gospel Values in Today's Postmodern World

The Alexandrian pre-Constantine heritage stressed the fact that human beings are created by a good God in an ordered good creation in which they are made stewards and responsible of everything God has put under their feet (Ps 8).

Human beings are historical beings in space, matter and time continuum. They are endowed with reason, free will and innate capacity to be virtuous. But in the course of human history, human beings have experienced the lack of beauty and harmony intended by God in creating the world. Sin has entered in the world bringing guilt, suffering and death. God's way of dealing with sin was the incarnation of the Logos in the person of Jesus Christ who brought through the sweet aroma of his sacrificial death and resurrection, justification, reconciliation, forgiveness, peace and communion with God.

"Was it not necessary that the Messiah suffer these things and enter into his glory? Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scripture" (Lk 24:26-27).

The scholarly works of Origen have shown to some extent the deeper understanding of Scripture concerning the incarnate Logos bringing salvation to all. Through the spiritual exegesis of Origen Christians are called to grasp the deeper meaning of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, interceding for the Church birthed at Pentecost and the hope of his second coming in glory to establish the final eschatological Kingdom of God.

One of the enduring gifts of Origen's genius to the Church and the world is Christian mysticism, the art of grasping the deeper meaning of Christ's presence in the Scripture. The risen Christ is everywhere. "He is encountered in every brother and sister" (Clement of Alexandria). And "Scripture is full of Christ's presence" (Origen).

Faithful to the Alexandrian pre-Constantine Eastern Church we can find in today's world God in our fellow human beings and in Scripture. The fellow human being is the way to God and the Scripture is the audible voice of God calling us to be in communion with the family of God, the Holy Trinity.

Beside human fellows and Scripture, cultures have become in today's world the holy grounds in which our contemporaries hear God calling them to respond to the cry and longing of his creation. People's noble beliefs, religion, worldviews, rites, habits, philosophies, social organizations and customs are to be respected in the process of intercultural witness to the Gospel of Christ. Cultures are to be used in explaining and presenting the message of Christian salvation.

The diversity of rich and wonderful cultural lived and shared experiences of people should be taken seriously into consideration and highly appreciated in the process of evangelization (*Gaudium et Spes*, 58).

Sent by Jesus Christ to disciple and guide the nations to the saving knowledge of salvation, all the cultures of the world in their inherent dignity need to be exposed to the principles of Christian life and ethics.

The cultures of the world are the holy grounds in which God's Spirit is working. The Logos is not alien to any culture. All cultures in their internal dynamic should be given today the opportunity to listen to the teaching of Jesus Christ which complements and perfects their rich heritage.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen were sensitive to the heritage of Greek culture. They used the thought patterns, the symbols, the philosophies, the literature, the methods of learning and the spiritual resources of Greek culture as long as they expressed beautifully the essence of Christian message of salvation.

Intercultural witness to the Gospel of Christ in our globalized world means the Christian churches' outreach of cultures as holy grounds of interactions for mutual enrichment of human condition. Interaction with cultures is not meant for proselytism. Its aim is the appreciation of people in their ways of thinking, feeling and acting as human persons made for relationships.

By appreciating the different ways of living of people, human beings come to respect one another and they are willing to cooperate as one family. Mutual appreciation of people's cultures brings mutual respect, mutual care and mutual recognition of common humanness.

This way of relating to the social and religious identities of people in intercultural witness to Christ is the best way to coexist in our global village. The mission toward cultures is the contextualization of the Gospel in the fullness of God's spirit working in the concrete ways of life of people.

As people-oriented mission, the intercultural witness to Christ is focused on cultural issues and social responsibility. It takes the whole of human life as the target of Christian message of salvation. The whole of life embraces, creation, ecology, indigenous spirituality, culture and social responsibility toward the poor and the marginalized.

David Bosh in *Transforming Mission*¹⁹ argues in 1991 that the Church is undergoing a paradigm shift in its understanding and practice of mission. The postmodern mission paradigm shift is more concerned with the rapid cultural changes of our societies impacted by science and technology.

The incredible divorce between postmodern cultures and Christian message of salvation has been presented as a tragedy and drama of today's global humanism based on scientific and technological achievements of industrial societies.

The Christian experience of salvation is no longer the root and source of cultural practices in post-Christian industrialized societies.

In these societies, people in their striving for better life, refer to post-Christian cultures as the best ways of fulfilling their human needs and hopes confined to the physical and material world.

By referring to secular cultures as the foundations of their human lives, contemporary people of industrialized societies and emergent nations find their identities in their common experience of building up more global and interdependent communities of mutual interests oriented toward the full emancipation of their worlds from historical and institutional Christianity.

The main mission of the Church when Christian salvation message eclipses in post-Christian industrialized societies, is to redefine the relationship between the Gospel message and secular cultures. Secular cultures refer to the human desire to build a world within the strict limits of practical reason confining faith in the absolute to the private sphere of life. In secular cultures, God is no longer, the source of common life. Common life is organized around democracy, science, technology and international laws and conventions. The world in which secular people live is a human made world robbed of its divine purpose. Human beings are the measures of reality and they are emancipated from the tutelage of religious control.

In the process of intercultural witness to Christ, the only way to deal successfully with secular cultures is to follow the advice of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "We must learn to speak of God in a secular fashion and find a nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts."²⁰

¹⁹David Bosh, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York: Orbis, 1991, 362.

²⁰Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

This may appear to us as the best way to appropriate critically the cultural stage of our secularized world. To read the Scripture from the perspective of secularization and to re-think theology in the light of contemporary cultural issues related to world transformation are the two approaches that do justice to the radical divorce between Christian faith and today's secularized cultures.

Intercultural witness to Christ aims at seeking and appreciating what is true, beautiful and good in human heritage of secularization. Intercultural dialogue is the appropriate way to interact with the struggles and hopes of secularized people in need of the redemptive message of Jesus Christ.

Concluding Remarks

John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae* defines intercultural dialogue as bringing "the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures."²¹

The Eastern pre-Constantine Church of Alexandria is an illustration of successful intercultural dialogue. Church's dialogue with the cultures of our time is a vital area of evangelization.

John Paul II, establishing a Pontifical Council for culture to promote dialogue between different cultures and the Gospel, in 1982 in his opening address, left these memorable words: "The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out."²²

Intercultural dialogue is successfully achieved when authentic values are integrated into Christianity through the interior transformation of people accepting freely the message of salvation of Jesus Christ for the renewal of their societies.

²¹*Catechesi Tradendae*, a 53.

²²*L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 June, 1982, 1-8.